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Association for Academic Surgery

The Association for Academic Surgery 2011-present: standing on the shoulders of giants



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ABSTRACT

The Association for Academic Surgery (AAS), which is a society dedicated to inspiring and developing young academic surgeons, recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. Each decade since its inception has seen incredible growth. This most recent decade, from 2011 to present, has been characterized by: (1) reevaluation and clarification of the society's vision, mission, core values and organizational structure; (2) diversification of the membership and leadership; (3) support for international outreach and global surgery research; (4) expansion of its impact through social media; and (5) adaptability to a changing political climate.

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Introduction

The Association for Academic Surgery (AAS) celebrated the 50th anniversary of its inception in 2016 and the 50th anniversary of its annual meeting in 2017. During its fourth and fifth decades as a society, the AAS has continued on the trajectory set forth by prior leaders and executive councils. The AAS has expanded on the initiatives put forth by the prior decade's leadership including but not limited to partnership with other national societies, international outreach, and diversification of the membership and leadership. If the AAS has seen further during the current period, it has been by standing on the shoulders of giants.

Although originally from a religious sermon, the following quotation reflects the activities of the AAS over the recent decade: "Gaze upward. Look inward. Reach outward, and press forward."¹ In gazing upward, the AAS has strived to make the sky the limit in terms of its ability to inspire and develop young academic surgeons. In looking inward, the AAS has reexamined the definition of academic surgery and clarified the societal mission through facilitated retreats. In reaching outward, the AAS has expanded its global footprint. The members of the AAS have also continued to utilize social media as a means of more efficiently and effectively communicating with its members. Finally, the AAS has pressed forward in its efforts to promote academic surgery in

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a constantly changing political environment. These themes are further expanded in the following.

Looking inward: reevaluating the society

The first step in reexamining the society occurred under the leadership of the 43rd AAS President, Daniel Albo (2010-2011). His officers included Scott LeMaire (44th AAS President, 2011-2012) as President-Elect, Melina Kibbe (45th AAS President, 2012-2013) as Recorder, Lillian Kao (46th President, 2013-2014) as Secretary, and Tim Pawlik (47th President, 2014-2015) as Treasurer. They led a rebranding campaign, which included the development of the current logo (Fig. 1). In devising the logo, the AAS executive council members were asked to describe the purpose and personality of the society. For that reason, the logo represents a set of open doors because the AAS works to open doors for current and future academic surgeons. Furthermore, the color of the AAS logo is purposefully warm, inviting, and vibrant, reflecting the personality of the society and its membership.

Successive presidents in the current decade have expanded on this work to explicitly define the mission of the AAS and its core values. In particular, Tim Pawlik, Justin Dimick (48th AAS President, 2015-2016), and Caprice Greenberg (49th AAS President, 2016-2017) worked to develop an enduring strategic plan that transcended the term of each individual president. In 2014, Tim Pawlik led a retreat of the executive council; at that retreat, the AAS mission was defined as inspiring and developing young academic surgeons. The five core values of the AAS were decided at that time to be inclusion, leadership, innovation, scholarship, and mentorship. The past and current AAS initiatives have always been aligned with this mission and these core values (Table 1).

Not only did the leadership look inward as a society but also as individuals comprising one of the largest executive councils of any national society. The executive council includes five officers, three past presidents, 11 councilors, 12 committee chairs, seven committee co-chairs, six representatives to other societies, and four additional ad hoc members (i.e., AAS Foundation President and AAS historian). Justin



Fig. 1 – The AAS logo represents a set of open doors because the AAS strives to open doors for current and future academic surgeons.

Dimick utilized the competing values framework,² and Caprice Greenberg utilized the DISC (Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance) behavioral assessment tool³ to assist council members in understanding themselves and how their values and behaviors impact the culture and effectiveness of the organization. In the competing values framework, there are two dimensions that are measured: (1) internal *versus* external focus and (2) flexibility *versus* control. These two axes lead to four different quadrants, representing different organizational cultures.^{2,4} In the DISC model, the axes are measured by whether people are (1) task or people oriented and (2) outgoing *versus* reserved. These two axes lead to four different quadrants describing different behaviors: dominance, influencing, steadiness, and compliance.³ Based on the competing values framework, the AAS executive council was found to be predominantly comprised of individuals who are externally focused and flexible (Fig. 2). Based on the DISC model, the council is comprised of more supporters and promoters than conductors or implementors. This leads to an organization that focuses on innovation, creativity, articulating future vision, transformational change, and entrepreneurship.^{2,4}

The aforementioned assessments revealed that the AAS did not have much structure in place for assessing, measuring, or controlling processes. However, by engaging in introspection, the AAS was able to develop a strategic plan that addressed its need for improved structure. In particular, the AAS instituted measures to ensure adequate finances and operational infrastructure to accomplish all of its goals, such as the creation of a finances committee. The overall strategic plan is aligned with our core values, sustains and grows the initiatives of past presidents, addresses the organization's strengths and weaknesses, and most importantly, transcends individual presidency terms.

Looking inward: redefining academic surgery

As described in Lillian Kao's presidential address in 2014, the definition of an academic surgeon has changed over time from the traditional triple or quadruple threat (i.e., surgeon, scientist, educator, and administrator) to include nontraditional roles (i.e., innovator or quality improvement expert).⁵ The need to redefine academic surgery has been triggered by the need to attract the best and brightest medical students and furthermore by the increasing angst of current residents about the pressures of becoming a triple threat.

In 2011-2012, the AAS partnered with its sister societies including the Society of University Surgeons (SUS), Association of Program Directors in Surgery, and American College of Surgeons to encourage students into a surgical career. Together, in a project led by Peter Nelson (prior Co-Chair of the Leadership Committee and Executive Council member), these societies developed the Redefining Surgery campaign. Taken directly from the Redefining Surgery website, the objectives of this campaign were the following.⁶

- (1) To provide a contemporary appraisal of the field of surgery in an effort to stimulate bright young students to consider it as a career.

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