



Conversations about Education, Research & Patient Care

*with Dean Mary Klotman*

## A Conversation with Dr. Linton Yee Associate Dean of Admissions

**Dean Klotman:** Good Morning, I'm Mary Klotman, Dean of the Duke University's School of Medicine. Welcome to my monthly podcast From one Duke to Another. In these podcasts I talk with members of Duke's faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends about some of the most interesting topics related to education, research, and patient care. This month I'm joined by Linton Yee, our associate dean for admissions for the School of Medicine. Dr. Yee oversees the medical student admissions process for the school and develops new initiatives to improve admissions strategies and processes. And I can tell you that's one of the areas that I get the most questions about. Dr Yee was named Associate Dean in May. He has served as vice chair and chair of the School of Medicine's admissions committee and has been the clinical course director for the Body Disease Class. He's also the Asian/Pacific American Student Association faculty advisor and leader of the Student Faculty Show Band, and I heard him play this year. Dr. Yee is Associate Professor in the department pediatrics in the division of emergency medicine. I can tell you as a new dean, having someone as experienced as Dr. Yee in admissions is a huge asset for me. So welcome Linton.

**Linton Yee:** Well thank you for having me on.

**DK:** This has been an exciting year for this school in many ways but in particular for admissions. We received over 8,000 applications. Now correct the the numbers if we're wrong, and 129 new students. Can you talk about that?

**LY:** That's correct. We were originally anticipating trying to get to the 115 to 120 mark this year, but a lot of people decided that this was the place they wanted to be for the next four years.

**DK:** So you try to predict the number of students that will accept you offer?

**LY:** Normally it ends up being a 2 to 1 ratio, in the past, but this year it kind of defied that, and I guess that's good for Duke because people really want to be here. And I think we have a lot to offer them in terms of, a number of things in terms of the curriculum, the lifestyle in Durham now. I mean a lot of these things for, instance like the lifestyle in Durham kind of hurt us in the past because Durham was not seen as a place to be. Now you go downtown to Durham and you can't find parking anymore.

**DK:** It's been transformed! I thinking people that have been here for a while would be absolutely shocked. As I was when I came back after many years away. Was there a particular part of our applicant pool or acceptance pool that you think we did better this year than other years?

**LY:** Right. So we did really well in our underrepresented minority pool and I think this year we had 36 underrepresented minority students which comprises 28 percent of the class which is higher than our usual average which is roughly around 24 percent. And I think we've made - we have a lot of people from California that we that we stole from like San Francisco and Stanford. We have a fairly significant Hispanic Latino representation this year. I think you know years ago, probably about four or five years ago, we only had three Latino students in the class. Now this year we have I think almost 12. So, we're making significant inroads in a number of different areas.

**DK:** So I think historically, one thing that we've really taken a lot of pride in is the diversity of our classes. Yesterday I had an amazing experience spending most of the day with an outside speaker, Scott Paige, who recently published a book called *The Diversity Bonus*, and we had all the leadership participate, and he really makes the compelling case for something that I think we've already learned, which is diversity is part of excellence, and they go hand in hand. And I think our school has really defined that very clearly.

**LY:** In order to improve patient care you need to make a connection with the people you're taking care of. And so if you're asking them to follow your path in terms of treatment, in theory you should walk the walk already. And so diversity is key to establishing these connections and relationships, because you have to find some sort of common ground with the person, that patient in front of you. The more things you've done, the more places you've been, the more things you've had the experience of that allows you to have more items in your treasure chests to kind of make a connection with that patient.

**DK:** So that's a great segue into a new course offering that we started last year, the Cultural Determinants of Health and Health Disparities. This course introduces students to concepts and research in cultural humility, health disparities, socio-cultural influences on health and wellness. Can you tell me where you fit that into the curriculum and what's the response?

**LY:** Actually this will be the second year of that course, it's spread over the entire first year and there's like roughly 12 sessions in which you're put into small groups with a faculty facilitator and I believe a student facilitator and you'll go and explore various parts of Durham. Kind of understand why the community contributes to the greater good of and well-being of the people you're taking care of. So they'll go downtown to Paris Street and look at the Black Wall Street area there. I don't know if this year they're going out to Bennet Place to where they had a civil war surrender.

**DK:** Very Interesting. So people ask me all the time, "What is the admissions process?" Now some of them ask me because they have personal interest in that. I always say first of all there is an arm's length between being dean of the School of Medicine and the admissions process, and I completely respect that. Can you talk a little bit, without giving too many secrets away, what the process is?

**LY:** So everybody has to complete an AMCAS application. The American Medical College Association, its application service. And after that AMCAS will have you fill out your academic background in terms of GPA and MCAT, courses taken. They also have to fill out your experiences and you also submit an essay. And after that, that person can designate each school that they want to put an application into. And so then we would get that, and so we would then send them a secondary application. And our secondary application consists of a number of different essays as well as some other additional information.

**DK:** I heard the most essays of any school, is that true?

**LY:** Right, That's correct. And each year we change the essays. I know some people complained, they try and pre-write it, but every year we changed the essays so it's you know . . .

**DK:** And obviously you don't do it to make students to put in a lot of time.

**LY:** Correct. Right. Because it ends up being we morph the questions to kind of fit what we had felt that we needed in the previous year. So for instance, the research question was added last year because you know a lot of the third year of committee curriculum people were asking "We need to have a little bit more definition as to what sort of research our students have been doing." And then even in exec committee we'd be looking at, well we didn't really know what their exact role was in terms of was it a hypothesis driven item or were they just cleaning or washing and not really participating in that thought process. So that's why we added a research question last year. But then that really wasn't getting at what we wanted last year. And then this year we changed it to more of a critical thinking and how that's going to apply to what you're going to be doing in the future. So I think it's a more advanced form of just asking what sort of research, now we're asking when you did research what sort of thought process did you use and how is that going to apply to what you are going to be doing in the future.

**DK:** So you actually use the answers, both to learn more about the student and to inform our processes. So I participated as an interviewer in the very unique interview process that I think some other schools, but certainly not the majority use, can you talk a little bit about that?

**LY:** So we've been using the multiple mini interview, probably from the time we were back in South, I'm guessing this might be the sixth seventh year that we've done this already. And part of the impetus for this was one, we change our curriculum to the team based learning format, from the original lecture - you talk and we zone out and don't pay attention kind of thing. So we were requiring them to be a little bit more active in their learning process so we needed to assess their ability to work with somebody else. Part of that in the MMI is we actually have a team station in which one person will give instructions to the other person. And the person in the other room will have to build or draw based on what that person - what sort of instruction that person gives them.

**DK:** And they're timed, so you have to think on your feet. The one thing that I was intrigued by is in the scenarios that you give to both the student you don't have a right or wrong answer.

**LY:** Correct. And we just want to see how they formulate the answer, can they present in an organized fashion. I mean it's more how you do it, not the end result.

**DK:** Our natural tendency is always to try to guess what the right answer is.

**LY:** Correct.

**DK:** I think it's a great process. I think one of the reasons students still come to Duke is because we have a unique third year offering which remains an open year to do scholarship. But I think that the definition of scholarship and what the students choose has changed significantly over the years. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**LY:** Right. So initially, some people would just do the research so now there's the advanced degrees as well, like you can get your MPH your MBA your JD.

**DK:** How many get another degree?

**LY:** That's probably - it varies by year but I would guess that probably a third to not quite half will get a different degree. But you know there's been a master's of divinity was a new one that we had a couple of people do a couple of years back which I thought was an interesting mix between the medical ethics concepts.

**DK:** And I understand a number of students will add then a second year's scholarship.

**LY:** Correct. Yeah. And so a lot of people will add another year to finish their current research project. And I guess that's where I get confused because I usually tell them "I thought you were supposed to graduate this year" and they go "I took another year" and sometimes people take three third years, but I think you can't do that anymore.

**DK:** But it think that's fair, it shows that we really are engaging in an area that they are interested in, and I think for many of them really that becomes part of their career, an interest that started in that third year.

**LY:** With the third year, if you think about it, their entire life has been dictated before them, like you know when they're undergrads, even when they're in high school they had to take certain classes and do certain things in order to get into their respective undergraduate institutions. And then when they're in undergrad, you have places like us telling them you need to take certain classes, and then even their first and second year, they still have to do what they are asked to do. But in the third year we asked them "well what do you want to do with everything that you've learned up to this point?" And so I mean when are you going to have that sort of opportunity to you know be creative, think in a new way, you take a path where no path has been before, and so that kind of creates and I think that's a key point to our curriculum, that we're creating students who are going to be leaders, who are going to be innovative, who are going to see things in a different manner. And if you look back, chance favors the prepared mind. I mean a lot of times there's going to be a chance opportunity and they're going to have the same thought process and be able to figure out "oh well, this happens because of this."

**DK:** Well for many students it is really the first time that they're kind of given a non-scheduled academic year. It's a little bit unnerving, but the work that comes out of it is really impressive. We still do, though, have your more traditional laboratory based investigation pathways and still offer the MSTP. Is that program thriving?

**LY:** Yes. Actually the number of applications for MSTP has gone up from the, I think mid-300s to over 500 now. And I think there are roughly a total of 88 MSTP students plus minus a couple who are on leave for various reasons. But they do fantastic things in terms of creating new devices . . .

**DK:** You know I'm finding that even within the laboratory based research scholarship that it's much more diverse. And so we have data scientists now that are getting their MD/PhD. We have scientists in the area of innovation. That is broader than more traditional lab-based research. So lots of exciting, I think, trends in both what the students want and what we're offering as a menu of things they can do. So the last thing I want to talk about is something that's been in the news lately which is that NYU announced free tuition for all their students. I think a lot of dean's kind of took a deep breath and said "Where is this going?"

**LY:** Yeah, we did too.

**DK:** What problem are we solving? I think there's been discussion about whether this might influence students' choices. I think the jury is still out. But we all recognize that there are students that cannot go to medical school unless we do provide financial support. Can you talk about what we offer our students?

**LY:** Right. So we've been fairly aggressive in offering support for our students. There are a number of routes for this. One we have the Rao scholarship which is a scholarship that covers everything.

**DK:** Which is wonderful.

**LY:** And then we have the Dudley scholarship which is from the same family but that just covers tuition. Then we have the dean's merit scholarships and then the dean's tuition scholarships and in addition to all these things we also have grants which are almost the equivalent of having a scholarship because you don't have to pay those back.

**DK:** Which are merit based and financial based.

**LY:** Right.

**DK:** And where do we stack up in terms of our student debt compared to other schools?

**LY:** I think we're probably, in all things considered, we're probably pretty good about minimizing the amount of debt.

**DK:** That's what I understand, particularly among private schools where the tuitions are quite bit higher. I think it's a topic that we will continue to discuss. Have you heard any feedback from students?

**LY:** It was definitely an eye opening statement from NYU. But again it depends on where people want to be. There is, I guess, good debt. If you want to be at a place where you're happy, you know you're getting the best education. I mean you can incur some level of debt rather than going to someplace that's going to cover everything but you're not going to be happy there.

**DK:** It's the total experience.

**LY:** Right. Exactly.

**DK:** And you know again there are some students where it is a make or break for their career so, happy that we can offer support to our students. It's always a priority in the long list of philanthropic opportunities. I'm not sure we're going to get to where NYU is, but I look forward to getting feedback as we discuss this in our community. I can say the quality of students is amazing, and I thank you and your team for putting the time and effort and passion into the admissions process.

**LY:** We appreciate your support. We couldn't do without you since it's a team effort on all levels.

**DK:** So when do we start again? I mean seems like it's constant.

**LY:** We've already started, I think, back in May. We opened our portal for the secondaries the second week of July and already we're probably going to break the 6,000 AMCAS mark later today. I think we probably have at least 2,500 secondaries completed already and we've already extended roughly about a third of our interview spots already before we even start interviewing which is next week.

**DK:** So the electronic submission is good and bad. It's easy to push the button.

**LY:** Exactly.

**DK:** But as I said we are so fortunate to get the students that we get here. I think a lot of it is the detailed process that you and your team go through every year, so thank you.

**LY:** Oh, you're welcome.

From One Duke to Another hosted by Dean Mary Klotman, is a production of the Duke University School of Medicine. Tune in each month to hear discussions about important and timely topics related to medical education, science and discovery and patient care. For more information please visit [medschool.duke.edu](https://medschool.duke.edu)