

Preferences of Physician Assistant (PA) Students Regarding Learning Activities and Materials

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Background

Preferences for learning activities and materials vary among students. At our institution, preclinical learning activities and materials include lecture supplemented by PowerPoint® presentations, program organized small group learning, required and recommended textbooks, electronic readings, and student-initiated individual and small group study. Student preferences for curriculum delivery approaches should assist PA educators in curriculum design and delivery.

Method

We conducted an anonymous survey of members of a first year class at the end of their second semester. Students reported their preference for print or electronic text material, the portion of time they read required or recommended assignments, and their assessment of the utility of a variety of content presentation. Survey items were presented as statements to which students could express agreement or disagreement using a Likert-scale format. Response categories were aggregated into positive and negative responses to the statements.

Results

The response rate was 61%. Students preferred printed texts (85%) to electronic sources (15%). Seventy seven percent of respondents reported reading required texts more than half of the time or all the time. The most popular content delivery method was small group session (97%), followed by lectures and PowerPoint® presentations (85%). Regarding study habits, individual study was preferred (100%) to student organized group study (73%). To support learning style, students identified printed textbooks (94%) as more useful to support learning style than electronic material or journal articles (59%).

Conclusions

The respondents to this study prefer textbooks in print format to electronic format or journal article format. Lecture, PowerPoint® presentation, and small group study all fit with students' learning styles, but students prefer small-group curriculum content to large group lecture-style presentation. The majority find that individual study supports their learning style better than student-organized small group study. These data are useful for curriculum design and delivery. Educators should seek to meet the needs of all learners, since over-emphasis on preferred learning styles could result in neglecting the needs of students with less prevalent learning preferences.