

Memorandum

To: Graduate Policy Committee

From: Alma Littles, M.D., Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, COM
David Steele, Ph.D., Assistant Dean for Curriculum and Evaluation, COM

Date: March 6, 2003

Subject: Grading Policy Proposal, Required Clerkships, 3rd and 4th Years

Proposal

The College of Medicine would like to request approval for a Honors/Pass/Fail grading option for the clerkship rotations in the third and fourth medical school curriculum. Having a three-tier Honors/Pass/Fail option will provide a better representation of student competency assessment than the current satisfactory/unsatisfactory grading option.

The Clerkship Curriculum Committee of the Florida State University College of Medicine, which is comprised of the physician Education Directors for each of the medical specialties required during the third and fourth year of study, unanimously proposes the adoption of an Honors, Pass, Fail grading system for the performance based components of the medical curriculum in the third and fourth years. A majority of the medical schools in the United States employ a variant of the pass/fail system in assigning grades to students based on their performance in the clinically intensive M3 and M4 years. The rationale for this proposal is outlined below.

Background

Medical education in the United States typically consists of two major phases: 1) two years of basic science instruction based largely in the classroom and laboratories; and 2) a two year period of clinical instruction based in hospitals, clinics, and other settings in which medical care is delivered. The final two years of medical instruction at FSU COM consists of the following required clinical clerkships:

Year 3

Internal medicine (8 weeks)

Family medicine (6 weeks)

Psychiatry (6 weeks)

Pediatrics (6 weeks)

Obstetrics and Gynecology (6 weeks)

Surgery (8 weeks)

Community Medicine (3 weeks)

Doctoring 3 (a 40 week course that is concurrent with the clerkships)

Year 4

Advanced Internal Medicine (4 weeks)

Advanced Family Medicine (4 weeks)

Emergency Medicine (4 weeks)

Primary Care Geriatrics (4 weeks)

Electives (24 weeks)

The third and fourth year clerkship curriculum has been developed by experienced academic physician educators at FSU COM based on national educational standards developed by each of the core medical specialties represented by the required clerkships.

During the clerkships students hone their clinical skills by caring for patients under the direct supervision of clerkship faculty physicians. Among other tasks they elicit patient histories, perform physical examinations, order and interpret laboratory and radiological tests, formulate differential diagnoses, and develop and monitor treatment plans. In addition, students participate in case conferences (Doctoring 3), complete required reading assignments and computerized case simulations, and complete various clerkship specific projects that have been developed to promote clinical reasoning and problem solving.

Assessing Student Performance

Student performance in these clinically intensive educational experiences is competency based. The faculty responsible for developing the clerkship curricula have developed an assessment rating form (please see attached) on which the clerkship faculty will record their judgments of student performance in the following domains: fund of knowledge, clinical problem solving, communication skills, history taking, physical examination, documentation, integration of technology, professional behavior, and ethical standards. In addition, at the end of each of the clerkship rotations, students are required to take the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) Subject Examination, a discipline specific examination developed by a national board.

Assigning Grades

Grades will be assigned as follows in each of the required clerkships. Please refer to the attached Clerkship Evaluation Form.

Honors

- 1) A student must meet expectations on all subcategories of the clerkship evaluation assessment form pertaining to "Professional Behavior and Ethical Standards"; AND
- 2) A student must be judged to "exceed expectations" in at least 10 of the 15 remaining subcategories on the assessment form; AND
- 3) A student must achieve a score on the NBME specialty shelf examination that is at least 1.0 standard deviations above the national average for clerkships of comparable lengths; AND
- 4) Satisfactorily complete all required projects.

Pass

- 1) A student must meet expectations on all subcategories of the clerkship evaluation assessment form pertaining to "Professional Behavior and Ethical Standards"; AND

- 2) A student must be judged to “meet expectations” in at least 13 of the 15 remaining subcategories on the assessment form and has no more than 2 “marginally meets expectations” in the remaining 15 subcategories; AND
- 3) A student must achieve a score on the NBME specialty shelf examination that is no more than 1.99 SD below the national average for clerkships of comparable lengths; AND
- 4) Satisfactorily complete all required projects.

Fail

A student is at risk for failure if:

- 1) He/she does not meet expectations in any subcategories of the clerkship evaluation assessment form pertaining to “Professional Behavior and Ethical Standards”; OR
- 2) He/she does not meet expectations in 2 or more of the remaining 15 subcategories on the rating form; OR
- 3) He/she marginally meets expectations in 3 or more of the remaining subcategories; OR
- 4) He/she achieves a score 2.0 or more SD below the national average on the NBME specialty subject examination*; OR
- 5) He or she fails to satisfactorily complete special assignments or projects.

*Students who do not pass the NBME will be given an opportunity to re-take the examination to achieve a passing score and a passing grade in the clerkship. If they do not pass on the re-take, they will be required to repeat the clerkship in their senior year.

Why Not Use the University’s Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) System?

✓ There are two main reasons for not adopting the current S/U system. First, we wish to encourage and recognize those students whose clinical performance is exemplary and exceeds that of their peers. Secondly, because the Honors/Pass/Fail system is so widely employed in American medical education, residency programs are familiar with this form of grade reporting and better able to interpret the meaning of these designations in making decisions about accepting graduates for specialty training.