Enhancing Pharmacy Student Leadership

John P. Juergens
Marvin C. Wilson

ABSTRACT. Leadership is one of the hallmarks of the pharmacy profession. Developing effective leadership skills in students of pharmacy is necessary to allow the profession to continue to move forward. The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy instituted a program to enhance the leadership skills of the elected student body and class officers, and the officers of the student chapters of the national professional pharmacy organizations. The program consists of regular meetings with student officers to discuss the elements of good leadership, breakout exercises, and discussions of problems and issues encountered by leaders with student input on potential strategies for resolution of those issues. The program also includes a peer evaluation of each organization president at the midpoint of their tenure with constructive feedback provided on their performance. The leadership program has been effective in enhancing the quality of the performance of elected student leaders and in attracting more qualified candidates. Since instituting the program there has been less variability in the student leader performance from year to year. doi:10.1300/J060v14n02_05 *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2007 by The Haworth Press. All rights reserved.]*

KEY WORDS. Leadership, pharmacy, students, professionalism

John P. Juergens, R.Ph., Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Pharmacy Administration and Coordinator for Student Professional Development and Marvin C. Wilson, Ph.D., is Professor of Pharmacology and Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs at The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy, 201 Faser Hall, University, MS 38677-1848.

Address correspondence to: Dr. Juergens at the above address (E-mail: phjuerg@ olemiss.edu).

INTRODUCTION

In the White Paper on Pharmacy Student Professionalism produced by the Task Force on Professionalism in 1999, leadership was listed as one of the ten traits displayed by a member of any profession.[1] The importance of leadership to the pharmacy profession was expressed very succinctly by W.T. Hill in his Harvey A.K. Whitney address in 1989: "What we as pharmacists believe our profession to be determines what it is."[2]

The profession of pharmacy has taken enormous strides in its evolution over the last twenty years, expanding its domain and area of influence such that graduating pharmacy students have a vast range of professional career options from which to choose. However, those options would not be available had it not been for the visionary leaders who not only blazed the trails into those new professional lands, but also demonstrated the value of having pharmacists involved in these nontraditional roles and enhancing the outcomes of health care service.

It can be discussed endlessly whether leaders are born or their leadership traits are learned. But according to Dr. Warren Bennis of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business, there is no doubt leaders are made, not born.

> "The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born–that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born."[3]

Regardless of whether it is by nature or nurture, or more likely a combination of both, there is an intuitive sense that the effectiveness of leadership skills can be enhanced and refined continuously over time and through experience. This notion has been embedded for many years in the accreditation guidelines published by the Accreditation Council on Pharmaceutical Education, and the call for colleges and schools to develop student leadership and professionalism is reinforced in the revised standards to take effect in July, 2007.[4, 5]

In 2004 the Committee on Student Professionalism, which was composed of representatives from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy and the American Pharmacists Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy, published the Pharmacy Professionalism Toolkit as a resource for students and faculty to promote and assess professional-

ism in schools of pharmacy.[6] In that document the Committee asserts that:

- "Student leadership deepens each student's commitment to the values of the profession and may help to encourage other students to participate in a professional association."
- "Strengthening the leadership ability of students enhances their professionalism and offers potential for future leadership within the profession and the community."

It is clear from these statements that leadership development within schools of pharmacy is an important concept, but it is a process that must be pursued actively in a structured manner in order to achieve effective leadership skills in students.

One of the challenging aspects of student governance is the considerable variability that can occur from year-to-year in the quality of the leadership demonstrated by some elected individuals. The result can be a constant ebb and flow of coordination and productivity within and among the student organizations, as well as fragmented communications among the classes, with the faculty, and the administration. In an effort to enhance the overall quality and continuity of the student leadership, The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy instituted in 2002 a formal Leadership Program for the elected officers of the student body, class presidents, and the presidents of the student chapters of the national pharmacy professional organizations and professional fraternities represented at the School. This paper describes the process of developing that program, its refinement, and observations on its effectiveness.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Student governance at The University of Mississippi School of Pharmacy is a multi-tiered structure, which consists of student body officers, class officers, and professional organization and fraternity officers. The student body officers include president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer positions, all of whom are second professional year students. Because of the split-campus nature of the School, there is an additional vice president for external campuses, who is a third professional year student. This position is designed specifically to help facilitate communication, governance, and continuity across the two campuses.

The School of Pharmacy has both 0-6 and 2-4 curriculum options, resulting in six student classes. Each of the six classes elects a president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer. In addition, the School hosts three professional fraternities and five student chapters of national pharmacy organizations, each of which has its own unique officer structure. The student body officers, the class presidents, and the presidents of each of the professional fraternities and organizations make up the Student Executive Council, which is chaired by the student body president. The Student Executive Council meets monthly to discuss a wide range of issues and serves as the primary communication conduit and coordinating body for all student activities across both campuses, as well as for communications with the School administration and the Student Faculty Relations Committee. The Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs and the Coordinator for Student Professional Development also attend the Student Executive Council meetings as observers and to provide guidance and input as needed.

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The initial leadership program developed for the fall of 2002 consisted of a series of five workshops conducted over the course of the academic year for first and second professional year student body officers, and class and organization presidents on the main campus. The theme of the workshop is based on concepts presented in, *Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change*, a report published by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in 2000.[7] The workshop is designed to be interactive in nature with small group breakout sessions and larger group discussions augmented by faculty and peer facilitation, readings, and outside guest speakers when appropriate.

The topics addressed in the workshop are intended to focus on the day-to-day management of the duties and responsibilities that come with each office or leadership position (Figure 1). In addition, the workshop sessions are designed to be progressive in nature in that each session builds on the discussions of previous workshops and student experiences in their respective leadership roles between workshops. While many of the individuals who are elected to student offices have had substantial prior leadership experiences in high school or other institutions, it is recognized that not all individuals come to those positions with the same skill sets, experience, and vision. For this reason, the first session starts with a group discussion of the fundamental char-

FIGURE 1. Sample Topics Addressed at Student Leadership Workshop Sessions

The Pharmacy Student Leadership Workshop is an effort to enhance the leadership ski lls of the elected leaders of the various student organizations within the School of Pharmacy. The workshop is designed to be interactive in nature with small group breakout sessions and larger group discussions augmented by faculty and peer facilitation, readings, and possibly outside guest speakers.

The following is a general list of topics to be addressed in the workshop meetings. It is expected that other topics and issues will emerge from the discussions.

I.   What is leadership and why is it important in the school of pharmacy? What is the difference between being an elected officer and being a leader?

II.   Is there a difference between having a personal agenda and having "vision?"

III.   You've won the election, now what? What are the expectations and responsibilities of student leaders?

IV.   What are the individual qualities of effective leaders and how do they interact with the purpose and function the group being lead?

V.   What are the obstacles and opportunities of student leadership?

VI.   Motivating and engaging your peers.

VII.   What should be the role and relationship of the faculty advisor to the group and it leaders?

VIII.   What are some ways student leaders can build bridges between disparate groups within the school and the greater University community?

IX.   How can leaders maintain their individual beliefs while representing the beliefs of their organization?

X.   How to avoid burnout: Delegating: What, when, to whom, and monitoring.

XI.   What do you do when those you lead fail to follow through with their responsibilities?

XII.   Dealing with guest speakers: What is the protocol? Social graces.

acteristics of effective leaders, the responsibilities and expectations of student officers, the identification of the kinds of challenges they are likely to encounter during their terms of office, and strategies for dealing with those challenges. Figure 2 presents examples developed by students of the types of duties and attitudes they believe are expected of them. As mentioned, when possible, informal peer mentoring is encouraged throughout the course of the program to draw upon the experiences of prior student leaders who have previously held officer positions in student organizations to assist current leaders and organization officers

FIGURE 2. Examples of Student Leader Characteristics, Duties, and Responsibilities

Be familiar with the members of the organization	Foster change.
Be familiar with the responsibilities of the office.	Provide answers.
Be respectful; be able to be looked up to.	Represent the group as a whole.
Keep everyone involved.	No job beneath you.
Be willing to give the time commitment.	Illustrate what is best for the majority.
Set goals for the organization.	Help the class/organization run smoothly.
Be familiar with the organization's traditions.	Make things better for those who follow.
Delegate tasks.	Demonstrate organization.
Increase level of expectations.	Be on time, reliable, accessible.
Problem solving.	Be open to compromise and change for the benefit of the group.
Listening/communicating.	Held to higher standards.
Liaison.	Don't alienate the minority group.

in how they approach their responsibilities. In addition, each newly elected student officer meets with their outgoing counterpart to discuss the details of the duties and responsibilities of the office, the status of the organization and its membership, and any pending issues that need to be addressed in the coming year. Because of the existence of the 0-6 curriculum option, many of the student body officers and higher class and organizational officers served as class officers in their earlier freshman and sophomore academic years. This extended service across multiple years assists in providing continuity and mentoring among student officers.

At subsequent workshops, current student leaders are asked to discuss their ongoing experiences, the problems and issues they have encountered, and how they managed those challenges. In an effort to sustain the momentum gained from the workshops, each student officer maintains a notebook that contains a summary list of issues and challenges they faced, how they addressed them, and the outcomes, as well as recommendations on how to avoid or address recurring problematic issues proactively. These notebooks are left for the student officers who come after them. In addition, to enhance continuity each current student leader is strongly encouraged to identify and to cultivate potential candidates to succeed them in their respective offices.

PEER ASSESSMENT

A vital component of the Leadership Program is peer assessment. After one full semester in office all student body officers, class, and organization presidents are evaluated by their constituent peers for performance and leadership effectiveness. For example, student body officers are evaluated by all students, class officers are evaluated only by members of their respective classes, and organization presidents are evaluated by members of their organizations. The timing of the peer evaluation of leaders is designed to provide constructive feedback to each officer to validate areas of strength and to allow them time to improve any perceived areas of weakness for the remainder of their tenure. This feedback also is used to prepare them for any future offices they might seek.

The performance evaluations are conducted using an assessment tool developed by students in the course of a previous leadership workshop. Through an iterative process student leaders in the original Leadership Program group developed a set of leadership characteristics they believed were most important. A seven-point Likert scale is used to assess agreement or disagreement with how well statements regarding those leadership characteristics apply to each officer. In addition, there is a global measure of overall performance anchored with "Poor" and "Exceptional" ratings (Appendix A).

The assessment scores for each student officer are tabulated by staff in the office of the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs. Table 1 presents the kinds of data generated from the peer assessment process. Each student officer then meets individually with the Associate Dean and the Coordinator for Student Professional Development to discuss their performance evaluations to highlight their strengths, and to

TABLE 1. Sample Peer Assessment Data. Percentage of Students Agreement with Leadership Statements; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree, 8 = No Opinion

Student Body Officer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Commitment		4.8		6.3	22.2	34.4	34.9	
Attitude	1.6			6.3	8.1	27.4	54.7	
Problem Solving	1.6	3.1	1.6	17.2	20.2	26.6	20.3	9.4
Vision		4.8	4.8	11.1	19.0	36.5	17.5	6.3
Reliability	4.8	4.8	4.8	19.0	14.3	23.8	25.4	3.2
Group Collaboration		4.8	6.3	11.1	11.1	31.7	25.4	9.5
Organization	3.2	7.9	4.8	9.5	20.6	23.8	25.4	4.8
Overall Performance*		4.8	1.6	14.3	17.5	38.1	23.8	

* (1 = Poor; 7 = Exceptional)

discuss areas in which they could use some improvement. Officers who demonstrated effective leadership as indicated by their peer evaluations are eligible for scholarship funds through the Associate Dean's office.

OBSERVATIONS

After conducting the Leadership Program for several years, a number of observations can be made regarding its value in improving the effectiveness of student leaders and mediating the variations in the quality of their performance.

- In the course of discussing student leaders' peer evaluations, students have expressed good feedback on the value of both the workshop and leadership evaluation programs. They appreciated the availability of assistance and a forum in which to discuss problematic issues with their peer leaders. Furthermore, more senior leaders enjoy the opportunity to mentor their more junior leaders in the program.
- The split campus presents several unique challenges for leadership development and effectiveness. For example, the presidents of most of the organizations are on the Oxford campus while members are spread across two campuses located approximately 170 miles apart, which makes it difficult to maintain continuity and coordination within organizations. In addition, the organizational presidents generally are second professional year students and may lack the institutional awareness and maturity of the more senior members of the student body. This also inhibits opportunities for mentoring from prior student officers. Therefore, a major emphasis of the workshop is the need to be attentive to routine communication and coordination of organizational activities, and in some cases identifying specific individuals who are responsible for ensuring the connectivity within the organization across campuses.
- The peer assessments for overall effectiveness for each student officer generally mirror the subjective impressions of the Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs and the Coordinator for Student Professional Development based on observations of the student officers and interactions with them during the semester. However, the assessments provided by professional fraternity members could be suspect in that members might feel they have a duty to give their presidents highly positive ratings out of a sense of loyalty. While there is no definitive evidence to support this concern, a comparison of the evaluations between professional fraternity and other organization presidents show a skewed pattern with fraternity presidents receiving higher performance scores. The fraternity presidents need to impress upon their constituent members the importance of honest and unbiased feedback in their leadership development. This is an issue for discussion in future workshop sessions.
- Currently, in addition to the student body officers, only class and organizational presidents are invited to the workshops. It would be logical to include vice-presidents to encourage them to seek future

presidential opportunities and to better prepare them for future presidential roles should they seek one of those offices. This would be consistent with the notion of encouraging current officers to identify and cultivate candidates to replace them in following years.

It should be noted that because this program is designed to assess and enhance individual student leadership quality, it would be very difficult to perform a formal assessment of the program itself. That is, there is no baseline data with which to compare the impact of the program from year to year, or to assess the improvement of an individual student officer over the course of one academic year. The peer assessment process is used as a means of providing some measure of student effectiveness and evidence upon which to based suggestions for improvement and reward. It might be possible to get a sense of the effectiveness of the program itself by doing a follow-up evaluation at the end of the academic year. But controlling for a wide range of potentially confounding variables makes this a highly impractical activity, which most likely would not produce enough useful information for the amount of effort required to do a valid program assessment. Still, it would be useful to explore other methods for assessing the effectiveness of the program and its elements.

CONCLUSIONS

In her term of office as President of the American Academy of Colleges of Pharmacy, Dr. Barbara Wells embraced leadership as one of the major themes of her presidency. In her presidential address at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of College of Pharmacy in July, 2003, she stated:

> "All of us have a responsibility to develop leadership abilities in ourselves, in our colleagues, and in our students. In the final analysis, our true measure as leaders will be not the number of people who follow us, but the number of people we serve."[8]

From these comments it is apparent that Dr. Wells firmly believes leadership is the strongest thread that runs through the fabric of the profession, and which holds the profession together and allows it to move forward in both good and challenging times.

Based on observations and feedback from students, the Student Leadership Program developed at The University of Mississippi appears to have had some impact on enhancing the quality of the performance of elected student leaders and, in attracting more qualified candidates. As mentioned previously, there may be alternative explanations for these observations. However, since instituting the program there has been less variability in the student leader performance from year to year. Consequently, there has been an improvement in the continuity of student governance and a better integration of the activities and cooperation among student professional fraternities and organizations throughout the School. In addition, there have been far fewer instances where student officers have failed to meet deadlines for planned activities, and most organizations seem to be more diligent in making their activity plans for the year early in the fall semester rather then procrastinating until deadlines loomed, as frequently occurred in previous years. In other words, most student leaders have been proactive in initiating and performing their duties and responsibilities, and far less prodding has been required on the part of the school administration.

Some of these observations might be related to current student officers actively recruiting their replacements, as they repeatedly are encouraged to do in the workshop seminars and throughout the academic year. Another contributing factor could be related to the maturity and strength of the personalities of the student body presidents in the past several years, who have been aggressive in monitoring the activities of all of the other student officers, and making certain they are attending to their duties and responsibilities in a timely manner. Again, without a formal pre- and post- evaluation mechanism to assess the program directly, it is not possible to say conclusively that the Program was responsible for all of the perceived improvements in student leadership. However, the observations and perceptions over several years strongly suggests the Student Leadership Program played some role in producing improvements in student governance.

REFERENCES

1. Task Force on Professionalism, White paper on pharmacy student professionalism. *J Am Pharm Assoc.* 2000:40:96-102.

2. Hill WT, Taking charge of the profession. *Am J Health-Syst Pharm.* 1989; 46:1557-1561.

3. Bennis, WG, *On becoming a leader.* Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.; 1989.

4. Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for the Professional Program in Pharmacy Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, Chicago, Il;1997. Standard No. 20, Guideline 20.1.

5. Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for the Professional Program in Pharmacy Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education, Chicago, IL. 2006; Standard No. 1, Guideline 1.4; Standard No. 22, Guideline 22.1; Standard 23; Standard 26, Guideline 26.1.

6. Pharmacy Professionalism Toolkit for Students and Faculty. Committee on Student Professionalism. Version 1.0, American Pharmacists Association, Washington, DC. 2004.

7. *Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging Higher Education in Social Change.* Astin AW, Astin HS eds. Kellogg Foundation, January, 2000.

8. Wells BG. Why Leadership? It's All About Patients. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2003; 67(4):article 104.

APPENDIX A. Student Leadership Evaluation Form

Peer evaluation and constructive feedback of your student leaders on their performance is an important concept in the health professions and addresses a core element of professional responsibility. Please provide your opinion of the performance of your student officers on the following characteristics. If you have had no basis for evaluating a leader on a particular characteristic, please select N/A, for not applicable.

	Strongly Disagree					**Strongly Agree**		
Commitment, focus The individual has a strong sense of dedication to the organization or office and to his or her vision and devotes sufficient time and energy on all aspects of that position.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
Communication skills, listening skills, interpersonal relationships The individual has the necessary social and communication skills to clearly relate his or her vision for the office or organization, and the ability to motivate others to work productively for a common set of goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
Positive attitude, enthusiastic The individual approaches the duties and challenges of the office in a proactive manner and with a sense of enthusiasm to achieve the stated goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A
Problem solving abilities The individual is a resourceful person who applies critical thinking skills to identify and evaluate problem situations, and develops rational and effective strategies for solving those problems and resolving issues.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A

**Vision, initiative, creativity,
fostering meaningful change**   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   N/A
The individual has a clear sense
of the mission and goals of the
position or organization he or she
leads, is a self-starter in moving
toward those goals, and uses a
sense of creativity in developing
tactics to make meaningful
changes.

**Reliability, dependability,
responsibility, follow-through,
timeliness**   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   N/A
The individual can be depended
on to initiate and to follow
through to completion activities
associated with his or her office
in a timely manner, whether
directly responsible for those
activities or indirectly through
delegation and coordination.

**Promotes group collaboration,
delegates well, ability to
compromise, consensus builder**   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   N/A
The individual has the skills to
motivate individuals to work
together as a productive group,
delegates tasks effectively,
facilitates group efforts, and has
the ability to resolve differences
of opinion and conflicting points
of view among members of the
organization.

Organization   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   N/A
The individual has good
organization and time
management skills, and a
working style that enhances the
function of his or her position or
organization, and that facilitates
the productivity of others.

	Poor				**Exceptional**			
Overall Performance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N/A