

Iowa students collaborate to improve leadership and professionalism



By Jill Flaherty

Nine years ago, the Iowa Pharmacy Association (IPA), in collaboration with the Drake University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences and the University of Iowa College of Pharmacy, developed an innovative method of bringing student pharmacists together to improve their leadership abilities. The Pharmacy Student Leadership Conference program was modeled after IPA's New Practitioner Leadership Conference, which has been operating successfully in Iowa since 1989. The annual student program now offers a similar professional development opportunity.

Student pharmacists interested in participating in the conference complete a brief application, and 30 students are then invited to participate in the 2-day conference. In the fall, Drake students travel to Iowa City to meet the University of Iowa students for the

first day of the conference. Students spend the day exploring their personal leadership capabilities through discussions, lectures, and team-building activities. Small groups are formed to allow students to begin working on team projects to improve leadership abilities and professionalism. Students have nearly a semester to complete their group projects, before presenting them in the spring.

According to Jennifer Moulton, IPA senior vice president for professional and educational affairs, "Students are provided the opportunity to meet students from the other college of pharmacy in Iowa, understand their own leadership and personality styles, work in teams to explore a leadership quality they feel a need to improve, learn about pharmacy issues, and just have fun!"

The groups chose from a variety of projects intended to develop or improve a leadership attribute the students view as in need of improvement. As a participant in the conference, I was a member of a group focusing on the various types of public speaking pharmacists do most frequently. My group, composed of both Drake and Iowa students, worked throughout two semesters to put together a practical and informative presentation on public speaking. Our hard work paid off, as the group members excelled in their own public speaking abilities and impressed their student peers when presenting their research.

In the spring semester, the Iowa students travel to Drake in Des Moines for the second day of the conference. The projects are presented to the large group and critiqued by faculty, student peers, and IPA staff. All students provide feedback on the group projects.

The student leadership conference is a unique opportunity for students to work with peers they do not see every day in the classroom. It brings a more diverse student population together, resulting in two well-spent weekends of professional development and enrichment. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet many future colleagues and share such a stimulating experience with them. Clearly, the conference brings student pharmacists together and allows future practitioners within the state to form friendships and bonds early in their careers.

Two hundred and thirty-four students have graduated from the Iowa Pharmacy Student Leadership Conference in the past 9 years, and Moulton said that the graduates "all have a better understanding of their own personal leadership capabilities and goals, and their role in advancing the profession of pharmacy in Iowa and nationally."

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