Student Essay Competition: a Creative Way to Learn From Our Students

When you think about your subject, and the teaching of that subject, do you attempt to see things from the students’ perspective? Do you consider where your students came from in terms of academic journey, previous and future courses? Do you acknowledge that life today is more complicated than when we were students? Do you consider what it is like to be a nervous first-year student or an overworked fourth-year student?

To better understand our students so that we could improve the teaching and learning at Wayne State University School of Medicine, we borrowed an idea from our Bioscience colleagues (1) and offered a Student Essay Competition. The student essay competition was open to all students (graduate and medical) within the School of Medicine at Wayne State University. In 500–1000 words, the student described the attributes that make the best learning experience. The essays were intended as a useful resource for the faculty. As such, essays were distributed to all faculty members (unless expressly prohibited by the author). Essay participation was voluntary.

We received 83 essays; 23 essays were from first-year medical students, 23 essays were from second-year medical students, 11 essays were from third-year medical students, 6 essays were from fourth-year medical students, 11 essays were from PhD students, 6 essays were from MS students, and 3 essays were from postdoctoral fellows. The essays provided perceptive observations and helpful ideas and were entertaining and interesting to read. Although the “top” three essay writers received monetary awards ($1,000.00, $500.00, and $250.00 for first, second, and third place, respectively), all students benefited from the opportunity to express their views and knowing that the faculty members were interested in reading their ideas about teaching and learning. However, the biggest “winners” were our school, faculty members, and students who will benefit from the creative and helpful insights of the essay writers. We encourage the American Physiological Society to sponsor a student essay competition for students in Physiology Graduate Programs around the world.

REFERENCE


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doi:10.1152/advan.90109.2008