

VIEWPOINTS

Finding Time for Faculty Development

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Faculty members are responsible for demonstrating excellence in the tripartite mission of teaching, scholarship, and service, yet few faculty members have formal training in these areas.¹⁻⁵ Faculty development programs can help close this educational gap by promoting desirable teaching, leadership, and scholarly behaviors, but they are often plagued by low attendance and participation by faculty members.^{1,6} This may be attributable largely to the limited “free time” available for professional development, a reason commonly cited by faculty members at academic health centers or health-related universities.⁷

Many colleges and schools of pharmacy have explored ways of increasing attendance and participation in faculty development by using online or on-demand programs such as Education Scholar (Western University of Health Sciences, Pomona, CA, and American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, Alexandria, VA), Media-site Education Grand Rounds (Sonic Foundry, Inc, Madison, WI) presentations, and Webinars.⁸ The popularity of social networking sites also presents a new, innovative opportunity for “virtual” faculty development. The impact of using online book clubs to increase participation in faculty development is largely undocumented in the literature.

The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Women Faculty Special Interest Group (SIG) has begun offering an online book club focused on academic and leadership skills to engage its members in faculty development. Since spring 2009, the SIG Networking Committee has sponsored a series of 4 online book discussions using a social networking site (www.ning.com). Book titles relevant to faculty members were selected to promote self-development in the areas of teaching, communication, and leadership, while stimulating opportunities for networking among members. While reading and

reflecting on new knowledge are important first steps in professional development, active learning and peer collaboration were structured in this forum to improve learning and accountability.

Assessment of the outreach achieved by the book club series was evaluated informally. Reading and discussing professional literature about academic and leadership skills appeared to be an attractive self-development and networking opportunity for SIG members, with over 100 members registering on the book club Website. The level of interest in this innovative form of faculty development was evident and promising, so it was surprising to see an inverse relationship between member interest and level of participation in the online book club discussion.

The conundrum and concern is that while SIG members want the book club to continue, and they remain interested in participating in future book club offerings, few have taken the opportunity to actively engage in the book club discussions. Data from an informal survey of SIG members suggest 2 main reasons for the low level of participation in the online book club. First, members indicated that they did not know how to register for or access the online book club to participate. This feedback suggests that the level of e-mail communication about registering and accessing the book club was insufficient and requires modification. Second, members reported lack of time to read books. The SIG appreciated such time constraints after the first year of the book club, and limited the 2010 selections to “quick read” books with a length of approximately 100 pages. Despite this change, few faculty members acquired the books and even fewer commented on the postings. Various attempts to increase discussion, via e-mail reminders and the development of a reader’s guide, also had little impact on participation.

The Women Faculty SIG online book club will continue to offer an intentional way of growing academic and leadership skills while inviting a virtual dialogue among faculty members with varying experience and expertise. The challenge faced by any group using this

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format is to optimally stimulate and continually engage participation, thereby fostering a more meaningful form of professional development. We continue to review and test methods for improving member engagement in meaningful use of the professional development and networking opportunities offered in a virtual book club environment.

Individual faculty development takes time and deliberate attention. Time always will be a limited commodity, so the question becomes what form of professional development faculty members prefer. Furthermore, this begs the question in the academy why we struggle to make time for faculty development and networking opportunities. Many educators and clinicians are challenged to find time in our busy schedules to read, reflect, discuss, and network, yet we encourage and expect students, residents, and fellows to engage in these very activities. Should we not step back and secure “protected time” to advance our personal and professional development to complement that being developed in those we teach and mentor? Have we become too busy for our own good?

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