



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/cptl

Experiences in Teaching and Learning

Development, implementation, and impact of a collaborative junior faculty engagement and professional growth program: The Young Faculty Leadership Initiative

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Engagement
Development
Junior faculty
Vitality
Professional growth

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To develop, implement, and evaluate the effect of a faculty engagement and professional growth program targeted at junior faculty members.**Educational activity:** A faculty engagement and growth program based on adult learning theory was piloted in a clinical sciences department. Effect of the model was evaluated using a pre/post-survey evaluating faculty output and work engagement using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).**Findings:** Average number of publications/projects with cross-campus collaboration increased (0.58 versus 1.25, $P = 0.03$, 95%CI 0.059–1.264). Involvement in national/state organizations, number of accepted poster presentations, and grants submitted and/or funded all increased ($p > 0.05$). Total UWES score increased (4.13 vs. 4.495 $p = 0.21$) with the greatest subscale increase in vigor (3.833 vs 4.347, $P = 0.1$).**Summary:** A faculty engagement and growth program targeting junior faculty members using adult learning theory as a framework may provide a novel and economic way for schools to support the development of these critical team members.

Background and purpose

Developing and mentoring young faculty members is a challenging, but critical component of facilitating their professional success, as well as supporting school and department-level visions, missions, and goals. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) 2016 Standards 9 and 19.5 emphasize the importance of faculty development and promoting an environment and culture that supports development and collaboration. Standards 6.3 and 9.3 specifically highlight the importance of this culture in advancing a school's vision, mission, and goals.¹

A majority of schools meet these Standards through faculty development programs that have varying levels of success. Notable examples of faculty development and mentoring programs have been published.^{2–8} Goals of these programs ranged from retention of junior faculty members (those who are pre-promotion and/or tenure) to utilizing external faculty members as mentors to improve

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American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) faculty survey responses.³ All of the programs reported positive outcomes including decreased faculty turnover, increased average number of scholarly works, and improved subjective measures such as teaching evaluations and AACP survey scores. Notable weaknesses of many of these programs are that they were intended only for the initial year of employment, targeted only scholarship, and only reported participant perception of the intervention, including little if any objective data.⁸

Comprehensive and directed first-year faculty development as part of orientation is commonplace in pharmacy education, but consistency in this level of support after orientation may wane. It may also be particularly difficult for some schools to provide continued intensive support in an environment of “do more with less” due to continued decreases in state funding.⁹ In addition, clinical pharmacy educators often face additional challenges as they typically commit substantial time to their practice sites and maintaining expertise in their respective specialties, thereby reducing the time available to focus on the domains of teaching, service, and scholarship.^{10,11} Guglielmo et al.¹⁰ performed a critical appraisal of faculty development in 2011 and found that many schools/colleges of pharmacy at that time did not evaluate faculty development program effectiveness. The authors concluded that “highly effective faculty development programs have not been created”.¹⁰ Additionally, Guglielmo et al.¹⁰ discuss the role of adult learning theory as suggested by Carroll¹² in developing a framework for faculty development curricula.

Assuming that faculty members as a whole and especially junior faculty members are self-motivated learners, Knowles’ principles of adult learning theory may be particularly appealing to this group. Knowles¹³ suggests that adult learners have unique attributes that make teaching and learning different in this population compared to younger learners. Briefly stated, Knowles,¹³ five assumptions of adult learning are self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. Each of these can be incorporated into a faculty development program as described in detail by Carroll,¹² who suggests that programs adhering to these principles should be voluntary in nature and provide a variety of parallel sessions (self-concept), utilize faculty members’ experience as a learning resource (adult learning experience), stimulate interest and preparedness by providing a “need” to know for faculty members (readiness to learn), be task-centered with value on immediate application (orientation to learning), and appropriately convince participants that there is a “better way” to do job tasks (motivation to learn).¹² Applying these principles involves a change in program format rather than a fundamental shift in how development is delivered, thereby making implementation of these principles into development programs in tangible ways a fast and real possibility for most programs.

In response to the environment and challenges previously noted, researchers created a novel faculty engagement and professional growth program model to support participants’ professional growth and facilitate intradepartmental collaborations while appealing to individuals at many different points of the pre-promotion or -tenure period. This model could also assist the school in achieving its missions of promoting, developing, and sustaining excellence and promoting research and scholarship that leads to improved patient care and educational outcomes. The research aims of this project were to improve faculty engagement, productivity, collaboration, and job satisfaction through sharing of ideas needs and opportunities. Specifically, it was hoped that this program would improve cross-campus collaboration between faculty at all three campus sites (Monroe, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport) and provide an opportunity for leadership on a small scale to interested members. Although a program like this could benefit everyone in the school, input from the chairs of the departments of clinical and basic pharmaceutical sciences resulted in a pilot program that targeted clinical faculty members. This kept the group size small for the pilot and made for easy alignment of professional priorities. This article details the creation, implementation, and assessment of this junior faculty engagement and growth model, which is the first of our knowledge to emphasize the use of adult learning theory to focus exclusively on development during the pre-promotion period and to be peer-led and facilitated by a junior faculty member.

Educational activity and setting

Researchers created a pilot program, the Young Faculty Leadership Initiative (YFLI), with the goal of encouraging junior clinical faculty members at similar points in their careers to form a working group in which they shared needs, opportunities, and general discussion regarding ways to improve and develop in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. Those eligible for the pilot group included clinical faculty members who were pre-promotion and/or -tenure or had been promoted/tenured within the past year (20 faculty members).

The conceptual framework and design of the YFLI was based on adult learning theory with meeting logistics and general format based on an eclectic mix of resources including published literature in pharmaceutical journals, the Harvard Business Review, and input from various colleagues.^{3,10,13–16} Based on information from these sources, the general format consisted of monthly large group meetings throughout the academic year. A lead junior faculty facilitator with no formal training other than self-directed learning served to schedule meetings, arrange speakers, prepare agendas, and manage meeting flow. In addition to attending monthly full-group meetings, YFLI participants were encouraged to be actively involved in one subgroup of four to six YFLI participants who would collaborate on a project in which they shared a common interest. Outside of a general suggestion for small group roles (see [Table 1](#)) these subgroups were intended to function autonomously, reporting back on progress, roadblocks, and areas where they needed help during the monthly meetings. All project planning, additional collaboration outside of monthly meetings, etc. was accomplished in these subgroups.

Guidelines for the general running of the YFLI monthly meetings were informed by Andriopoulos¹⁶ Harvard Business Review article and included: a strict one hour cut-off time, a clear individual meeting objective for each meeting, a focused agenda sent out prior to each meeting, and defined time and emphasis on open discussion among the group members at each meeting. [Table 2](#) shows a typical meeting agenda structure. The facilitator handled all preparation for meetings, and coordinated various internet-based video conferencing platforms for each meeting to involve participants from three different campuses and external guest speakers. The most

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