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A Student-Led Effort to Reform the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society Selection Process

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To the editor: Membership in the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society (AOA) is a significant accomplishment. However, one recent study suggested that students from groups that are underrepresented in medicine are less likely to be selected for membership than their peers from non-underrepresented groups.\(^1\) In response to such concerns, the AOA national office called for medical schools to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within their local chapters.\(^2\)

At the University of Colorado School of Medicine, fourth-year medical student AOA members organized a reform committee to improve objectivity and reduce bias in their AOA selection process. We served as members of this committee. In addition to the fourth-year medical student committee members, we recruited additional stakeholders to participate in our reform work, including non-AOA first- through fourth-year students at our medical school, DEI experts, and faculty members.

Initial discussions were grounded in the AOA motto of “Be Worthy to Serve the Suffering.”\(^2\) A root cause analysis of our selection process was conducted to determine how to improve equity and decrease conscious and implicit bias. Student-led subcommittees identified strategies to objectively evaluate applicants in the areas that are essential for AOA membership: service, leadership, scholarship, and academic achievement. We have always had an essay question as part of the AOA application; however, we changed the topic of that essay question to further understand each applicant’s life experiences, as part of a holistic selection process. We believe our reformed selection process will allow us to select students who excel in academics as well as in service, leadership, and scholarship, areas that are essential to serve the suffering.
Our AOA reform effort demonstrates the ability of students to contribute to the improvement of their medical schools. We encourage students to identify areas in need of reform, especially in the context of improving DEI. We hope our reform process serves as an example of one way that students can take on leadership roles at their medical schools and work with faculty to ensure a more equitable future.

References
