

# From College Advocates to Peer Support Advocates

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

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# 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

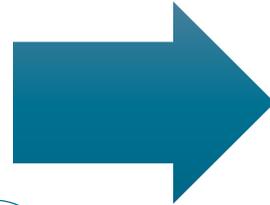
# From Idea to Concrete Plan: Timeline



# Formalizing the Idea

So *can we* actually do something?

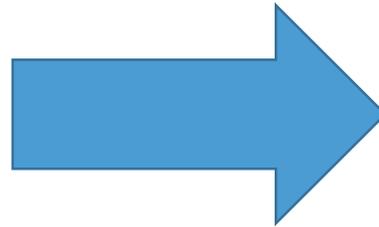
- Research: Michigan, Univ. of Miami, UCF, IU, *school that shall not be named...*
- Discussions with leaders of current programs



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

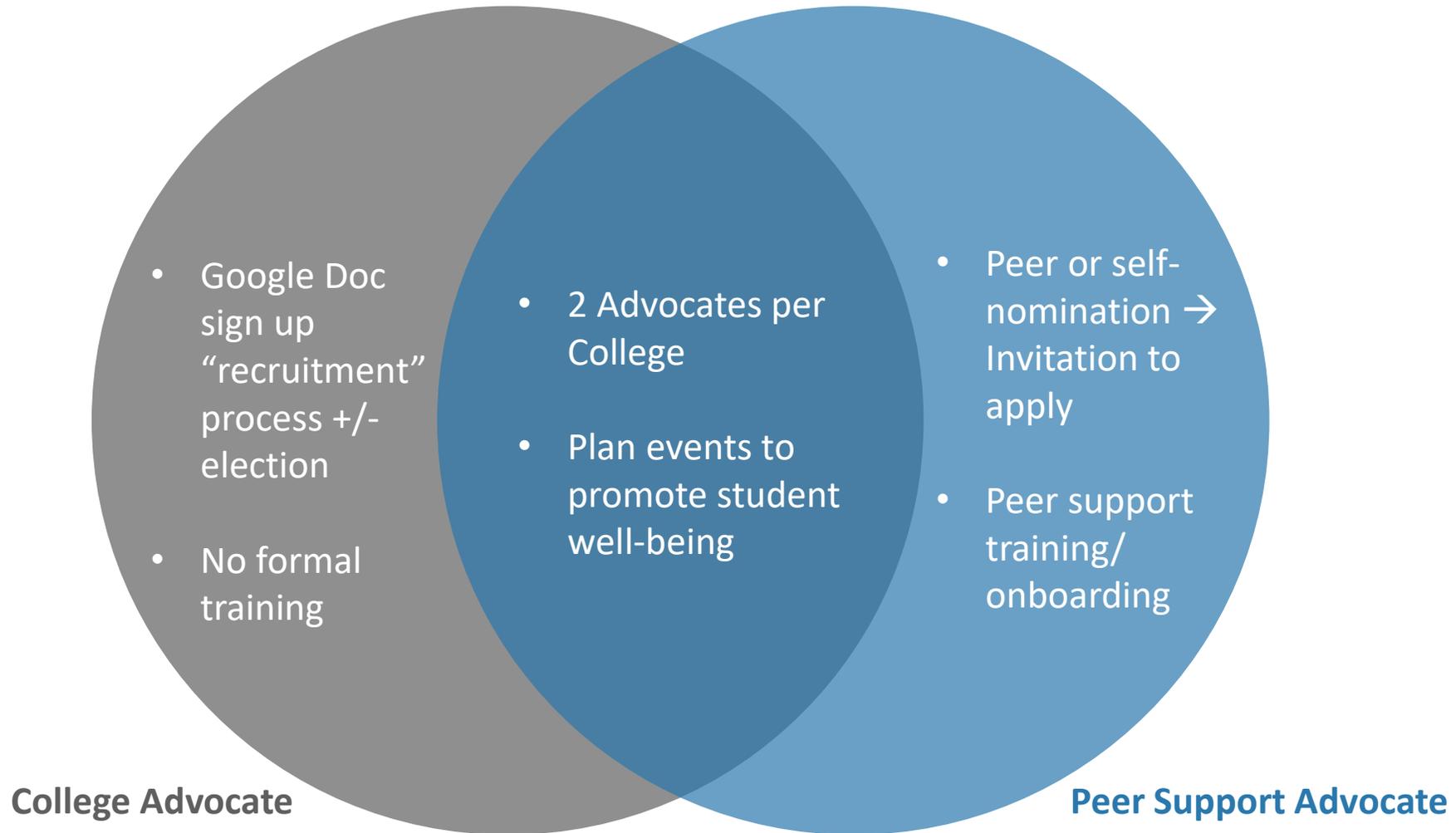


**Decision-maker  
buy-in**

# 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:
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    - Ed Fisher





**Any questions?**