

# EPA Thinking Course Syllabus

## Course description:

The *EPA Thinking* Course is designed to place early emphasis in the curriculum on the type of thinking that underlies the fundamental clinical professional behaviors known as the Core Entrustable Professional Activities for Entering Residency (EPAs). Small groups meet in monthly sessions beginning in the first month of medical school to discuss the answers to questions provided in modules corresponding to each EPA. An additional module is included for the second session to review the essential concepts in metacognition that underpin entrustable behavior.

This course takes advantage of the Expert Skills Program to teach students how to acquire EPA thinking. The overarching goals are:

1. To teach the difference between the thinking that leads to either entrustable behavior or pre-entrustable behavior.
2. To learn and apply principles of metacognition necessary to build the learning skills that underlie the EPAs.

This course is an innovation in clinical teaching by introducing the necessary skills in cognitive function ahead of the procedural skills learned in the clinic. The discussion in a flipped classroom helps students to identify and strengthen the thinking skills that underlie entrustable clinical behavior. This is expected to meet long range goals of teaching self-directed, self-regulated learning.

## Course implementation:

This course is taught on a monthly basis with small group, flipped-classroom instruction in two-hour learning modules that correspond to each of the 13 EPAs in addition to other introductory concepts. The group activity is comprised of a discussion based on student responses to a standard set of questions. The discussion questions serve as the learning objectives and the core resource materials include:

- The *AAMC EPA Learner and Teachers Guide*; available free online or in print form.
- The materials available at the ESP website
- Additional references as students or mentors find the need.

## Flipped classroom protocol:

The students are called on in rotating order and are expected to be prepared to answer when called on any one of the questions for that session. Students should have free access to resources during the session. In general, the questions ask the students:

1. to inspect both the AAMC descriptions of the expected behaviors and the accompanying vignettes and then compare the differences in pre-entrustable thinking and entrustable thinking that accompanies the EPA for that module.
2. to identify the concepts in the ESP (deliberate practice, learning style, ELC) that are relevant to the EPA and to describe how they might be applied in achieving entrustable performance.
3. to compare their own current style of thinking and whether it can be applied to the development of EPA thinking.

Specific instructions are provided to the students in each of the EPA modules.

#### Mentor requirements and guidelines:

Mentor supplements are provided for each EPA session to help mentors achieve a more complete discussion. The supplements provide suggested responses and/or background to help generate guiding questions for the group to discuss.

#### Portfolio optional requirements:

In addition to in-class activities, three portfolio entries can be required:

1. A preliminary reflection on expectations based on prior educational experience and the student's current understanding of clinical practice. This will be due prior to the first group meeting as a baseline for the student to monitor progress.
2. A mid-year reflection on course exam performance outcomes compared to expectations and changes in the student's expectations for clinical training. (Note: Although basic science exams do not directly relate to clinical activities, the student's preparation and awareness of learning deficiencies is highly relevant.)
3. An end-of-year reflection on changes, if any, in their awareness of strengths and weaknesses in their thinking and a personal estimate of the relative importance of EPA thinking early in the curriculum.
4. [Optional: for institutions interested in long term reinforcement, requesting a reflection at any point during the third year can bring a relevant experience to bear on EPA thinking. This might be worked into a clerkship conference.]

#### Learning assessment:

Grading as simple pass/"not-completed" will serve to record attendance. The "not-completed" grade is derived from mastery learning approaches that focus on completion of the experience. This grading also removes unnecessary coercion since the goal is to improve competitiveness for residency application and not to memorize content. A make-up activity for missed sessions would be written responses to each of the preparation questions. The nature of the topic as related to residency application will be enough motivation not only to attend but to participate.