Continuing Our Focus on Teaching

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By all accounts, the 1996 AACP Interim Meeting was a success. What made it so successful was not so much its theme, *Evaluating Teaching As Scholarly Work* (although it was a great theme!); nor its speakers (they were certainly good!) and programming (of course, as staff we believe that the programming was excellent!). The major reason for the success of the Interim Meeting was the people who participated, networked, and who took valuable lessons back to their colleagues from its sessions. Indeed, the Interim Meeting topic was the most recent in a series of AACP efforts designed to help faculty improve what and how they teach. Based on members' reaction to the Interim Meeting and other recent AACP meetings, we can conclude that is on the right track, and it validates our decision to develop and offer the first AACP Institute this June.

Judging from past participation of faculty in AACP programs devoted to teaching and learning (Teachers Seminars, Interim and Annual Meeting sessions) faculty are demonstrating an increased interest in pedagogy and andragogy. Perhaps the best—and most impressive—gauge of faculty interest in improving their teaching is to examine the annual participation of faculty in AACP's Innovations in Teaching Competition (supported by educational grants from Merck Human Health Division). This competition involves the evaluation of portfolios of innovative teaching activities or projects submitted by faculty. The faculty submitting the top three portfolios (judged by the previous year's winners) are provided with $1,200 stipends to present their innovations to a special session at the AACP Annual Meeting. Each faculty member submitting a portfolio is offered the opportunity to exhibit a poster with their innovative teaching activities. During the four years of the competition, 142 portfolios have been submitted for evaluation. While there are some who repeat in subsequent years, by far each year we see new ideas being tried and submitted for review.

A review of the portfolios reveals an impressive array of teaching innovations generated by our faculty. In short, faculty members in all our schools are thinking deeply about teaching and trying new approaches to how and what they teach. All this comes in the absence of external support in the form of GAPS grants or related external funding. The Association's focus (and monetary reward and recognition) has given value to teaching activities. Moreover, the criteria that we have used to guide the preparation and evaluation of portfolios have evolved as we have learned from our own experience and the experiences of the American Association for Higher Education in its Peer Review of Teaching demonstration projects.

A more comprehensive view of AACP efforts related to teaching reveals a long-term commitment to programming in this area. Of course, the AACP Teachers Seminars have, for years, been annual events devoted to assisting faculty improve the nature of their teaching. Significantly, the attendance at these events has been growing impressively over the years. Topics of Teachers Seminars have ranged from Teaching Science (1991) to Classroom Research (1993) to developing and administering problem-based curriculums (1994) to outcomes assessment (1996). Also, AACP's 1995 and 1996 Interim Meetings were devoted to teaching (deliberative Curricular Inquiry [1995] and Scholarship of Teaching [1996]).

Following adoption of AACP's 1992 policies related to the entry-level PharmD degree, AACP instituted an implementing institutional change initiative through which AACP visited schools for the purpose of assisting their faculties to institute curricular and institutional change. Consultants have visited 25 schools so far. Their reports reveal the commitment of administrators and faculty members to students and their learning (described as "educational care" by Dr. Nicholas Popovich in his 1991 AACP presidential address[1]).

There is a wealth of resources that AACP has generated over the past decade to help faculty continue their commitment to teaching. The AACP Center for the Advancement of Pharmaceutical Education (CAPE) has developed resources (Educational Outcomes, Handbook on Outcomes Assessment) for use by schools and colleges and their faculty. The papers of the AACP Commission to Implement Change in Pharmaceutical Education, the work of the AACP Focus Group on Liberalization of the Professional Curriculum are all available for faculty use.

At a time when our professional literature is dominated by references to decreased resources, increased work loads, and complaints about the quality of higher education, it is refreshing and reassuring to see such an intensity and creativity among our faculty related to teaching.

Congratulations and keep up the good work!

Reference