

Psychosocial Impact of Dissection Room Experience on Undergraduate Students

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The expanded use of cadavers in undergraduate education as well as recent research has shed light on several issues concerned with the use of cadavers as educational tools. Two of the biggest issues are procurement of the cadavers and the attrition of students out of programs due to the use of the cadavers. The former became an issue at Missouri Southern in the fall semester of 2014 when the procurement of viable cadavers suddenly became an issue and almost caused the cadaver-based courses to proceed without cadavers. The issue was resolved, although with less than perfect specimens, and the courses proceeded. This incident eventually led to our research which expands on the findings of other studies aimed at isolating educational and demographic factors that may lead a student to become more comfortable with the cadavers as an educational tool as well as a gift donation of their body to education. We propose that a clinical-based approach to the undergraduates' exposure to cadavers as educational tools in the curriculum will ease the psychological and social stress of such courses.

Our research was conducted as a longitudinal study of the participants enrolled in cadaver-based anatomy courses at MSSU to gauge the impact of dissection room experience on the student. Basic demographic and academic data such as gender and major was asked of the respondents in the initial survey and paired with their follow-up surveys at the end of the semester. The initial and follow-up data was analyzed with SPS software using ANOVA, chi-square, and McNemar Test analytics.

Our data resulted in findings opposed to the current understanding of dissection room experience and its correlation with lower willingness to donate whole body and apprehension toward the donation process. The results of our study indicate that, with MSSU's approach to cadaver-based education, the students' psychological and academic attitudes toward cadavers and the donation process result with no net change longitudinally in willingness to donate whole body. A significant decrease in apprehension toward cadavers was seen while attitudes concerning the importance of whole body donation remain high.

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