

Independent Study and Lifelong Learning

In order to become life-long learners, students must develop skills for self-directed learning, an essential task of medical student education. Before starting a clerkship, a student should ask and be able to answer the questions, “What should I learn in this clerkship?” and “How will I learn it?” In general, the answers to these questions will be found in multiple domains: medical knowledge, clinical skills and professional behaviors. Knowledge will be acquired during didactic activities, such as general and patient-specific reading, Firecracker study schedule, lectures, conferences, etc. To guide students, this section provides lists of specific core topics that should be learned during the clerkships and web-based educational programs that students must complete.

In addition, students must maintain an electronic patient encounter log (PEL) for required clinical experiences. The PEL contains a clerkship specific “must see list” of symptoms and diseases that the faculty feels students should become familiar with. Students must also recognize different categories of diseases. These include the important aspects of preventive, emergency, acute, chronic, continuing, rehabilitative and end-of-life care. Clinical skills and professional behaviors will be developed during supervised and observed patient encounters and during interaction with senior physicians, everywhere that care is delivered. Measurement of the student’s medical knowledge, clinical skills and professional behavior against defined benchmarks determines the student’s progress through the academic program. Importantly, the patients that students see and document in the patient log should form the basis for active and independent learning. In this patient-centered process students should develop the ability to independently identify, analyze and synthesize relevant information. Students should also strive to critically appraise the credibility of information sources they use. These competencies will be evaluated during discussions about patients at the bedside and in conferences and as part of students’ write-ups. Each student’s log becomes part of each student’s performance evaluated at the end of clerkship.

Each of the core clerkships have required web-based courses and quizzes that students must complete during the rotation. The courses consist of the:

1. Firecracker curriculum
2. USMLE World assigned questions
3. Communication Skills Course required modules
4. Ethics Modules and Quizzes

The University has purchased subscriptions to each of the above web-based resources for all clinical students. These resources promote independent study and deepen students’ understanding of the clerkship. In addition, these courses will also help students prepare for the NBME clinical subject exam and Step 2.