

Single Long-term Research Project Integrates In-depth Knowledge and Skill Development Leading to Scholarship Excellence

Healthcare undergraduates pursuing career and education goals face a highly competitive admission process to graduate and professional schools. Applicants are urged to develop and demonstrate a multitude of health professional competencies obtained from a variety of experiences and communicate them in an integrated manner. The Difference Makers in the University of Florida, Food Science and Human Nutrition Borum Lab surveyed lab members to identify key health professional competencies needed to be a top applicant for their future professions and graduate programs. The Difference Makers then supplemented the data with an internet search for current requirements/competencies for healthcare professions and graduate programs. A focus group made up of the Difference Makers deliberated over the survey results and narrowed the competencies to eight:

- Hands-on Patient/Client Interaction
- Soft Skills
- Collaboration Skills
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Professional Development
- Sustainability/Commitment
- Effective Oral/Written Communication Skills with Diverse Audiences
- Technical Skills for Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

Completing a multitude of research activities as an undergraduate student to cover all the skills is time demanding, not conducive to in-depth learning, and makes it difficult to integrate the demonstration of competences during an interview. The Difference Makers identified examples of activities developing the eight health professional competencies while working in the Borum Lab. This research highlights the feasibility of obtaining health profession and clinical translational research competencies by overlapping the experiences with skill development when excelling in an extended single extracurricular research program.

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