

## LETTERS

### Student Perspectives on Student Leadership Development Programs

*To the Editor.* Because leadership development is a crucial aspect of pharmacy training, colleges and schools and of pharmacy should implement leadership training programs that incorporate all aspects of student experiences, including curricular and cocurricular learning. Many institutions have numerous student organizations and groups for students to be actively engaged as leaders in their schools and communities. For many postgraduate opportunities, student cocurricular activity is an important aspect of a candidate's application. With any program for leadership development, a school should consider how they might impact both those most interested in such a program and their student body at large. In all activities, thought should be given to how to engage all students, as change will only happen if every pharmacist is engaged in learning to become an effective leader.

The importance of providing leadership development opportunities to students was summarized well by Janke and colleagues who identified that student pharmacists receive excellent patient care and practice management skills within their curricula but often lack the ability to influence the change needed to fully use these skills in practice after graduation.<sup>1</sup> Because leadership development is a crucial aspect of pharmacy training, schools should implement leadership training programs that incorporate all aspects of student experiences, including curricular and co-curricular learning.

The article by Chestnut and Tran-Johnson presents a unique program that incorporates both curricular and cocurricular approaches in the leadership training of student pharmacists.<sup>2</sup> They provide the methodology in planning their year-long program and the evaluations and outcomes they are collected over 6 years. The design and considerations of their program have several key strengths worth noting including the promotion of cocurricular activities and the challenge of making lessons in leadership practical for students.

Cocurricular activity is an important aspect of pharmacy education. Many schools have numerous student organizations and groups for students to be actively engaged as leaders in their schools and communities. For many postgraduate opportunities, student cocurricular activity is an important aspect of a candidate's application.<sup>3</sup> Cocurricular activity has even been evaluated in recent reports seeking factors within prepharmacy admissions

criteria that might be predictive of organizational involvement, highlighting the significance of this aspect of pharmacy school felt by many.<sup>4,5</sup> The report by Chesnut and colleagues is intriguing because of the synergy with cocurricular activity in the program. In the first few years of the course, students in organizational elected positions were specifically invited to participate. Understanding the limitations in that design they adjusted criteria to include an application process to relate what students hope to learn in the course. Interestingly, still understanding the importance of organizational activity, the course coordinators offered financial support towards participation in national meetings to those students who showed the highest level of engagement and participation in the program. Developing a program that can work synergistically with experiences through organizational activities in student leadership development is crucial for all pharmacy schools.

Relating to the importance of including organizational activity within a leadership development program, Chesnut and Tran-Johnson describe a specific aspect of their course that makes the lessons learned practical to students. Often leadership courses offered at colleges and schools of pharmacy provide discussions and information that does not seem immediately applicable to students. While students are being trained to be agents of change upon graduation, being able to apply lessons and skills immediately is important for understanding and long-term success. By understanding their ability to implement change now, students are better empowered to make changes as pharmacists. The program here challenges students to understand themselves and the long-term application of lessons and skills learned, but also assign short-term goals where students must relate how they applied previous lessons on a monthly basis. By challenging them in this way, students are immediately faced with the strengths and weaknesses of their leadership style, and then forced to learn what is most effective for them.

Chesnut and Tran-Johnson highlight several excellent considerations for schools to consider in creating and evaluating leadership development programs. The program described offers a great example of how schools should incorporate co-curricular involvement into a leadership program design. By including cocurricular involvement in the design of a program, faculty members better engage students, making time more valuable, and they have the ability to make the lessons in their program more applicable on an immediate basis.

With any program for leadership development, a college or school should consider how it might impact both those most interested in such a program and their student

body at large. Opening up speaker events was an excellent example of this consideration. Other ideas might include challenging the students involved in such a program to coordinate a leadership workshop for their peers or creating excellence awards for outstanding leadership regardless of participation in the program. In all activities, thought should be given to how to engage all students, as change will only happen if every pharmacist is engaged.

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