

# Medical Student Scholarly Project Mentoring: Toward Better Rural Physician Satisfaction, Recruitment and Retention.

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## Introduction

The Arizona Center for Rural Health reports that currently half of rural Arizona physicians are age 50 and over and therefore nearing retirement. Replacing them and recruiting the additional 400 primary care physicians needed to bring physician-patient ratios into parity with urban areas are challenging recruitment objectives. For rural residents the lack of available health care is more than an inconvenience--it may in fact contribute to lower life expectancy. We propose rural physician-mentor participation in medical student Scholarly Projects as a way to improve work satisfaction and ultimately improve physician recruitment and retention in rural Arizona.

## UA College of Medicine-Phoenix Rural Certificate of Distinction Requirements

### Years 1 and 2

- Application to participate in Rural Certificate of Distinction October 1.
- Initiate four-year Scholarly Project
- Required 16 noon seminars over two year period, rural health topics
- 4 week summer rural clinical placement in June, between years 1 and 2

### Year 3

- 19 week rural clerkship experience. Internal Medicine (6 weeks), Family Medicine (6 weeks), Pediatrics (3 weeks), Surgery (4 weeks)

### Year 4

- Successful completion of Rural Certificate of Distinction (noted on Dean's Letter and official transcript-helps with residency application).
- Successful completion of rural topic Scholarly Project. Findings presented in March.

## Scholarly Project

Scholarly Project (SP) is a required component curriculum at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, Phoenix. Students pursuing an emphasis in rural health (called Rural Certificate of Distinction) must complete a rural-relevant SP. Students are paired with a mentor at the beginning of year 1. Together the student and mentor identify a research question in medicine, investigate and understand the background related to this question, and formulate approaches which help answer this question. SP promotes life-long learning, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Past rural SP's informed issues surrounding improved population health and reducing barriers of underserved populations. Among the potential rewards, greater physician-mentor job satisfaction leading to improved job retention and improved recruitment success among students who have immersed themselves in rural health research.

## Scholarly Project Examples

SP Topic	Author	Mentor
t's about the Heart: A Qualitative Study of Rural Family Physician Training needs.	Samantha Varner, UA COM-Phoenix. '16	Steven Brown, MD
Analysis of Knowledge Retention of the Rural Trauma Team Development Course	Brock Bennet, MS 4	Corey Detlefs, MD
Challenges affecting implementation of salad bars in rural vs. urban Arizona public schools	Michelle Blumenschine, MS 3	Meg Bruening, PhD

## References

- 1) Joe Tabor, and Howard J. Eng. The Arizona Rural Health Workforce Trend Analysis 2007 - 2010 Center for Rural Health Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, The University of Arizona. June 2012.
- 2) Gopal K. Singh, PhD , Mohammad Siahpush, PhD. Widening Rural-Urban Disparities in Life Expectancy, U.S., 1969-2009. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. Volume 46, Issue 2, February 2014, Pages e19–e29.

## Discussion and Conclusions

- Given the critical need for physicians in rural communities new effective strategies toward recruitment and retention must be pursued.
- UA COM-P conducts ongoing Rural medical education programs that place students for months in the same community
- A requirement of the program is the Scholarly Project, pairing a student with a mentor physician on a research project.
- Our hypothesis is that rural physicians who take-on the mentoring role will experience greater job satisfaction and will more likely to remain in their rural job placement.



Figure 1: Recent UA College of Medicine-Phoenix Clinical Placements in Rural Arizona.