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# Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning

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Experiences in Teaching and Learning

## Implementing and sustaining a mentorship program at a college of pharmacy: The Keys to Successful Mentorship



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Mentorship

Mentor

Student-led

Professional development

### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To evaluate mentor and mentee opinions of The Keys to Successful Mentorship, a longitudinal student-led mentorship program established at a college of pharmacy.

**Educational activity and setting:** In 2008, a mentorship program was created whereby first year pharmacy students (mentees) were paired with third year pharmacy students (mentors). An anonymous survey was administered to second (P2) and fourth (P4) year pharmacy students identifying strengths and weaknesses of the program.

**Findings:** Results of the survey administered to the P2 and P4 pharmacy students revealed that there was a strong desire to take part in the mentorship program. Of the respondents, 77% of P2 and 70% of P4 students stated the mentorship program aided in their professional growth. Mentors disagreed significantly more than mentees that participation in the program should be optional. Qualitative findings suggested that the program assisted students in building professional relationships and networks, better prepared them for experiential training, and helped with post-graduate decisions.

**Conclusion:** The implementation of a longitudinal student-led mentorship program was supported by student pharmacists and may aid in their professional development.

### Background and purpose

Mentorship is important in the training and professional development of future pharmacists. As the nuances and complexities of higher education and the workplace continue to increase, there is a growing recognition that formal mentoring programs are needed to enable adults to be successful throughout their careers.<sup>1</sup> Professional organizations such as the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) and American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP) have acknowledged this desire and offer mentor matches to their members. Studies have shown that individuals who were mentored are more likely to be promoted, publish more often, and are more likely to obtain grant support for their research.<sup>2–5</sup> Pharmacy residents involved in a mentorship program as part of their training were more likely to match to a career post-residency.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, individuals who were mentored report greater self-efficacy, increased job retention, improved career satisfaction, and ultimately become mentors themselves.<sup>5,7,8</sup>

Upon entering pharmacy school, the student pharmacist is inundated with increased responsibilities, the necessity to adapt to a

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2016.11.017>

self-directed learning style, professional obligations, and an accelerated learning path with a continually evolving curriculum. It is not uncommon for pharmacy students to struggle with this transition into a professional curriculum and to feel uncomfortable in seeking answers to their questions from senior students or faculty. The guidance of a mentor can help alleviate these stressors and aid in the professional growth of the student pharmacist. Although mentoring is deemed as both necessary and invaluable in the business world and is encouraged in the academic setting between faculty-faculty relationships,<sup>9</sup> there is a paucity of literature regarding mentorship at the academic level between students. Mentorship programs in both nursing and medicine curriculums have shown some success; however, a formal structure that evaluates goals and outcome measurements are often missing.<sup>10,11</sup> The only study evaluating a mentorship program within a pharmacy school was conducted at Butler University in 2003. Undergraduate students were randomly assigned to professional pharmacy students, with the majority of mentors being first year student pharmacists.<sup>9</sup> Overall, the majority of mentors and mentees rated the experience as positive, 74 and 64% respectively. Unfortunately, this study only evaluated the reception of the program and did not evaluate the impact on professional development of the pharmacy student. Additionally, the study did not incorporate pharmacy students as mentees, thus no conclusion can be made as to the impact a mentorship program has on academic success.

Ideally, a mentorship should develop into a long lasting relationship, that is consistent and longitudinal. Furthermore, the mentor should be intimately familiar with the pharmacy program, be viewed as role model, and should be both supportive and available to their mentee.<sup>1,6</sup> To address these factors, The Keys to Successful Mentorship program was established in 2008 at the Eugene Applebaum College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (EACPHS). This student-led mentorship program was novel in design and was subsequently adopted by the college curriculum in fall 2009. The primary goals of our program are to better prepare pharmacy students for the rigors of the academic program, aid in developing professionalism, and instill role model characteristics within the mentor and mentee.

### Educational activity and setting

The Keys to Successful Mentorship begins by pairing all first year pharmacy students (P1s) with third year pharmacy students (P3s) to create the mentee-mentor relationship. Our program is designed to acclimate the P1 to the pharmacy school program through a P3 mentor, better prepare the P1 for experiential education through shadowing on clinical rotations, and enhance on both personal and professional development for everyone involved through enhanced access to professional networks.

The organization of our program is coordinated by the P3 class President and the Rho Chi President during the given year, with the aid of the Director of Experiential Education. Their tasks include pairing the students together and coordinating the initial meeting, including orientation to the program. With respect to matching individual students, a survey is sent during the summer to both the incoming P1 and current P3 students to help assist in the matching process. Based on a previous analysis assessing the matching criteria of our program, this survey specifically asks for information regarding interests, involvement in student organizations, geography, and preferential characteristics such as age and gender. In addition, with coordination from the Director of Experiential Education and the Associate Dean for Pharmacy, mentees and mentors are assigned the same faculty advisor. The role of the faculty advisor is to provide another level of networking for the student. A previous survey indicated a gap within the student-faculty relationship at our institution, with a request to improve access to faculty support.<sup>12</sup> Assigning the same faculty advisor to both the mentor and mentee was a method to improve this relationship.

During the second week of the school year, all P1s and P3s attend a mandatory orientation session where each mentee formally meets their mentor for the first time. The orientation session also includes a lecture from faculty members who provide information on maintaining successful mentorship relationships. Each P3 serves as a mentor to at least one P1 mentee, with minor adjustments based on class size. The P3 class President and Rho Chi President acquaint the students with guidelines that should be followed to develop a successful mentorship relationship (Table 1). The guidelines were written by the creators of the program to provide a basic framework and set of expectations for both the mentor and mentee.

Our mentorship program is designed in a manner that enhances leadership opportunities in a graduated fashion. As such, students are transitioned from a mentee to a mentor in their final two years of the curriculum. Our mentorship program has also been incorporated into the pharmacy experiential curriculum. As the P2s begin their Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience

**Table 1**  
Guidelines for The Keys to Successful Mentorship Program.

Mentor and mentee responsibilities	
1.	Establish a means of communication via email and cell phone
2.	Plan an informal face to face meeting at least once per semester
3.	Provide support in transitioning into the rigors of the professional curriculum
4.	Discuss challenges in the program and formulate strategies for success
5.	Address curricular issues and career opportunities
6.	Provide encouragement and support throughout the progression of the program
7.	Develop a professional relationship
8.	Third year student (P3) should aid in the professional development of the first year student (P1)
9.	Aid in networking opportunities for both parties
10.	Create a comprehensive mentorship by the involvement of mentor, mentee, and faculty advisors
11.	Mentee to shadow mentor at least one time during each of the mentor's Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) rotations

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