

## VIEWPOINTS

### The Importance of Administrators in Higher Education Continuing to Teach

Joseph L. Fink III, BSPHarm, JD

College of Pharmacy, University of Kentucky

After deciding I was burned out on dealing with administrative matters and concluding a 16-year stint in university administration 6 months ago, going through the transition back to a full-time faculty position has given me ample opportunity to reflect on the advantages I am enjoying because I continued to teach during that 16-year adventure. Doing so has proven to pay great dividends.

While in pharmacy school I was constantly exposed to administrators who continued to teach. At the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, Dr. Linwood F. Tice was not only the Dean, but also a classroom instructor in a course entitled, *Pharmacy and Chemistry of Medicinals*. Consequently, I saw from my earliest exposure to academe a model for this behavior in the professoriate. When I later returned to join the faculty at my alma mater, that practice was still in place; Dr. Daniel A. Hussar had assumed the deanship and continued his outstanding teaching.

When after 8 years in academe I joined the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy as an Assistant Dean, Dean Joseph V. Swintosky, impressed on me the importance of all Associate and Assistant Deans plus the Division Directors (in the days before departmentalization) being actively engaged in teaching—a view that I shared and that has been reinforced over time.

Beginning in 1988 I held a series of administrative positions outside the College of Pharmacy, with some assignments being simultaneous, even on occasion 3 at one time: Acting Director of Admissions; Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Special Assistant to the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies; Assistant Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies; Director of the University's high technology business incubator; Acting Director of the James W. Martin School of Public Policy and Administration; Special Assistant to the President for Academic Affairs; Assistant Director of the University of Kentucky Research Foundation; Associate Vice President for Research; Vice President for Corporate Relations and Economic Outreach; Executive Director of the

University Research Park; Vice President for Research and Economic Development; Acting Director of the Appalachian Center. I include this list to illustrate the variety of administrative assignments that can come the way of a pharmacy professor. Through it all I continued to teach – 3 credits in 2 courses during the fall semester and the equivalent lecture load of 3 credits in 2 other courses in the spring.

One conclusion I reached during that period was that, unfortunately, too many administrators are out of touch with what goes on at the interface between instructor and student, the essence of higher education, truly our *raison d'être*. At one point I was seated in a room full of University administrators discussing an issue with major implications for the teaching faculty of the institution when the realization struck me that I was the only one present who had regular contact with students in the classroom. Their lack of appreciation for the subtle changes that had taken place in the students since they had last taught, and the resultant impact on the classroom, became woefully apparent.<sup>1,2</sup>

Teaching, research, and service—that mantra concerning our roles in higher education—is nearly always presented in that priority. We in the academy continually tout teaching as the primary part of our mission. Teaching is the one activity that has traditionally differentiated colleges and universities from research institutes and other organizations with service missions.

Based on personal experience, a brief list of the advantages accrued from continuing to teach would include:

- Gives greatly enhanced credibility with faculty across campus;
- Creates a degree of independence when one is forced to take unpopular positions on tough issues, especially when reinforced by tenure;
- Facilitates return to the faculty when that decision is made;
- Keeps one connected or rooted with the discipline or specialty;
- Staying connected makes one a more interesting person and communicates academic priorities;
- Encourages one to keep current on the literature in the specialty;

**Corresponding Author:** Joseph L. Fink III, BSPHarm, JD.

Address: University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy. Tel: 859-257-2300 ext. 241. Fax: 859/323-1023. E-mail: jfink@uky.edu

- Forces one to return to the pharmacy building periodically, providing an opportunity to meet new faculty;
- Contributes an important perspective that is sometimes absent when important institutional projects or priorities are being considered;
- Provides credibility with off-campus constituents of the university; and
- Gives more timely feedback on the effectiveness of one's efforts than an administrative initiative that may not show results, good or bad, for quite some time.

I found continuation in the classroom to be particularly valuable while working on commercialization and economic development initiatives. This classroom connection gave me credibility with the faculty that I had not "sold out" on issues important to academic freedom and integrity. It also reassured the faculty that someone who shared their values was leading University activities in the field and was aware of the potential pitfalls and threats to academic values inherent in such initiatives.

Is balancing a tight schedule of meetings on administrative topics with an inflexible class schedule sometimes a challenge? Most certainly. But the trade off is

that for 2-3 hours per week you are not confronted with the endless array of problems that can bubble up through the system. And my experience was that "Sorry, I have class" was universally honored when a scheduling conflict materialized.

Finally, for the administrator who continues to teach, students help keep things in proper perspective. Just when you have resolved a major challenge or experienced a breakthrough in a long-pursued administrative initiative and you are feeling smug in your accomplishment, student evaluations arrive, humbling you, bringing you quickly back to reality and reaffirming that all the things we do in higher education are aimed, directly or indirectly, at enhancing the education of the students and creating in them the ability to do and think things they did not do and think before joining us.

## REFERENCES

1. Romanelli F, Ryan M. A survey and review of attitudes and beliefs of generation X pharmacy students. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2003;67:Article 12.
2. Ryan M, Romanelli F, Smith K, Johnson MMS. Identifying and teaching generation X pharmacy students. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2003;67:Article 42.