

Title: Early process evaluation of a leadership program: Identifying challenges

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What problem was addressed: In 2015 the Southern Medical University-FAIMER Regional Institute (SMU-FRI) was launched to develop education methods, leadership skills, scholarship, and professional networks in the Southeast Asia Region. SMU-FRI is a two-year fellowship program for health professions faculty who have the potential to improve health professional education at their schools. It consists of two 7-day residential sessions with highly interactive educational activities, interspersed with two 11-month distance learning sessions. This early process evaluation study was conducted with the first two classes, to obtain data to inform continuous quality improvement in program design and implementation. The project determined the perceptions of participants regarding the personal and professional impact of the SMU-FRI program.

What was tried: A mixed methods design was undertaken with data collection from the first two cohorts of participants from SMU-FRI ($n=38$). After obtaining written informed consent, a retrospective pre-questionnaire was distributed to the Fellows through Survey Monkey after the end of the second residential session. A 47% response rate was achieved after three reminders. The survey asked them to rate their knowledge, skills, or competence on the six major curriculum themes: health professions education, assessment, professional development, leadership, research and scholarship, and project management and evaluation. Participants reported significant increases in their knowledge, skills, or competence in health professions education ($t=10.55$, $p<0.05$), assessment ($t=8.33$, $p<0.05$), professional development ($t=8.80$, $p<0.05$), leadership ($t=8.32$, $p<0.05$), research and scholarship ($t=7.17$, $p<0.05$), and project management and evaluation ($t=8.33$, $p<0.05$).

To obtain a deeper view of participants' experiences, we invited Year 2 participants to participate in an interview, conducted during the second onsite session; 27 participants were interviewed. The interview questions covered experiences and challenges in implementing the FAIMER project, knowledge and skills gained in SMU-FRI, changes in professional networks, experiences with the online learning session, and involvement in curriculum development. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using an iterative thematic analysis. To improve validity, data were checked by two authors (SL, SY).

What lessons were learned: The survey showed that the program is meeting many of its goals; participants reported increased ability in six curriculum themes. The interview analysis identified three key themes: (1) Participants increased their knowledge and skills in teaching methods and educational research, and applied in their home institutions. (2) Participants gained education leadership and management and project management knowledge and ability after the first year learning, and four of them published the project in educational journals. (3) Participants reported their professional network increased due to their SMU-FRI experience. Many reported that one of the key values was the opportunity for them to develop productive relationships with their peers from different professions and institutions.

The study also pointed out challenges with implementing program evaluation; there was a lower survey response rate than desirable, in part due to connectivity issues; we are strategizing ways to increase the response rate to have a better understanding for program revision.

References:

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This research was conducted with ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Southern Medical University.