

APPENDIX D: STUDENT GUIDE

HOW MEDICAL STUDENTS CAN START THEIR OWN MINI MEDICAL SCHOOL: THE SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY MINI MEDICAL SCHOOL MANUAL

August 1, 1998

Fellow medical students,

Organizing the Southern Illinois University Mini Medical School has been a great experience for myself and the other students who put the project together. It has not only been an educational project for our students in the community, but it's been fun for us as well. I'm glad that other medical students around the nation are also taking an interest in this concept. I have no doubt that you'll find your experiences with Mini Medical School as enjoyable and satisfying as I have.

In planning the first Mini Medical School organized by medical students, we've encountered and resolved many problems that previous programs may not have met. Still, there are further challenges ahead that we look forward to overcoming. To this end, we'll be updating our guide continuously and assembling various materials to aid you in your own Mini Medical School. If you have any further questions or would like some of the material we are putting together, please e-mail me at asureka@siu.edu or call the SIU School of Medicine Student Affairs office at 217-782-2860. Regardless, let us know how your project turns out and if this guide was of any help.

Good Luck,

Amod Sureka, MS III

Founder and President of the SIU Mini Medical School

Background

In this age of health awareness, there's increased interest in medicine in our society. As future health-care providers, we have the obligation to provide accurate medical information to the people in our communities and to help them distinguish the factual from the latest fad. This is becoming increasingly important in light of the growing amount of questionable material available in the media and on the Internet.

Mini Medical School, a lecture series for health-care consumers, is a program that can serve these needs. There are currently over 40 such programs across the nation. The idea behind them is to provide an interesting, educational, and easy-to-understand lecture series to facilitate the understanding of basic concepts in medicine and of biomedical research. At the same time, it's also important to attempt to convey the importance, excitement, and wonder in the fields of science and medicine.

The Mini Medical School was started in 1990 by Dr. J. John Cohen at the University of Colorado. This concept has been supported by Dr. Bruce Fuchs of the National Institutes of Health since 1994. Forty similar programs have enjoyed great success. However, before the 1998 Southern Illinois University (SIU) Mini Medical School, all such programs had been organized by the faculty and administration of various medical schools and science institutions. In 1998, several students at the SIU School of Medicine decided that the health-care information needs of the local Springfield community could be met by the people who might well be involved with their care in the future: the medical students. After a successful experience organizing and delivering our first Mini Medical School course, we medical students at SIU became convinced that similar results could be achieved by other medical students around the nation.

Although the faculty and administration have the knowledge, experience, and perhaps even time to organize a Mini Medical School, it's possible for medical students to organize a program that is equal to, and perhaps in some ways superior to, the traditional faculty-organized program. In fact, there are several advantages that you have over the faculty in organizing such a program.

- As medical students, you are in the unique position of being able to identify which lectures are easiest to sit through as well as the lecturers who actually entertain as well as teach. Also, in choosing whom you would like to speak at your Mini Medical School (a.k.a. MiniMed), you can decide solely based on who you think would do a good job. You will (hopefully) be immune to the politics that faculty and administration often face (e.g., "We can't choose Dr. X—we should choose the chair of his department," or, "If we choose someone from the Internal Medicine Department, we'd better get someone from Family Practice, too").
- There are always several students in any given class who bring an "unbridled enthusiasm" to any given project. Such students can help turn a relatively unremarkable lecture series into a fun and friendly event.
- Even though medical students are organizing the project, you can still tap the extensive resources of the medical school. Thus, the students can shape the experience and still use the considerable expertise and material of the medical school.

Starting the Project

In organizing a Mini Medical School, as in any task, you need to gather a group of students who will serve as the organizing committee and thus do the lion's share of the work. The first of two approaches used in our case was to advertise what we were trying to do and to distribute some basic information about the project. This advertising could be as low tech as word of mouth and handbills on bulletin boards or "higher tech," like e-mail to your entire class (or all the classes at your school).

Another approach we used was to talk to student organizations at their group meetings. This way, you can talk to people face to face and be available for questions. Also, in speaking to the various student organizations, you are talking with the students who are probably more active than most in nonacademic activities. The only caution is to make sure that the rest of the class knows that all students are invited to participate, not just those involved with a particular student organization.

It doesn't take too many students to organize MiniMed. As a minimum, I'd suggest having half as many medical students as there are lecturers. This way, each student can keep in contact (which can be a difficult task given some schedules) with no more than two lecturers. After that, you can divide up tasks as needed. It's helpful if everyone is on hand on the evenings of the lectures to make sure that things run smoothly and to give the audience a little personal attention.

Timetable

Here's the timetable we devised based on last year's Mini Medical School. We will (we hope) be following this schedule in the SIU Fall 1998 session.

- 8 weeks before: Start calling lecturers
- 6 weeks before: Deadline for speaker to accept and choose topic.
Send letters to
 - 1) Last year's waiting list
 - 2) Donors
 - 3) Politicians
 - 4) Former attendees
- 5 weeks before: Send advertisement to newspaper
- 30 days before: Advertisement in newspaper appears
Press release sent out
Registration form ready to send out
- 14 days before: All registration forms due
- 10 days before: Call people on this year's waiting list
(until you reach your maximum)

Where to Hold Mini Medical School

Before you select a location, there are several things that you have to decide.

- Is it your main goal to educate a large number of people at a single time?
- Would you prefer more personal contact with fewer students to create the Mini Medical School "experience"?
- Are you also trying to expose the community to your medical school?

A large auditorium will allow many people to learn about the subjects covered in lectures. However, with a group of 400 people, it's more difficult for a lecturer to connect with an audience and for the medical students to get to know the people from the community. However, a small auditorium may force you to limit enrollment and leave some

people waiting until next year before they can attend. This point may be moot if you are trying to expose the community to your medical school. In that case, it's best to hold your lectures in the very room or auditorium where you attend class. In this manner, people will see your school and get a feel of what a "real" medical student does.

Regardless of the size of the auditorium, you can always leave the room half filled if you wish. Just because there are empty seats doesn't mean that you have to enroll more people if you feel it will compromise the atmosphere of your program.

When you decide on an auditorium, the first thing you must do is reserve the room. It isn't easy reserving a room on the same day for 6 to 10 consecutive weeks. In fact, as soon as you decide to start a Mini Medical School, reserve an auditorium. After all, you can't have a lecture without someplace to keep the people.

Also, keep in mind what audiovisual capabilities the room has. You will definitely want to be able to use slides and a microphone. Beyond that, you may have to be a little less picky. Also, consider that even though you have the equipment, you may not know how to use it. Find out if an AV tech comes with the room, if you can hire the medical school's tech, or if you can learn to run the equipment on your own. Be sure to practice on the equipment beforehand if you'll be running the show yourself; glitches in this area can be annoying and look very unprofessional.

When to Hold Mini Medical School

Mini Medical School has been done in a weekend for select audiences. However, the majority of Mini Medical Schools are conducted once a week. Considering the amount of work that goes into a session and the time commitment on the student's part, once a week is probably just right.

The time of year when you choose to hold the Mini Medical School will probably be greatly influenced by how rough your course work will be. If you find that there are two months in your schedule that are relatively light, that's the time to hold MiniMed (of course, this requires some planning ahead). Which day of the week to hold MiniMed may also depend on your schedule. If you find that you'll be having quite a few exams on Thursdays, don't hold MiniMed on the previous night.

The other thing you must decide is how many weeks to conduct MiniMed. Although many Mini Medical Schools last 9 to 10 weeks, we felt in our first outing that we should start small. It seemed to us that the minimum length of time that we could hold a lecture series and still call it a series was six weeks. We found that it was the optimum amount of time for relating a good amount of information, building relationships with members of the community, and not becoming sick and tired of the project. In fact, in the future we will probably stay with the 6-week series.

Lecturers

The main thing to remember in choosing who will speak at MiniMed is that Mini Medical School is directed toward people who know relatively little about science and medicine and that it is supposed to be fun. Thus, in all likelihood, not every lecturer at your medical school will be appropriate for a Mini Medical School.

There are two qualities that you look for in a lecturer for this project.

1. A lecturer should be able to relate to an audience that is somewhat naïve in the ways of science and medicine. That may mean either lowering the difficulty level of a lecture or spending extra time explaining the basics before talking about the more difficult material.
2. The best lecturers are usually the people that you enjoy listening to in class and talking to outside of class; these are the people who can make a lecture both fun and entertaining. It's not important that the lecturer be the chief of surgery or an expert in his field, but rather that he or she be able to relate some relatively basic material

in a manner that the general public can understand. The bulk of the lecture should probably be focused on a few key points along with an overall feel of the subject. If this is done in an enjoyable manner, rather than as a hard-core, fact-filled lecture, the audience will be likely to remember the more salient points and have a good time, too.

As a medical student, you will have met many lecturers yourself, but there are many lecturers that you will not yet have come across. To get the best possible group of lecturers, ask the senior students if they know of any lecturers that fit your criteria. Plus, if you use the suggestions of the upperclassmen, when you come across one of your professors who wanted to speak at MiniMed but wasn't invited, you can always say that you relied on the upperclassmen in choosing lecturers.

Slides are essential for a good lecture. Not only are they visually appealing, but they give the audience something to follow while the lecturer speaks. Although pictures, diagrams, and computer presentations are great, pages of text tend to detract from the communication between lecturer and audience. Lastly, encourage the lecturers to involve the audience with hands-on activities and audience participation whenever possible.

In deciding the order in which lecturers speak, you will need to know when they're available. Instead of asking when each lecturer would like to speak, I suggest asking which days he or she *cannot* give their lecture. This will allow you the flexibility to organize the order of lectures so that they can build on one another or to match pairs of lectures with topics that go well together.

Lecture Topics

This is an area that I don't think is especially important. In MiniMed, the subject of the lectures is far less important than the person who delivers the lecture. Once you have the lecturer chosen, you can work with him (gender neutral) to find a topic that he would like to speak about. And you will find that there really isn't any shortage of interesting topics in science and medicine.

A good way to introduce a subject to the audience is to start with a topic in a field that has recently been grabbing headlines (e.g., flesh-eating bacteria or hormone replacement therapy) and use it as a jumping-off point for the broader content of the lecture. In fact, you may want to base the title of the lecture on this attention grabber. Regardless, by making the title of a lecture interesting or funny, you're once again setting the tone of the lecture series.

Funding

An important point to understand about the cost of Mini Medical School is that it doesn't *have* to be an expensive project. MiniMed can be executed equally well on either a large or a small budget. The amount of money that you can spend will not affect the most important aspect of MiniMed—the lectures. Instead, a small budget limits only the number of niceties that you can offer your students (e.g., refreshments, booklets, mementos). But, there's a reason you call them niceties; they're nice, and here are some ways that you can find funding to buy them.

In trying to solicit money from different sources, it's important to be able to show how MiniMed can benefit the school or organization and how little MiniMed costs to run.

Medical School Administration

Perhaps the most important potential source of income is the administration of your medical school. There are several advantages that MiniMed can offer your medical school (which means several reasons for them to give you money). The main benefits of MiniMed surround the fact that it's an excellent program through which to reach out to people in the area. This is especially important to the medical school that wants to increase its interaction with the community. Mini Medical School can also be a program that helps establish an identity for the medical school that's separate from local hospitals and physicians.

Research Department(s)

Other potential sources of income within the medical school administration are the various departments at your school that conduct research. MiniMed is an excellent forum in which a department can educate the public about the impact of research on medicine as well as the specific contributions being made at your medical school.

Admission Fee

Existing Mini Medical Schools around the nation vary in the fees, if any, that they charge for admission. However, it's important to understand that it's unlikely that all the costs of MiniMed can be recouped from admission fees alone. Furthermore, in trying to make a profit from MiniMed, you will probably be detracting from the overall experience that you are trying to provide and make admission fees out of reach for some people. Therefore, charging an admission fee should be thought of as a way to offset the costs of running a Mini Medical School.

The financial gains of an admission fee are obvious; however, charging a fee may also help increase audience retention throughout the lecture series. A fee may create a psychological commitment for students to complete the course after having paid for the privilege to attend. Hopefully, this also encourages people to attend each lecture and treat MiniMed as a lecture series rather than merely an opportunity to attend the selected lectures in which people have a previous interest. In fact, the organizers of the University of Indiana Mini Medical School have tried both charging a fee as well as keeping MiniMed free. They found that charging a fee led to better audience retention in their course.

We attempted to choose an admission fee high enough to defray some of the costs and give students the psychological commitment to attend, but not be so high that people can't afford it. In our first year of MiniMed, we set our fee at \$10. This defrayed about 40% of our costs and did not seem to hinder anyone's participation (no one complained that the price was too high, at least). In fact, many of our students suggested that they would be willing to pay more for the next session.

Fees at other Mini Medical Schools around the nation range from having no fee to about \$25 to \$30. Dr. Bruce Fuchs, organizer of mini medical schools at the Medical College of Virginia (MCV) and National Institutes of Health (NIH), has never imposed a fee at his programs. However, Dr. Richard Weber's successful program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine has charged \$25 for their nine-week course and has filled his audience for the past three years.

Student Organizations

If your medical school is like ours, it probably has an active AMA or AMSA group along with a few specialty-interest groups thrown in for good measure. These organizations can be a help. If your group has loads of cash lying around, go ahead and ask them to directly sponsor MiniMed. The group benefits by

- having its name advertised in the promotional material within the community, and
- being able to show the regional and state offices that your local chapter is doing something unique and not the usual blood-drive-in-a-box or blood-pressure screening at the local mall.

Hospitals

Hospitals are often extensively involved in community education and patient-instruction projects. In fact, they may have a project similar to Mini Medical School already in place. However, in my experience, such hospital-based programs tend to focus on 1) specific diseases, with an emphasis on patient care and management, and 2) general health information, such as proper diet and exercise. Considering that MiniMed is concerned with a variety of topics in medicine and the science behind the medicine, overlap between the programs shouldn't be too great. Because of this lack of overlap, hospitals may be willing to cosponsor your Mini Medical School.

Other

The last potential contributors that we will mention are private organizations such as drug or biotechnology companies and private foundations, or associations such as the American Heart Association or the American Lung Association. In soliciting funds from these organizations, it's important to convey the following points:

- The costs associated with MiniMed are relatively low (especially compared with direct advertising through television or the newspapers.)
- The community will learn about the organization and its goals.
- The community will see the organization doing a community service.

At SIU, we were fortunate in that we had financial support from inside and outside our medical school. Our first year of MiniMed was funded by a grant from NIH, leaving us free to concentrate on the completion of a successful program. Similarly, subsequent years will be funded by both the dean of our medical school and the associate dean for research and faculty affairs. With such financial concerns attended to, we'll be able to continue to grow and improve.

Advertising

In your advertising, it's important to give the pertinent information regarding the topics, dates, times, location, costs, etc. However, it's equally important to convey the tone you're setting in your Mini Medical School.

Newspaper Advertisements

It's likely that you'll find your optimum audience through this form of promotion. By advertising in the newspaper, you're able to reach a variety of people from a broad range of occupations and education levels. It's from this diversity that people bring different interests and are able to contribute to the sessions in different ways.

Advertising in your local newspaper may be your single largest cost. Keep in mind, though, that a little goes a long way here. We selected a two-day Sunday-Monday advertisement, and a physician group, SIU Physicians and Surgeons, paid for an additional two days. The good news about our advertising was that it was very successful. The bad news about our advertising was that it was overkill. After the first two days, we had enough applicants to fill our auditorium and start a waiting list. In fact, we probably had enough interest after the first day of advertising.

Bearing in mind that it was our first time organizing a Mini Medical School, we felt it was important to make sure that we had an adequate audience for this untested program. In retrospect, considering that virtually all Mini Medical Schools in the past have met with near instant success, I suggest placing an advertisement in the newspaper for one day and leaving time and funding for additional advertising if necessary. After all, there are other less expensive forms of advertising available, and you can always put another advertisement in the newspaper if needed.

Springfield's main newspaper, the *State Journal Register*, charged roughly \$500 for a 6" x 6" advertisement for one day (regardless of the day of the week) and half price for subsequent days. We chose the Sunday edition because it usually has a high readership (since people have nothing better to do than sit back and read the newspaper). We chose the Monday edition specifically because it carried a science and medicine section.

In choosing the day on which to place your advertisement, you must consider the different advertising rates on different days, any special package rates offered, if there are certain days that have sections that will appeal to your target audience (e.g., a science and medicine section), and which days have a higher readership. Our rationale was that Sunday is probably the best day to advertise due to the high readership, whereas Saturday is next best, and lastly, the weekdays.

Press Releases

The appropriate way to get some attention from the media is to send out a press release. Your medical school's public affairs office regularly sends out such documents for all school events and announcements. Work with them to develop your own release and then let them take care of the rest of the work from there.

Direct Mail

Another way to gather your audience is through the mail. You can choose which people to mail information to based on either their affiliation to the medical school or their potential interest in attending MiniMed, or both.

1. *Donors and Patrons of the Medical School:* You, as medical students who have benefited from the philanthropy of the donors, can now express your gratitude and "give a little back" for their generosity by inviting them to attend MiniMed. These invitations are a nice gesture of appreciation. This relationship between the donors and the students (rather than administration) may be unique at your school and thus be especially well received.
2. *Government:* Although the benefits may seem somewhat remote, it's always nice to have a friend or two in your local government. A letter of invitation to the members of your city council will, at the very least, inform them about one of the community projects in which your medical school is involved. A better situation occurs if a city council member is able to attend because it presents you with an opportunity to show off your school.

If your school happens to be in the state capitol, you have the additional opportunity to reach the officials in state government who actually make some of the decisions regarding not only the medical education system in which you learn, but also the medical system in which you will practice. Although the elected officials may not be able to attend, the presence of aides will still allow you to educate policy makers, albeit indirectly, on health issues, as well as to let them know about some of the happenings occurring in your school. If an elected official

does happen to attend the lecture series, or even attend a single lecture, this provides a great opportunity to get some free publicity from the local media.

Both of these groups of people, donors as well as politicians, are unlikely to register or attend MiniMed in any great numbers. However, if any of them would like to come, it's important that there be room available for them to attend.

3. *Those Who Might Be Interested:* We figured that there was one group that was relatively easy to access and whose members would be interested in lifelong learning and staying current in science and medicine: teachers (especially science teachers). A benefit to inviting teachers is the ease by which you can issue invitations. If desired, you can merely send invitations to the different schools and have them distributed to the teachers from there.

In issuing invitations, there's a critical difference between teachers (or similar specific groups) and donors or politicians: teachers are far more likely to attend. Thus, it is important to keep in mind the number of people from specific groups that you want to attend. After all, it's probably preferable to have the more diverse audience that you may get by advertising in the newspaper than an audience filled largely by people of one profession. So, I would suggest that you hold off on inviting teachers until your other forms of advertising (i.e., the newspaper and other letters) have been completed and slots have been filled by people in a variety of professions (including, of course, interested teachers who respond to the newspaper advertisement.)

Registration for the Course

In all of our advertising (newspaper, invitations, etc.), we asked interested people to call our Students Affairs office. The Students Affairs office then collected the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the interested callers. Finally, the office sent out additional information about MiniMed as well as a registration form that people could return, with the admission fee, if they did indeed want to enroll. It's very important to set a deadline by which people should return the registration form and admission fee. This not only allows you to use additional advertising (if needed) to attract more students, but it also lets you order the proper number of materials (e.g., refreshments, booklets).

It's helpful if the person receiving the telephone calls has all possible information about MiniMed. Callers are bound to have questions, and it's easier if they can be answered on the spot.

There are a few points that you'll want to make in your advertising that may avoid some problems during registration:

- It may be wise to state in the advertisement that space is limited. Some callers were angry that after seeing the advertising and making the phone call, they weren't able to register. In organizing MiniMed, we were concerned that suggesting that there might not be much space available would discourage people from calling. Considering the great response we received, this doesn't seem likely.
- Other people who called for information didn't want to commit themselves to MiniMed over the phone but rather preferred to walk in on the night of the first lecture and register. This is not practical if you're limited in space and funding. Therefore, stating outright in the advertisement that phone registration is required should minimize walk-ins.
- We designed MiniMed as a course with a variety of lectures that would expose the community to a broad range of topics in science and medicine. Considering that space was limited and that we did want people to attend the lectures that we organized, we required that our students attend all the lectures. Of course, there really is no way for us to enforce this, except to repeatedly emphasize that MiniMed is a full course of lectures to be attended, and that picking and choosing a lecture or two to attend is strongly discouraged.

Note: At some point in the registration process, in our case in the registration form, you should inquire whether any of your students have any special requirements (e.g., wheelchairs, assistance in walking). This way, you can provide the necessary assistance.

Checking Into the Lecture

Each night, we asked our students to check in at a registration table that we set up. Being able to meet with students at every session has several advantages:

1. This is yet another opportunity for medical students to meet and get to know different people from the community. The relationships that you form can strengthen the overall relationship your school has with the community. It's such one-to-one connections that make this a fun project and can differentiate a student-organized MiniMed from the traditional MiniMed. The enthusiasm that the medical students bring to this project can turn a relatively plain lecture series into an enjoyable event.
2. It's a great way to get feedback from your students. In our first year, we distributed surveys on four out of six nights regarding how easy or difficult and how enjoyable or boring the students found each lecture and the overall course. If you don't want feedback to be as formal as a questionnaire, you can get information by just asking questions as people come to your table.
3. Distribute material for the evening easily. If you have a large group of people, it can be difficult to distribute material (handouts, freebies, etc.) efficiently and quickly. Handling this chore before everyone has sat down will make the evening go much more smoothly. The problem that we encountered, however, was that lecturers often didn't have material ready ahead of time (maybe because we didn't give them enough advance notice). Nonetheless, it's helpful whenever possible.

Food and Drink

The food that you provide at your MiniMed can be a vital part of the lecture series because it can be the added incentive for people to show up (food is good). Besides this, considering the fact that your students will be present for more than two hours, serving food can be a thoughtful touch. Choosing which foods to serve is pretty basic. In terms of drinks, coffee, iced tea, and water are pretty standard and cheap. Soft drinks are relatively expensive, and there are too many choices (should you do the Dew?). Considering that you want people to have a good time, serving cookies is a good way to go in terms of food. Just in case, however, it may not be a bad idea to provide some food for the health conscious or diabetic; fruits or vegetables may be a nice alternative. A bigger decision is who will handle the food each week, you or someone else.

Handling food on a weekly basis can be a difficult chore. If possible, it's preferable for a catering service to handle the job. The easiest place to start finding a caterer is to ask the managers of the auditorium where you are holding your event who they use for catering. Another possibility is to check who your school normally contracts with for catering. In fact, you may get some of the perks that your school receives (e.g., lower prices, free toothpicks) by using the relationship that the school already has with the company. The main benefit to catering is having the food delivered and set up for you; however, an additional benefit is being absolved from any liability if anyone becomes sick. Unfortunately, you will pay for the convenience; catering can be quite expensive.

The alternative is to buy the food yourself, bring it to the auditorium, and set it up. Definitely cheaper, but it's a lot more work. Also, you may have the liability issue to deal with (I suggest you consult an attorney before proceeding along this route).

Lastly, in planning which culinary delights to serve, it's important to consider how much money you have to spend. Food can be one of your largest expenses, so you can tailor the amount of food you make available according to your budget. In serving coffee, iced tea, water, cookies, and vegetables, we found that we spent approximately \$2.50 per person per session, coming out to roughly \$800 over the duration of the course. Nonetheless, it was worthwhile (the cookies were really good).

Handbook

When your students first enter Mini Medical School, they likely will have only the information from the newspaper advertisement and registration form regarding who you are, what you're trying to do, and the topics that will be covered in the course. A booklet that introduces you, outlines some of the goals of MiniMed, and gives additional information about each topic that will be covered will provide an appropriate background for MiniMed as a project as well as for each individual lecture. It's important to make certain that you do few things in such a booklet:

1. Introduce yourselves, and welcome everyone.
2. Thank the appropriate people for their help with the project.
3. Provide a class schedule.
4. Include some information about the medical school. People will be curious about the lives of the medical students who organized the program as well as how MiniMed compares with the real thing. Also, this is another opportunity for you to provide information about your medical school.
5. For each lecture, provide a synopsis of or introduction to the lecture, either written by you or the lecturers. Additionally, give some information, general and professional, about each lecturer. This may help the audience be more at ease with the lecturer and thus create a less formal, more fun environment. If possible, provide a picture of the lecturer.

Last-Minute Details

With any luck, such details won't bother you at the last minute, but instead will be handled beforehand. In practice, however...

Security

At night, the stalwart band of law enforcement at your medical school is responsible for making sure that the doors are locked and that there aren't any nonauthorized personnel wreaking havoc. Thus, it's important to inform security that you're expecting a large group of people at the medical school and that you'll need doors unlocked.

Besides informing security ahead of time, be sure to talk with the security officers who are working the shift when MiniMed is scheduled. They're the ones who will actually be unlocking the doors, and sometimes messages don't always reach the guys who do the work. Lastly, check all the doors yourself the night of MiniMed; there's nothing worse than having everyone standing outside the auditorium all night.

Restrooms

Make sure that there are men's and women's restrooms near the auditorium. You may save yourself some hassle by making signs pointing people in the right direction.

At the Door

From the moment that your students enter the door from the parking lot, try to create an environment with a personal touch. A friendly greeting at the door along with instructions about where they need to go will go a long way toward establishing such an environment. You will probably want additional people at the door to help with special needs (e.g., wheelchairs, assistance in walking). Your people can give assistance where necessary or just accompany your students to their destination.

Graduation

It's nice to be able to reward your students for their persistence in sticking with MiniMed throughout the entire course. A less beneficent reason for graduation "ceremonies" is that this is an opportunity for you to create the mother of all photo opportunities.

Putting together a graduation ceremony doesn't require too much time or effort. There are a few basic things that will make the ceremony a success, though.

- Of course, a graduation isn't complete without a graduation certificate. This is another chance for you to show off your creativity. To make the certificate somewhat official, however, choose a font that is sufficiently dignified and be sure to print these certificates on a thick paper for that "official feel."
- Although it won't be practical to ask your students to dress up for the event (not to mention severe overkill), be sure to be dressed up in your white coat (or graduation gown, if you prefer). This gives the appropriate sense of formality to the proceedings and is perfect for any pictures that people may want to take with you.
- Give them stuff. With any luck, either your medical school, companies associated with your school, or drug companies will give freebies (coffee mugs, Post-it notes, pens, etc.) for you to give to your students. You may want to give out some of these things at the beginning of the course in an introductory packet, but be sure to save the good stuff for graduation.

One decision you'll have to make is when to hold the ceremony—before or after the lectures for the evening. Having the ceremony before the lectures has the advantage that the audience is fully awake and in their top ambulatory condition. Unfortunately, graduation lacks the finality that you may want if you still have two-plus hours of lectures to sit through. Having the ceremony after lectures has several advantages worth noting. Most importantly, it's actually the end of the lectures. Also, you can decide how much time you want to spend on the ceremony; this may vary depending on how long the lectures were. Lastly, you won't be rushed to leave time for lectures; this allows you to spend some time here and there to say good-bye to anyone you've gotten to know over the course. The major disadvantage is that you're holding this ceremony after a long night of lectures; ergo, people may be somewhat tired. With good planning, however, the proceedings should be interesting enough to keep people awake.

How grand you choose to make your ceremony is up to you. You can always go with "Pomp and Circumstance," call individual names, and include the \$9.95 photograph. At SIU, we chose to go with a simpler ceremony that required far less time. After the lectures were completed, we said a few words to the group as a whole and then invited everyone to come down to the front of the auditorium and line up to receive certificates and gifts. We were also lined up along the front of the auditorium and could thus congratulate the students on their way out and say our good-byes. Any one of us could step out of the line and talk with a student or two for a little while. All in all, we were pretty happy with how it turned out—not too long and not too formal (plus, our audience collected some money and presented us with a great thank-you gift).

In Conclusion

We hope we have provided some useful guidelines for starting a Mini Medical School, and we urge you to tailor your project to meet your specific goals. If you can draw on your many years of lectures and find what you most enjoyed, you'll be able to provide your students with some good experiences. Also, putting to use some of those personal skills that you are honing for your future physician-patient relationships will ensure that everyone has a good time. Again, if you have any further questions or would like some of the material we are putting together, please e-mail me at asureka@siu.edu or call the SIU School of Medicine Student Affairs office at 217-782-2860. We're looking forward to learning how your project turns out and if this guide was at all helpful. Good luck.