Medical School through a Learning Community Lens

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Learning communities (LCs) consist of people with shared interests who engage in collaborative learning and “foster active over passive learning, cooperation over competition, and community over isolation” (Cross, 1998, p. 5).

LCs are congruent with the changing epistemologies of knowledge, are supported by research, and educate students for “lives of work and service” (Cross, 1998, p. 11).

Historically considered a fiercely competitive environment, some schools of medicine have embraced the LC philosophy. When viewed through the lens of a LC, it becomes evident that **Wright State University’s Boonshoft School of Medicine** with its defining culture, academics, and environment embodies this ideology.

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**CULTURE**

Culture is a social construct of artifacts, norms, traditions, assumptions, values, and practices that guide behavior and judgment (Manning, 1993).

- **Artifacts**
  - Medical terminology
  - “Doctor”
  - Scrubs, lab coats, stethoscopes
  - Cadavers
  - Behavior: professionalism, caring

- **Admissions criteria** aligns with espoused values (WSUBSOM, 2012)
  - Students selected for ability to work collaboratively
  - Humanistic
  - Not looking for rockstars
  - Primary care values

- **Cultural integration**
  - Mentoring: “Bigs” and “Littles”
  - 1st year orientation

- **Ritualistic performances**
  - White coat ceremony
  - 3 USMLE Boards - national exams
  - Match Day
  - Graduation

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**ACADEMICS**

**Collaborative learning at the bedside**

- Practice: learning by doing engages high level skills such as analysis and synthesis (Lenning, Hill, Saunders, Solan, & Stokes, 2013)

**Team based learning (TBL)**

- Knowledge is constructed and contextual (Lenning et al., 2013)
- TBL bridges concepts and application (Thompson et al., 2007)
- Individual study → test → team negotiation → team test → team case study

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**ENVIRONMENT**

Human environments play a role in the development of communities (Strange & Banning, 2001).

- **Physical design**
  - Flexible spaces
  - Mobile furniture
  - Lecture hall can flex as discussion tables
  - Medical school is located on WSU's campus but separate, peripheral

- **As aggregates of people**
  - Accommodates various learning styles
  - Congruence between people and the environment

- **As reflective of the organization**
  - Responsive to societal needs
  - Primary care/social medicine

- **Student perceptions of environment**
  - Enacted v. espoused values

- **Safety and Inclusion**
  - Allows risk taking (Lenning et al., 2013)

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**OUTCOMES**

- Deeper learning
- Incites creativity, analytical and critical thinking (Levine-Laufgraben, 2004)
- Emotional intelligence, sensitivity to diverse perspectives, conflict management (Kezar & Lester, 2009)
- Reflection, transformation, and the co-creation of knowledge (Palloff & Pratt, 2005)