

From College Advocates to Peer Support Advocates

Enhancing Peer Support at the UNC School of
Medicine (UNC SOM)

Neil Cornwell, Mary Chandler Gwin, Michelle Ikoma

Overview

- I. About the Larry Keith Advisory College Program
- II. Brief History of the College Advocate Program
 - Stimulus for enhancing peer support at the UNC SOM
- III. From Idea to Concrete Plan
- IV. New Peer Support Advocate Role
- V. Where We Are Now & Next Steps
- VI. Challenges & Lessons Learned

Larry Keith Advisory College Program

- Originally established in 2008 as an advising, career, and professional development program
- Students randomly assigned to one of 6 Advisory Colleges (a.k.a. “Harry Potter houses”)
 - Each college has 2 faculty advisors
 - Every year has 2 students that serve as Advisory College Advocates
- Build relationships to provide specialty neutral advice for professional development
- Resource for adjusting and navigating medical school

History of College Advocate Role

- Created to help students with the challenges of medical school
- 2 students elected by their class for a 1-year term
 - Organized social events
 - Participated in orientation
 - Attended 'brown bag' lunches with students and advisors
- In 2014 curriculum changed and the continuity in advocate support was lost

The Need for Enhanced Peer Support

- Peer support was requested for years as students felt isolated in their specific years
- Previously denied due to concern of oversight and burden on students
- COVID highlighted the need to have additional structures of support
- Researching other medical school models provided reassurance of feasibility

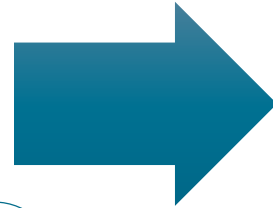
From Idea to Concrete Plan: Timeline



Formalizing the Idea

So *can we* actually do something?

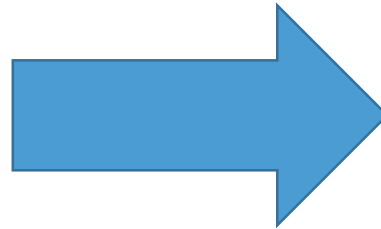
- Research: Michigan, Univ. of Miami, UCF, IU, *school that shall not be named...*
- Discussions with leaders of current programs



Proposal to SOM Wellness Program Leadership

- Initiation of formal planning meetings (weekly)
- Needs assessment
- Plan for engaging stakeholders, learning best practices

Pivot Point: Engaging Experts & Stakeholders



Focus Group:
College Advisors

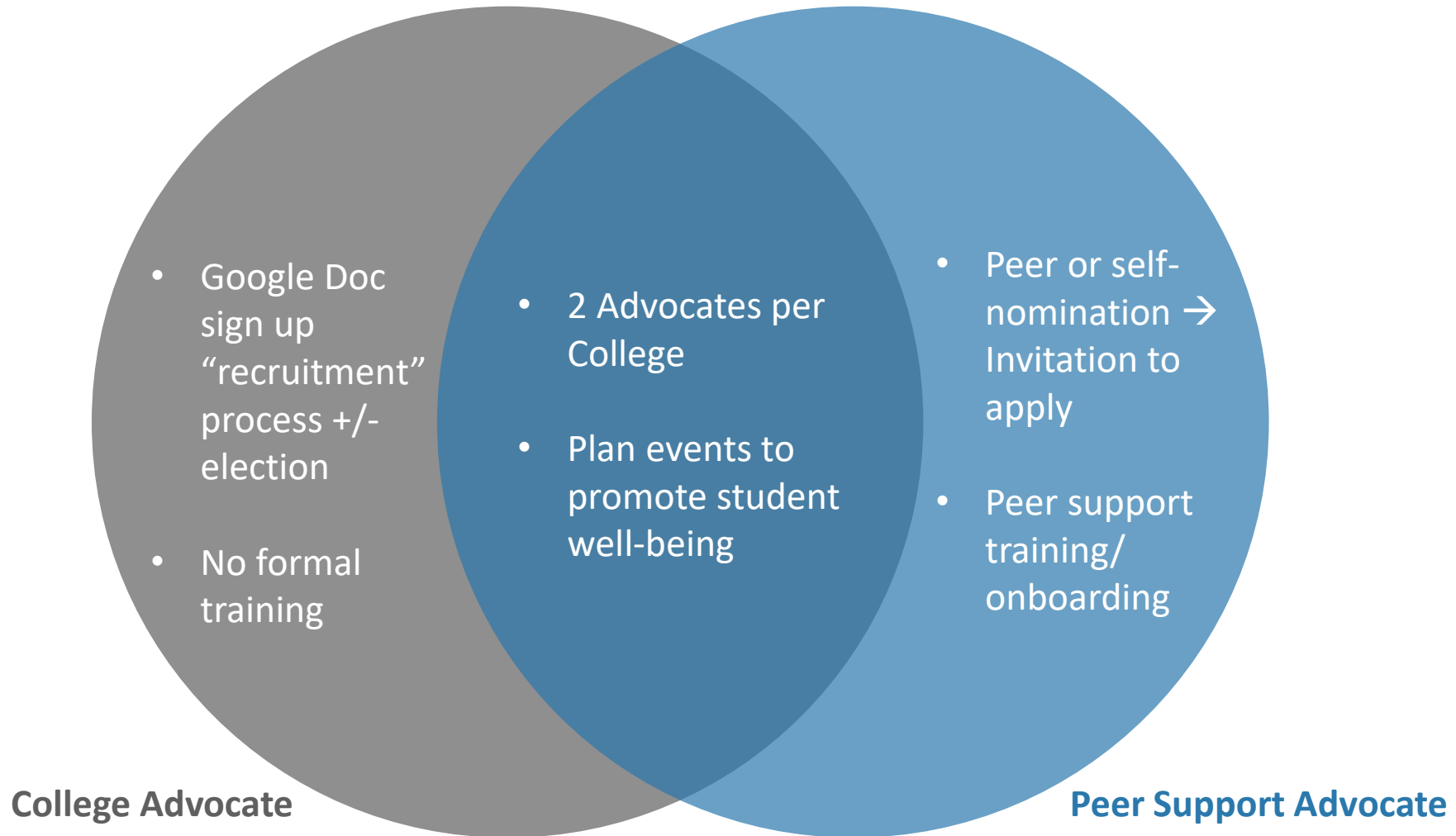


**Decision-maker
buy-in**

Planning for Implementation

- **New Core Team Member:** Sara Tinkham, Director of Medical Student Advising Programs
- Clear path forward, **integration with Advisory College Program**
 - Redefine College Advocate role → Peer Support Advocate
- Engagement of MS1 Chief Advocate
- Defining ideal Peer Support Advocate, developing **recruitment process to optimize chances of finding these individuals**
 - Added challenge: COVID = MS1s only know one another by “Zoom persona” (often a black box w/ a name)

College Advocate → *Peer Support* Advocate



Recruitment

- Utilized a class wide email and GroupMe messaging to reach all students
- Nomination process versus popularity contest
 - Qualtrics survey
 - Name, advisory college
 - Tell us about yourself and your interest in this role

Selection

- Committee
 - Director of Medical Student Advising Program
 - Wellness Consultant
 - MS1 Chief Advocate
 - Students involved in program's conception (MS3s, MS4s)
- Students were evaluated within their Advisory College pool of applicants

Training

- Asynchronous module
 - General overview
 - Basic support techniques
 - School specific challenges / resources
- 1-hour synchronous onboarding session
 - First formalized meeting
 - Review of module and role playing scenarios



PEER SUPPORT COLLEGE ADVOCATE MODULES

☰ General overview

Lesson

☰ Empathetic Listening and Emotional Support

Lesson

☰ Challenging Situations

Lesson

☰ Impact of COVID and race and gender violence

Lesson

☰ Pivotal Moments in Med School

Lesson

☰ Navigating Resources

Lesson

☰ Feedback

Lesson

Where We Are Now

- Consultation with UNC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
 - Formalizing boundaries and what students can expect
- Supplemental training, delivered by Peers for Progress for Peer2Peer (UNC-wide peer support program)
- Will formally announce program within the next few weeks

Next Steps

- Implementing a request portal
- Looking towards welcoming and supporting the incoming MS1 class
- Generating new promotional material
- Transitioning out of COVID (hopefully)
- Rolling out to other classes

Key Insights & Lesson Learned To-Date



Being a student-led initiative has tremendous advantages...but also comes with challenges



You will hit speedbumps & potholes

- Leaning into each other, remembering our “why”



It takes a village

Acknowledgments

- Huge thank you to:
 - Alli Schad
 - Sara Tinkham
 - Lauren Sibley, Natalie Spach, Jean-Luc Banks, Brianna Frame
 - Carolina Peer Support Core & Carolina Peer Support Collaborative
 - Samantha Luu
 - Ed Fisher





Any questions?