

Personality Traits of American Medical Students Undertaking Transnational Medical Education

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Introduction

The University of Queensland (UQ) Medical School is comprised of a diverse student body, including a cohort of American students who will spend their clinical years 3 and 4 at the Ochsner Clinical School in New Orleans, LA prior to entering the highly competitive Match process to determine their resident specialty. While match rates for international medical graduates are traditionally lower than those of domestic U.S. students¹, UQ-Ochsner students have been equally successful in The Match as compared to their U.S. educated peers. We hypothesized that Ochsner students may have personality profiles that differ from their UQ counterparts, which may reflect the additional challenges they are to face in pursuing medical training in the United States.

Methods

A quantitative cross-sectional study used a self-report questionnaire administered to first year medical students. Personality profiles were measured by the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI)². Univariate statistics compared groups. TCI means were calculated based on a likert scale of 1 to 5 with 1.00-1.50=very low, 1.51-2.50=low, 2.51-3.50=average, 3.51-4.50=high, and 4.51-5.00=very high.

Results

410 students completed the survey (247 Domestic, 80 Ochsner, 83 other international, Table 1). The trait profiles of Ochsner students differed significantly from their classmates with lower levels of Harm Avoidance and higher levels of Novelty Seeking and Persistence (Table 2 and 3).

Table 1. Student Group Demographics

	Domestic Students n (%)	Ochsner Students n (%)	International Students n (%)	Total n (%)
Gender				
Male	164 (66)	33 (41)	49 (59)	246 (60)
Female	83 (34)	47 (59)	34 (41)	164 (40)
Total	247	80	83	410
Age				
< 25	213 (86)	53 (66)	60 (72)	326 (80)
≥ 26	34 (14)	27 (34)	23 (28)	84 (20)
Total	247	80	83	410

Table 2. Comparison of Personality Traits by Student Group

Trait	Student Group	n	Mean +/- SD	95% CI for Mean	P Value
Novelty Seeking	Domestic	243	2.57 +/- 0.50	2.51-2.64	0.004
	Ochsner	80	2.79 +/- 0.51	2.68-2.90	
	International	82	2.62 +/- 0.51	2.51-2.73	
	Total	405	2.62 +/- 0.51	2.58-2.68	
Harm Avoidance	Domestic	247	2.74 +/- 0.55	2.67-2.81	0.048
	Ochsner	80	2.57 +/- 0.56	2.44-2.69	
	International	83	2.69 +/- 0.57	2.56-2.81	
	Total	410	2.70 +/- 0.56	2.64-2.75	
Persistence	Domestic	242	3.36 +/- 0.35	3.32-3.41	0.048
	Ochsner	80	3.47 +/- 0.32	3.40-3.54	
	International	83	3.41 +/- 0.37	3.33-3.49	
	Total	405	3.40 +/- 0.35	3.36-3.43	

Table 3. Comparison of Personality Traits in Ochsner Students vs. All Others

Trait	Student Group	n	Mean +/- SD	95% CI for Mean	P Value
Novelty Seeking	Ochsner	80	2.79 +/- 0.51	-0.32 to -0.07	0.001
	All Others	325	2.59 +/- 0.50		
Harm Avoidance	Ochsner	80	2.57 +/- 0.56	0.02 to 0.30	0.022
	All Others	330	2.73 +/- 0.55		
Persistence	Ochsner	80	3.47 +/- 0.32	-0.18 to -0.01	0.026
	All Others	325	3.38 +/- 0.36		

Discussion

Low Harm Avoidance suggests confidence and an acceptance of risk, while high Novelty Seeking indicates curiosity and challenge seeking. High levels of Persistence suggest industriousness despite obstacles. These results indicate that Ochsner students possess personality profiles well suited for facing adversity and difficult challenges, characteristics that are ideal for the medical profession. While certainly multifaceted, this may be a reason for Ochsner student's success in the competitive and challenging residency Match.

References

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