

# The challenge of starting a new chapter

By Derek Stranton

Picture this: After years of toiling as an undergraduate you finally get a letter informing you of your acceptance to the inaugural class of “ABC Pharmacy School.” After researching and applying, usually the last thought to come to mind is student organizations on campus. Upon arriving at ABC Pharmacy School, you find out that your school will be starting a brand new APhA–ASP chapter. So you sign up expecting many different wonderful events and activities. Instead, you find out that there are no plans, no activities, and no by-laws for your chapter. This is when an inaugural class discovers the challenges of starting a chapter.

This is the situation my colleagues and I found ourselves in when we became the first class at the South University School of Pharmacy in 2003. In the beginning, our chapter did not have members, events, or money. These are extreme hardships to overcome. However, with hard work, we think we can do just that.

It is amazing how far we have come since the founding of the chapter in November 2003. Our first challenge was to recruit an enthusiastic advisor to help guide the chapter. We were lucky to find two professors, Jeffery and Emily Evans, a husband and wife team, to serve as advisors. We then held chapter elections and

adopted by-laws to ensure a proper start. After doing this, everything else should have just fallen into place, right?

An active chapter requires a sufficient number of active members, and to attract members, a chapter must be able to offer a variety of events that appeal to members. Also, funding is necessary to sponsor events, and raising funds requires members to contribute dues and personal time toward fundraising events.

Out of a student body of 68, only 23 opted for chapter membership. For some schools, 23 members would represent just the chapter leadership! On the positive side, this is 33% of our student body, and we are blessed with a strong core of students who are dedicated to increasing membership as new classes matriculate.

Since our chapter is new, funding is a primary issue. After their election, it became apparent to the members of the executive committee that the first committee they should form should be a fundraising committee. The fundraising committee quickly came up with fantastic ideas, such as “Teacher’s Pie in the Face” contests, which allowed the chapter to raise funds without additional investment.

Once a chapter has members and money, it is time to begin participating in APhA–ASP-sanctioned events such as *Operation Diabetes*, *Operation Immunization*, and the *Heartburn Awareness Challenge*. For the different patient care projects to work, it is important to develop a chaired committee for each event. It is also important to appoint a strong, organized leader who will be well received by the chapter members.

The last year has been a learning experience for me, the executive committee, the advisors, and the entire chapter. Because we are a new chapter at a new school, we could not ask how things had been done in the past. We sometimes got the feeling that the blind were leading the blind. Obviously, this became frustrating at times. To prevent that, the executive committee members are now going to have leadership retreat workshops with the advisors and committee chairs to plan out the goals of the chapter. At APhA2004 in Seattle, we were able to network and meet with representatives from other chapter. This helped us form ideas, make them our own, and put them to use in our chapter.

Another ongoing challenge is increasing member participation. It is hard to fight the preconceived notion that the chapter does not do anything fun. Hopefully, the second year of the chapter will change that because there will be new events planned. Even with the challenges and burdens involved in starting a new chapter, I can say the sense of accomplishment our chapter has achieved in 1 year has been worth it. I am very happy to have helped build South University’s chapter, and I hope that we can set an example for all new chapters in the coming years.

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