

Advancing Social Accountability in Medical Education: The ISAT Self-Assessment at the Universidad de La Sabana

By: Claudia Liliana Jaimes Peñuela¹, Camilo A. Correal Muñoz¹, Francisco Lamus Lemus¹

¹Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, Universidad de La Sabana, Chía, Cundinamarca, Colombia

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Abstract

This article presents an evaluation of the self-assessment process conducted at the Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine using the Indicators for Social Accountability Tool (ISAT). Established in 1994, the faculty has committed to producing medical professionals who contribute to the common good, recently implementing a curricular reform to better align medical education with evolving community health needs. The ISAT self-assessment aimed to evaluate the institution's progress in key areas: student recruitment, faculty development, curriculum content, governance, social responsibility, and research impact.

Our methodology began with forming a core assessment team of experienced faculty members who participated in the Social Accountability Fellowship, co-hosted by The Network: TUFH and NOSM University. The team utilized the ISAT tool, collecting data through structured discussions, workshops, and consultations with our constituencies. Our findings revealed significant strides in curriculum reform and faculty development, with public health elements and community-based education increasingly integrated into the curriculum. However, challenges remain in attracting and supporting students from marginalized communities, formalizing community involvement in governance, and fully integrating research activities with broader social accountability goals.

This assessment underscores the need for innovative strategies to overcome financial and socio-economic barriers, enhance community partnerships, and ensure that institutional decisions are informed by community needs. The article concludes that while the faculty has made notable progress, sustained effort, collaboration, and strategic innovation are required to further advance its social accountability agenda. Moving forward, Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine aims to refine its strategies in student recruitment, governance, research integration, and interprofessional education to remain at the forefront of socially accountable medical education in Colombia and beyond. The faculty's commitment to these principles is essential for creating a healthcare workforce dedicated to building capacity to serve the complexity of the quintuple aim of societal health needs.

Introduction

The Faculty of Medicine at Universidad de La Sabana, established in 1994, has consistently aimed to produce medical professionals committed to the common good (Universidad de La Sabana, n.d.). A notable aspect of this commitment is the faculty's recent curricular reform,

which seeks to better align medical education with evolving community health needs (Facultad de Medicina, 2018). This article explores the self-assessment process conducted using the ISAT tool, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities encountered in advancing social accountability within a Latin American private university context, all with the aim of pursuing the quintuple aim of health care (health improvement, reduced per capita cost of care, improved patients experience, health workforce satisfaction, and elevated health equity) (Farrell et al., 2023).

Methodology

In the first semester of 2024, Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine undertook a self-assessment using the Indicators for Social Accountability Tool (ISAT) as the primary evaluation framework (Santoso Utomo et al., 2022). The process began with the formation of a core assessment team composed of faculty members who had participated in the Social Accountability Fellowship. This team received additional training to effectively apply the ISAT tool within the institutional context.

The assessment strategy emphasized gathering diverse stakeholder perspectives. Initial data collection involved insights from a core group of evaluators, drawing on previous interviews and accreditation reports. This expanded to include broader input from the medical education board, which encompasses representatives from various academic and community stakeholders. The ISAT tool was systematically applied across six key areas: student recruitment, faculty recruitment and development, curriculum content and learning methods, governance, social responsibility, and research and societal impact (Santoso Utomo et al., 2022). These areas were assessed through structured discussions and workshops, providing a comprehensive evaluation based on both quantitative data and qualitative feedback. Following data collection, the core team analyzed the results, identifying strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the institution's current practices. This analysis, aligned with the ISAT framework, has helped prioritize future actions. The findings are being compiled into a report that includes specific recommendations for advancing the institution's social accountability, leading to the development of an action plan.

Throughout the self-assessment, the process has been guided by principles of transparency, inclusivity, and a commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring that the outcomes are both reflective of the current status and actionable, paving the way for meaningful advancements in the faculty's social accountability efforts.

Results

The self-assessment revealed a detailed understanding of the institution's progress toward social accountability, highlighting both strengths and areas for growth across several key dimensions.

In the area of **student recruitment, selection, and support**, ongoing efforts to revise selection criteria to better promote diversity and equity were highlighted. However, challenges persist, particularly due to the financial constraints of operating within the context of a private university. These constraints often limit the institution's ability to attract and support students from marginalized communities, revealing a critical need for innovative

strategies to align recruitment practices more closely with the faculty's social accountability objectives.

Faculty recruitment and development showed mixed progress. The institution has made strides in recruiting faculty members who are equipped to address community health needs. On the development side, there has been a concerted effort to enhance teaching strategies, with a focus on active learning and work-based education. These initiatives aim to prepare faculty members to educate students in ways that are responsive to community health needs, signaling a strong commitment to advancing educational practices within the institution.

The evaluation of **curriculum content and learning methods** revealed that the faculty has progressively incorporated public health elements and community health needs into its curriculum, reflecting a clear alignment with social accountability principles. Nevertheless, there is a recognition that these efforts need to be more deeply integrated across all programs to fully realize their potential. The faculty is working to expand active learning and interprofessional education, aiming to equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively serve in community healthcare settings and other institutions influencing the social determinants of health.

In terms of **governance**, the assessment identified a need for greater involvement of community representatives in the decision-making processes of the faculty. While there have been efforts to engage community stakeholders, these interactions are not yet formalized within the institution's governance structures. Moving forward, the faculty aims to increase the participation of community voices in critical decisions, particularly those related to curriculum development and policy-making, to ensure that the institution remains responsive to the needs and expectations of the communities it serves.

Social responsibility was recognized as an area where the faculty is making significant efforts to build partnerships with local communities and health organizations. These collaborations are designed to enhance community engagement and ensure that the medical curriculum addresses the health priorities of the population. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and supporting initiatives that tackle the social determinants of health, which are essential for creating sustainable community health improvements.

Lastly, in the area of **research and societal impact**, the faculty has shown a strong commitment to community-based research initiatives. These efforts are aligned with the institution's broader goals of social accountability, yet there is an opportunity to better integrate these research activities into the curriculum. By doing so, the faculty can ensure that academic research not only contributes to scholarly knowledge but also pursues socially accountable research that has a direct, positive impact on community health outcomes. Encouraging a culture of action research, where findings are translated into practical interventions, is seen as a critical next step for the institution.

Overall, the results of the ISAT self-assessment provided comprehensive insights into the current state of social accountability at Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine. The findings underscore significant progress, particularly in areas such as curriculum reform and faculty development, while also highlighting key challenges that need to be addressed.

Discussion

The ISAT self-assessment at Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine offers a comprehensive overview of the institution's efforts to align its medical education practices with the principles of social accountability. The assessment results reveal both commendable progress and areas requiring further attention, providing a balanced perspective on the current state of the faculty's social accountability initiatives.

Curriculum Content and Learning Methods emerged as a significant area of achievement. The faculty's integration of public health elements and community-based education into the curriculum is a positive step toward making medical education more relevant to societal needs (Frenk et al., 2010). This initiative reflects the institution's recognition of the importance of training healthcare professionals who are equipped with competent clinical skills and the capacity to address the social determinants of health, both sets of skills being essential for improving community health outcomes. However, as highlighted in the results, there is a need for these efforts to be more deeply embedded across all programs to ensure that social accountability becomes a foundational element of the curriculum. The faculty are actively working to enhance this integration by expanding faculty development in active learning methods and promoting interprofessional education, which is crucial for preparing students to work effectively in partner communities and healthcare settings (Rourke, 2018).

Faculty Development is another area in which the institution has made notable progress. The emphasis on improving teaching strategies through active learning and community-based education demonstrates a proactive approach to enhancing the quality of medical education. This focus is vital for developing a faculty that is not only skilled in clinical teaching but also capable of addressing the broader health needs of communities. The assessment indicates that while the faculty has made strides in this area, there remains a need to ensure that faculty capacity sustainably embeds responses to the needs of the communities they serve. This alignment is critical, as enhanced faculty capacity brings a range of perspectives that enrich the educational experience and better prepare students for the rapidly changing realities of healthcare practice.

Despite these strengths, the assessment also underscores several challenges that the faculty must address to further advance its social accountability goals. **Student Recruitment and Support** continue to be an area of concern, particularly in terms of attracting and supporting students from marginalized communities. The socio-economic barriers inherent in private medical education in Colombia present significant challenges, limiting the institution's ability to fully implement inclusive recruitment practices. This challenge is compounded by the financial pressures that students and private institutions face, which are profoundly influenced by unstable governmental policies supporting marginalized groups. The faculty must continue to explore and expand innovative strategies to overcome these barriers, potentially through partnerships with external organizations that can provide financial and logistical support to underrepresented students.

The involvement of community representatives in **Governance** was also identified as an area needing improvement. While there have been initial efforts to engage community stakeholders, these interactions remain informal and are not yet fully integrated into the faculty's governance structures (Woollard et al., 2023). Exploring means strengthening the

bonds between the health academic programs and community allies, which can provide a pathway for sustained alignment with the needs of partnering communities (Frenk et al., 2010). Enhancing community involvement in governance is essential for ensuring that institutional decisions are informed by the dynamic changing realities and priorities of the community, leading to more effective and impactful social accountability initiatives.

Finally, the assessment of **Research and Societal Impact** highlights the faculty's active engagement in community-based research as a strength. However, the results indicate a need for better integration of these research activities with the curriculum and broader institutional goals. By fostering a culture of action research, the faculty can ensure that its research not only contributes to academic knowledge but also has a tangible impact on community health outcomes (Puschel et al., 2020). This approach would enhance the relevance of socially accountable research activities and provide faculty and students with valuable opportunities to engage in research that is closely linked to their educational and professional development.

Conclusion

The ISAT self-assessment at Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine has provided a valuable and comprehensive evaluation of the institution's progress toward embedding social accountability into its medical education practices. The results demonstrate that significant steps have been made, particularly in areas such as curriculum content and faculty development, which are increasingly aligned with the needs of the communities the faculty serves. The integration of public health elements and community-based education into the curriculum underscores the faculty's commitment to producing healthcare professionals who are not only clinically proficient but also attuned to the social determinants of health that impact their patients.

However, the assessment has also brought to light several areas where further efforts are needed to realize the faculty's social accountability goals fully. One of the most pressing challenges remains the recruitment and support of students from marginalized communities. The socio-economic barriers that restrict access to medical education in Colombia, particularly within private institutions, require innovative and sustained strategies. The faculty's ability to attract a diverse student body that reflects the community's demographics is crucial for ensuring that the future healthcare workforce is equipped to meet the needs of all segments of society.

The governance of the faculty also requires attention, specifically in terms of formalizing the involvement of community representatives in decision-making processes. Strengthening the bonds between academic programs and community partners will not only enhance the relevance of the education provided but also ensure that the faculty's initiatives are grounded in the actual needs and priorities of the communities it aims to serve. This alignment is essential for creating a medical education environment that is responsive, adaptive, and effectively socially accountable.

In addition, the integration of research activities with the faculty's broader social accountability goals presents an opportunity for further development. By fostering a culture of action research that is directly linked to the curriculum and community needs, the faculty can ensure that its research efforts have a tangible and positive impact on community health outcomes. This approach will also provide students with valuable opportunities to engage in

research that is closely connected to their educational and professional development, reinforcing the institution's commitment to social accountability.

Looking ahead, the faculty's commitment to advancing social accountability will require ongoing effort, collaboration, and innovation. The challenges identified through the ISAT self-assessment must be addressed with a strategic approach that leverages the strengths of the institution while actively seeking out partnerships and resources to overcome barriers. By continuing to refine its strategies in student recruitment, governance, research integration, and interprofessional education, Universidad de La Sabana's Faculty of Medicine can ensure that it remains at the forefront of socially accountable medical education in Colombia and beyond. The faculty is well-positioned to lead the way in creating a healthcare workforce that is not only clinically competent but also deeply committed to serving the health needs of the communities it serves, and the learning process we have engaged in may help other faculties undertake the same process of moving toward greater social accountability.

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