

**Report of the 2014 Academic Program Review  
Of the Combined BA/MD Program**

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**Introduction**

The University of New Mexico's Combined BA/MD Program began in the fall of 2006 as a joint effort by the College of Arts & Sciences and the School of Medicine. The program has intertwined missions of educating physicians to address the health care needs of rural and medically underserved communities in the state, broadening the diversity of the student body, and establishing enduring links between the program's students and medically underserved New Mexico communities.

Planning for the program began in 2002 and 2003, when the medical school dean and his senior leadership engaged their counterparts in the College of Arts & Sciences about potential collaboration. The resulting combined degree program entailed an interdisciplinary undergraduate program housed in the College of Arts & Sciences, followed by the standard medical school curriculum. Distinctive features of the baccalaureate component include a balanced presentation of humanities and social sciences along with a rigorous curriculum in science and math, a summer practicum that provides students with an opportunity to participate actively in community health programs in rural and other underserved areas, and a strong, highly integrated system of academic advising and personal support. The program received a substantial boost with the recent hiring of 13 joint-appointment faculty, funded initially by the BA/MD program. These faculty additions have enabled the College of Arts & Sciences to offer required core science courses in small sections (50 students, equally divided between BA/MD students and traditional UNM undergraduates) that emphasize active learning.

Students admitted to the program simultaneously receive provisional admission to the medical school, contingent on satisfactory performance during the baccalaureate component of the program. The program has accepted 28 students per year for the program since its inception. Two students from the original 2006 charter class graduated a year early and are now in the second year of residency training, and an additional eight students have completed their MD studies and began residency training in July of this year.

**Strengths and Noteworthy Accomplishments**

There are many strengths of the program, including the dedication from the administrative leadership of the College of Arts and Sciences as well as the School of Medicine to support the program's objectives. The program's faculty and staff have developed a collaborative working relationship that strengthens the academic experience for students and promotes the program's objectives. The review team was impressed that staff who have left the program to take on other responsibilities continue to be engaged and well informed about the program, its successes, and challenges to be addressed. Leadership and support occurs not only at the top levels of the program, but also cascades throughout the administrative staff involved in the program, who have adopted shared decision-making and active engagement in program review and improvement.

A particular strength of the program is the assessment of student performance and progress. Formal student assessment occurs multiple times throughout the program, but informal assessment also takes place frequently, with advisors monitoring student performance in individual classes, with watchful input from faculty, throughout the semester and implementing real-time assistance if needed. There are multiple resources for academic assistance, and information about these resources is shared several times during the program. Attendance at CAPS tutoring, drop-in sessions, and/or supplemental instruction is required during the first year of the program, which not only assists progress past academic challenges but assures that students are aware of support services that they can use in the future. In addition to monitoring student progress in the BA/MD program, follow-up with students who have left the program also occurs. The outcome information provided by these students is utilized to guide decision-making about potential adjustments and improvements to the program.

The joint appointment faculty members collaborate among themselves to coordinate classroom teaching materials, subjects and methods. A notable strength of these faculty is their emphasis on effective educational pedagogy, with implementation of varied teaching techniques and coursework development. Faculty development endeavors are comprehensive and frequent. They include improved teaching methods, interdisciplinary course building, and coordination of course topics. The main campus Director brought many of the faculty to a two-day Course Design Institute faculty development workshop within the past few years, again demonstrating the emphasis on educational endeavors as well as the support for the program. Two particular faculty development endeavors are worth noting: the Group Instructional Feedback Technique (GIFT) program and the peer observation sessions. GIFT occurs each semester and peer observations occur at least annually. The faculty recognize and embrace the significance of each activity for their personal professional development. The GIFT provides formative input for real-time adjustment to instruction and the peer observation goes beyond the expectations of UNM policy to include a focus on learning from, rather than only evaluating, the instructor's classroom practice. In addition to their classroom contributions, program faculty members serve on the BA/MD Curriculum and Student Progress Committee and provide valuable input into the program administration. The joint-appointment faculty are dedicated to the BA/MD program as well as being integrated into their individual academic departments. A result of this dual role has been the diffusion of program-based educational experiences into their individual academic departments, and enhanced working relationships across different academic units.

The staff of the BA/MD program are invaluable to meeting its objectives. Besides providing advising support and assistance with academic concerns, they proffer emotional and personal support to students to assist in the transition from high school to college. There are two advisors for the program, providing services at a much lower advisor to student ratio than is available for students in other academic units. Students emphasize the value of their relationship with the advising staff. Many comments were shared with the review team regarding the value of this relationship, and current medical students maintain a personal relationship long after completion of the baccalaureate component of the program. The baccalaureate staff members, recognizing the combined nature of the program, meet regularly with the staff of the MD program to share information about the needs and objectives of the individual components.

### **Challenges and Opportunities for Quality Improvement**

Financial support for the BA/MD program derives primarily from the New Mexico state legislature. The university has utilized this funding to provide student support for the cost of attendance as well as for the administration of the program including financial support for the faculty and staff. Currently the state legislature continues to provide the support, with annual updates about the program provided to them by the Dean of the School of Medicine. The patience of the legislature in funding a program that will not have definitive outcome data about its success for at least twelve years after its inception is remarkable.

The risk to the program, however, is the loss of this financial support as it provides the majority of the funding. The university administration has expressed a willingness to provide financial support to the program should the state legislature limit or withdraw its support. This situation, however, represents a potential risk to the program.

From the beginning, the BA/MD program has invested substantial, ongoing effort in a recurring cycle of program evaluation and improvement. It has not, however, engaged in a formalized strategic planning process that examines the internal and external environment, identifies potential opportunities and vulnerabilities, and develops contingency plans to take advantage of opportunities and anticipate potential challenges to sustained program effectiveness. As the program continues to mature and more outcome data become available, it becomes increasingly important to step back and take a larger look at the program, its achievements and limitations, and the long-range prospects for its continued success.