



Bradley Rabquer, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Biology at Albion College, as well as the Director of the Lisa and James Wilson Institute for Medicine, a newly developed program that focuses on four areas that are critical for healthcare careers: preparatory, educational, experiential, and community. A 5-million-dollar gift from James and Lisa Wilson is allowing Albion College to transform the future of medical education by revising the pre-med curriculum. The hope is that Albion will become the national model for training future doctors by showing how to move healthcare education in a transformative direction.

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

Albion College: The Future of Medicine

Moving Past an Archaic Model and An Outdated Litmus Test

Rabquer explains that the program applicants for the Wilson Institute of Medicine are not eliminated based on prejudging and screening; they have a variety of backgrounds and test scores, but they all have a passion for a career in health. One of the Wilsons' beliefs is that students who could ultimately have excellent careers in healthcare may have SAT or ACT scores that would traditionally discourage that interest, with race and socioeconomic factors also contributing. "It's an archaic model," Rabquer adds, "being used as a litmus test" and a limiting factor on students' abilities.

In an Introduction to Pre-Medical STEM course, students who may lack the traditional academic background once seen as the only path to a healthcare position are able to transition from high-school into demanding subjects, but they have the academic, social, and emotional encouragement they need as they face challenging material. Instead of "throwing them into the water," Rabquer explains, the course "walks them into that discipline."

A More Efficient, Equitable, and Inclusive Pathway Through Medical Education

As they embarked on this journey, Rabquer explains that they asked themselves how to make a more "efficient, equitable, and inclusive pathway through medical education." That meant taking a hard look at the prerequisite classes they currently offered and revamping those courses to create interdisciplinary classes designed specifically for those students. For instance, if they needed to take Physics—it made more sense to examine how physics worked within the body or within the cell. The idea is that the more relevant the course, the better the retention of the material and the better the experience for the student.

They gathered a team of ten faculty from various departments across the sciences and the humanities. While this is admittedly a great deal of work, Rabquer acknowledges, and inevitably involves a bit of campus politics, everyone involved sees the benefit for both students and staff. All are working together to explore curricular ideas and see what's being done at the medical school level and then designing classes to help students prepare for advanced training.

The Wilson Institute works to give students the best chance of moving to any health professional school they choose by providing quality advising that prepares students for professional training, helping them secure internships, research opportunities, and job shadowing, as well as providing seminars and support for navigating the professional school application process and taking standardized tests.

Students will be strengthening their candidacy for professional schools in a variety of healthcare-related disciplines, while acquiring the communication skills and social skills that will make them a strong team-member with a commitment to their community and an appreciation for diversity—including the responsibility to compassionately interact with patients from a variety of backgrounds.

A Space Where Students Can Come for Anything

Craig Streu, Associate Professor of Biochemistry, says Rabquer is a fantastic teacher—known throughout the campus for being funny, interesting, and informative; Streu adds that Rabquer's popular classes are "limited only



by the seats in the classroom.” He also sees Rabquer as an excellent mentor and advocate for students, the perfect person to be in a position to influence so many students’ lives.

Streu notes it’s an exciting time at Albion College because they have been given the resources to “think about anything.” He credits Rabquer with assembling a team of incredible people with exciting ideas, all prepared to create an ideal Pre-Health program. Though many of the creative and original ideas have been in faculty members’ minds for years now, they now have the resources to act on those ideas in these “exciting first steps.”

Barbara J. Keyes, Ph.D. Professor in the Department of Psychological Science, formerly led the institute. Rabquer credits Keyes, who he refers to as his mentor, for building the program. When Keyes prepared to step down in 2016, she recommended Rabquer for the role.

She notes, “Brad has so many gifts,” in that he’s solidly grounded in the research of his discipline, the strong connection between

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his research and biomedical research, his supportive and approachable demeanor that encourages students to seek out his help, and even his close connections to the healthcare industry via his wife, who is a physician, and other close relationships to healthcare providers in their area.

Of the 1400 students at Albion College, typically 300-350 of those students will have an education focus in healthcare, so Rabquer and his team wanted to develop a “support

structure and go-to resource” for any problems they encounter, from academic to social to financial or emotional—in essence a “space where students could come for anything.”

Connecting Skills and Attributes to Careers

They are rolling out the first topics in “The Wilson Curriculum” in the fall. In the required Introduction to Health Care course, students begin to connect their skills and attributes with



a variety of careers in healthcare. Maggie Meyer, the Experiential Learning and Recruiting Coordinator, then helps pair students with professionals they can shadow so they can further explore careers in medicine and make decisions about the positions that work best for them. Unless their background affords the opportunity, many students who are interested in the medical field don't have the resources or connections to have access to a pharmacist or surgical technician or physician's assistant.

In this program, they also have ample opportunities to meet with speakers who cover a variety of healthcare topics, and the team ensures the speakers are diverse in terms of age, race, and gender. For juniors and seniors, an "Issues in Health Care" course ensures students are well-versed in topical concerns in health care so they won't feel ill-prepared to tackle anything they should expect to encounter after graduation.

Biology major Matthew D. Stander met Rabquer at a Distinguished Scholars Program while presenting some research he'd done in high school, and he began to advise him before he even attended Albion College. Stander adds,

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“From day zero, he was my mentor and advisor.” Stander appreciates how Rabquer puts a great deal of trust in his students and doesn’t micro-manage their projects, giving them academic and intellectual freedom but also support. He will soon be attending the Michigan State University School of Osteopathic Medicine, and he notes that Rabquer’s support was incredibly important in the application process.

Biochemistry major Karen Carroll had not considered a career in the healthcare field until she had a traumatic accident as a child; she was profoundly impacted by the compassion and

understanding in her healthcare team. When her grandmother passed away just a couple of months later, she encountered the kindness of healthcare professionals again, and that cemented her decision.

Now, she is on her way to becoming an anesthesiologist, with Rabquer’s help and guidance. He’s seen her through twelve drafts of her personal statement, and he wrote her a letter of recommendation. She adds that he knows her well—as he knows all of his mentees; he knows her academic interests, her hobbies, and even her financial standing.

Liberal Arts College as Optimal Setting for Pre-Med Curriculum

Rabquer views the Liberal Arts College as “the perfect and optimal setting to tackle changes in pre-med curriculum.” Most of what has been added recently is an appreciation of sociology, psychology, ethics—and other skills like communication, and teamwork: subject areas already valued at a liberal arts school like Albion College. As he explains, they are building off the strengths of the Liberal Arts background. Hopefully, this work will lead a national movement of other Liberal Arts colleges preparing students for the future of medicine.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James Clevenger earned her M.Ed. degree from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham. Most recently, she taught Business Communications at Samford University.

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