

And You Think Your Job Stinks?  
Think Again:  
Every Cloud Does Have a Silver Lining

Gireesh V. Gupchup

Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition.

– *Jacques Barzun*

A poor surgeon hurts 1 person at a time. A poor teacher hurts 130.

– *Ernest Boyer*

***IN THE BEGINNING***

The job seemed perfect. I would join a division that included an internationally renowned pharmacy administration faculty member, another junior faculty member would join soon, and an endowed chair would follow. Additionally, the college had a graduate program that included both M.S. and Ph.D. degrees. There seemed to be several research op-

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portunities with faculty who were willing to help mentor me. The city's year-round recreational activities, pleasant climate, cultural diversity, and geographic beauty were big pluses. Although I had several interviews pending, I could not refuse the job.

During my first day on the job, things changed. I found out that the senior faculty member had retired, the junior faculty member who was expected to join soon would not do so for at least two years, and the possibility of obtaining an endowed chair was not as promising as it seemed when I interviewed for the job. Essentially, I was the only pharmacy administration faculty member, and I had to coordinate four courses that started in two weeks! Also, I was told that I would have to chair the graduate program, for which I quickly learned we had little financial support from the college. Was it already time to throw in the towel?

I could have, but I didn't, partly because it was difficult to move my family again and partly because I remembered that my mother always said, "Everything happens for the better." Most importantly, I treated the situation as an opportunity. It was a rare situation in which few pharmacy faculty members would find themselves. That is what makes a narrative of my experiences unique.

From the perspective of the college, it was not possible to predict the retirement of the internationally renowned faculty member. With regard to the hiring of a junior faculty member and the endowed chair, it was probably partly my fault for not asking the correct questions. I also believe that a college has a responsibility to clarify what hurdles a new faculty member may have to clear after joining. In retrospect, I should have asked specific questions about the time frame in which these positions would be filled. In my excitement to join what I believed was a "perfect position," I didn't analyze the situation well enough. My advice to budding faculty members would be to talk with experienced faculty members at their institution about the *realistic* demands that a particular position may entail once you have visited a prospective college. For example, it sounds great that one would have an opportunity to guide graduate students. However, the amount of effort required to guide graduate students may not be apparent to a fresh Ph.D. graduate, even if the work proves very rewarding.

In the remainder of this article, I will describe how I handled the challenges in research, teaching, service, mentoring, and interaction with college and university-wide faculty that have presented themselves during my four years in New Mexico. I hope the account of both my successful experiences and, more importantly, my mistakes will help

junior faculty in their future careers and help experienced faculty understand current challenges faced by new faculty.

### **RESEARCH**

When I joined the University of New Mexico, I was informed that we were a Carnegie Research I University. At that time it didn't mean much to me. I learned during my first year on the job that this meant that our university was among the top extramurally funded institutions in the U.S. Although I was informed during my interview that I was required to get grants and publish papers regularly, only when I joined the faculty did I realize that this was no easy task. I was always interested in research, and that helped me. However, it took at least three years for me to figure out what I wanted to focus on in terms of research.

What helped me early on in my research endeavors was that one of my former professors, Dr. Mike Rupp, introduced me to pharmacists at the Indian Health Service (IHS) Hospital in Albuquerque. They were getting ready to implement a pharmaceutical care plan for asthma patients. During discussions with the IHS pharmacists, it was determined that in order for us to document the outcomes of patients resulting from the implementation of pharmaceutical care plans, we needed to develop a questionnaire specifically for measuring quality-of-life for asthma patients. This project landed me my first grant during my first semester at New Mexico. The culturally-specific nature of this health-related quality of life (HRQOL) questionnaire allowed me to make several contacts with researchers who have similar interests both within and outside the university.

Obtaining a grant for the above-mentioned project was not easy. Before I finally received a grant from the University Research Allocations Committee, I was told by two external agencies that encouraged research in minority populations that I was studying "too small of a group." However, once I received the grant, I was forced to learn on my own how to navigate the Investigational Review Board (IRB) process. While this was an excellent learning experience, it was frustrating because I had to submit IRB applications to both our university and the Indian Health Service IRB offices. The two offices could not agree upon a common informed consent form. It took six months of negotiation between the two IRB offices to finally get this form approved! Eventually this early research activity paid dividends.

As I started exploring other research opportunities, it became clear that, as an economically disadvantaged state, New Mexico had several underserved populations. I decided that studying the use of pharmaceutical products and services among underserved populations would be a good research focus to have. As a matter of fact, this is my current research focus. Initially, there were several research projects that could be done, but I did not know which ones to choose and how to make research opportunities a reality. Ideas for projects presented themselves through college routing mail (what is this?), but during my first year on the job I was completely lost in terms of whom to approach for help with projects. For example, I had read that the use of herbal medicines was rampant in the New Mexican elderly. This prompted me to want to conduct a survey investigating the psychosocial predictors of the use of herbal medicines in this population. I did not pursue this project until a year ago, when I read a related study in a peer-reviewed journal written by a senior professor at our college who had an office down the hallway from mine. Here was someone with a similar research interest who had an office close to mine! If only I had known! In this environment, without a research mentor, I started taking on any project that looked interesting. As a result, I spread myself too thin.

I believe that it is very easy for junior faculty in pharmacy administration to get themselves into situations similar to mine, where they have too many research projects going on at one time. In the enthusiasm to help other pharmacy practice faculty who did not have research expertise but had wonderful practice-based research ideas, I took on too much. Graduate students who also needed research projects and training added to the list of projects. I was working very long hours because of the predicament in which I had put myself. At the beginning of this year, in addition to all my other teaching and administrative duties, I was involved in 19 research projects. There was no way I could terminate any of these! It was only then that I realized this kind of load was slowly infusing mediocrity into all my activities: research, teaching, service, and even my family life.

Part of the reason that I found myself in this situation was that I believed I needed to publish solely for tenure. I actually was told this repeatedly by senior faculty members. As a result, I agreed to get involved in any project that had even a remote possibility of yielding a peer-reviewed publication. Essentially, I thought, "The more publications, the better." Although I did not have a research focus at this point, this process did lead to a few publications. However, I believe that this is a trap that any junior faculty member can fall into at a research-intensive uni-

versity. To guard against this, I would suggest carefully selecting research projects that have promise and are in an area of interest to the junior faculty member. If the projects are meritorious, publications will follow. The more of a research focus one has, the easier it becomes to garner research funds, simply because one has become recognized in that area of research. It is always good to remind ourselves that we publish to benefit the health care research community and/or patients rather than for the sake of tenure. Moreover, publishing for the sake of tenure will more likely lead to dissatisfaction and burnout than publishing for the enjoyment of scholarship.

As I mentioned earlier, since I didn't have a senior pharmacy administration faculty member to guide me, I had to elicit help from senior clinical pharmacy faculty members. A problem we had at our college was that there were very few senior clinical faculty members. I was fortunate that a very successful researcher, Dr. H. William Kelly, helped me considerably. His constructive criticism helped me realize that I had to focus my research efforts in order to be successful in the future. I am slowly starting to learn how to say "no" when asked if I want to participate in another research project.

One positive outcome of being overly zealous in accepting research opportunities was an invitation to be a research consultant for the New Mexico Medicaid Retrospective Drug Utilization Review (DUR) Program. From my perspective, consulting with the DUR Program has been beneficial since I have been able to keep my pharmacy as well as database research knowledge current. It is difficult to determine whether consulting would be beneficial to other junior pharmacy administration faculty members. I would suggest carefully considering the nature of the consulting position and the time commitment required. Consulting may not be a good option if it will stifle progress toward promotion at one's institution.

The slow process of completing my ongoing projects and carefully choosing future projects has only just begun. Along the road, I have had to seek out research mentors in other areas of pharmacy practice. It took me four years to figure out that I had spread myself too thin. Time will tell if I am successful in my research endeavors during the next few years.

### ***TEACHING***

The primary reason I joined academe was that I wanted to teach. Interactions with students both inside and outside class have always given

me a sense of personal accomplishment. Of late, I have even injected a few of my research findings into my teaching in an attempt to find a bridge between the two.

My excessive teaching load when I first began my position at New Mexico was a consequence of numerous factors, not the least of which was the faculty attrition I mentioned earlier. Our school also has several curricula operating at the same time. I was responsible for a course in each program in my first semester. As a result, I was teaching in the B.S. pharmacy program, in the entry-level Pharm.D. program, in the track-through Pharm.D. program, and in the Ph.D. program in pharmacy administration.

My teaching methods have changed over the years. In my first year, I barely had enough time to prepare lectures. As some of our programs (B.S. and track-through Pharm.D.) were phased out, however, I was able to devote more time to devising innovative classroom strategies. I have tried several different types of in-class activities, such as cooperative learning, debates, and group presentations. In general, most of the in-class activities have worked well. There was only one occasion, when I conducted a debate about the pros and cons of a Pharm.D. degree in a B.S.-level course, that the debate got out of hand. I believe that this was because of the nature of the issue being debated and the fact that the class in which the debate was conducted was the last B.S. class in the college. In retrospect, it was not a very wise decision on my part.

In an attempt to take the active learning concept even further, I have had students get involved with projects outside of class. For instance, I have had students interview laypersons about pharmacy, conducted a pharmacy shadow program (where a student shadows a pharmacist for a day), and had students participate in various group projects. The group projects have been the most successful of these activities thus far. In these projects, students are required to maintain a reflective logbook about their activities and progress in the group project through the semester (1). Students have consistently indicated that the reflective logbook has helped them keep their projects on track as well as improve the quality of their projects. Another positive outcome that I have observed is that students within groups seem to have formed lasting friendships.

The only feedback that I have received to help me improve my teaching has been student evaluations. Students have been quite candid about what they have liked and disliked about my courses. Some of their comments have not been helpful. For example, some students have made comments about pharmacy administration courses being “pure psychobabble” and “a waste of a whole lot of credit hours.” However, such

comments only represent the views of a very small minority of students. Overall, my experience is that students are quite perceptive and are very capable of offering meaningful suggestions. I have incorporated some student suggestions, such as increasing the number of article evaluations in a research methods class. From my perspective, it has been heartening not to receive the same negative comment in two consecutive years. This probably indicates that it pays to heed student comments.

I stated above that only student comments have helped me improve my teaching. I am not saying that our department does not value teaching; it does. However, we do not have a formal peer teaching evaluation system in place. I have had senior faculty visit my class voluntarily, but I have never seen a formal evaluation of my teaching from any of them. Informally, senior faculty members have given me a few useful tips. I believe that every college should have a peer teaching evaluation and feedback system in place. Although research may be more important at some pharmacy schools, our mainstay is teaching students. Every pharmacy school will undoubtedly have a sentence in its mission statement indicating that it intends to provide quality education.

Mentoring new faculty in the area of teaching is important. Developing a course when one is just out of graduate school is a daunting task. There are so many issues to consider, like writing course and lecture objectives, researching the literature for lecture material, preparing succinct lecture notes and audiovisuals, effectively delivering lectures, and writing exam questions that reflect the objectives. Initially, I would suggest modeling lectures on those of former professors. Some of my former professors even allowed me to use their lecture notes. As time passes and lecture materials become obsolete, however, there is no substitute for reading the literature. Colleagues from other schools that one has met at professional meetings can be a good source of teaching advice.

The issue of graduate education and teaching has been a strained one. The number of pharmacy administration faculty in our college has been based on the teaching load in the professional program. As our graduate program in pharmacy administration has grown, the department chair has come to realize that we need more faculty members to help with the teaching load in this program. Graduate student instruction was historically treated as a service-based activity. This has changed after several discussions with an understanding department chair. Graduate student instruction is now recognized as a teaching activity rather than a service-based activity. Polite persistence has paid off!

One aspect of teaching that I have thoroughly enjoyed is the student-centered problem-based learning (SCPBL) courses that we conduct every semester at our College of Pharmacy. These courses provide students with patient-based cases to “solve” with other group members. The instructor’s duty is to act as a facilitator and tutor. These cases have given me an opportunity to revisit the information I learned and forgot in pharmacy school several years ago. Moreover, it has been wonderful to see students motivate themselves to learn while “solving” a patient case as a group.

In spite of my teaching load and my research schedule, I have been able to serve on several committees both within and outside our college. I outline in the next section my experiences with service-related activities.

### ***SERVICE***

In addition to research and teaching, I have been involved in a number of service-related activities. Faculty attrition has led to my appointment on several faculty search committees, as well as college standing and ad hoc committees. My tenure on committees has been very useful in helping me to learn college and university policy and procedures. I believe that these committee appointments also helped me understand the views of other professors at our college.

The two most challenging committees on which I have served within our college have been the curriculum and graduate studies committees. Working on tasks for these committees has been extremely time consuming. For the Curriculum Committee, the process of phasing out our B.S. and track-through Pharm.D. programs and introducing the new entry-level Pharm.D. program has been especially tricky in terms of creating an environment in which the students in the programs being phased out were not neglected. With the new entry-level Pharm.D., we have had to make continual changes to both the didactic and experiential criteria for the program to run smoothly.

My role as the chair of the pharmacy administration graduate program has required me to serve on the Graduate Studies Committee. This was a difficult and frustrating role to fill, primarily because, at the time, we were struggling with recruiting and maintaining quality students. As a fresh Ph.D. graduate myself, at times I felt completely lost. However, serving in this capacity has been one of my most fruitful endeavors. By trying to emulate other established graduate programs in our geo-

graphic area, we have been able to raise our graduate student enrollment from 4 to 11 students in a span of 4 years. Additionally, we have been able to secure four college-funded graduate assistantships in the past four years.

At the Health Sciences Center level, I have served on the Clinical Process Improvement Committee (CPIC) for our university hospital. Serving on the CPIC has enabled me to get a flavor of how bureaucratic institutions operate. The most important outcome of serving on this committee has been the contacts it has allowed me to make with committee members outside the College of Pharmacy. Within the university I have also served as the advisor for the Indian Students Association. It has been inspiring to interact with many bright young Indian students who have been successful in obtaining good jobs.

Outside our university, I have served on national and state-level committees. The most positive outcome of serving on committees outside the university has been the opportunity to network with colleagues around the country. I believe networking with colleagues at other institutions has helped me share ideas and make professional contacts that may be helpful in the future. In my opinion, networking is an important activity that other junior faculty may wish to embrace.

Looking back over the last four years at the number of service-related activities that I have been involved in, I would have to agree with my department chair's last annual evaluation summary statement that said, "Simply, too much." I must confess that I have had difficulty refusing service-related committee assignments for fear of offending my more senior colleagues. On the other hand, I believe that these activities have allowed me to develop and maintain strong professional relationships with my colleagues that could potentially help me in the future. Hopefully, my service-based activities will become more streamlined and manageable in the future as I slowly learn the difficult art of saying "no" when asked to serve on a committee.

### ***MENTORING***

If not completely understood, mentoring can be a dirty word. Too often junior faculty at our college believe that a mentor is someone who will literally hold your hand, take you to the water, and make you drink. This is a fallacy. A mentor can only guide you, not do your work for you.

In my opinion, a mentor is someone who can help a junior faculty member navigate the complexities of beginning an academic position. The mentee, in turn, must pull his or her own weight. It is helpful if the mentor and mentee specialize in similar areas. Unfortunately, we did not have a senior faculty member in the pharmacy administration area during my first four years at the UNMCOP. This resulted in my seeking advice from several individuals on different aspects of my academic experience. So far, this approach seems to have been successful.

As I mentioned earlier, I sought the advice of a clinical pharmacy professor for my research. I have frequently asked for advice from a faculty member in the College of Medicine and from our department chair for my administrative (service) duties. I have even asked for advice from our dean from time to time. All of these individuals have been more than happy to help. Essentially, one may have to find multiple mentors for different purposes. An important point to note is that one has to search for mentors; they do not come to you on their own. This advice would be valuable at a school like ours, where a formal mentoring system did not exist when I joined the faculty. When a formal mentoring system exists, it may be possible for a senior faculty member to guide a junior faculty member to the right individuals, depending on the needs of the mentee.

In addition to my research, teaching, service, and mentoring experiences, there are other important issues that I have faced during the last four years in my faculty position. These are collegiality and university interface, the terror of tenure, and a supportive dean. I will briefly outline these in the next section.

### ***OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES***

#### ***Collegiality and University Interface***

I consider myself fortunate to have made so many professional contacts within the College of Pharmacy, within our Health Sciences Center, and across the entire university campus. I believe that this indicates the willingness of professors in other disciplines to collaborate and to share ideas across the University of New Mexico campus. At the Health Sciences Center level, we have had Thanksgiving and Christmas lunches and musical performances for faculty in our medical mall. This has given me an opportunity to meet other faculty in a nonthreatening and relaxed atmosphere. Within the College of Pharmacy, the students and

faculty have had frequent picnics. This has given faculty and students an opportunity to interact at a personal level. As one student once told me at one of these picnics, it allows students to get a chance to see that “faculty are human too!” I believe that it is important for colleges to conduct such social functions. It gives faculty and students an opportunity to feel a sense of belonging.

In spite of the many examples of collegiality I have described throughout this paper, relationships with other faculty are not without conflict. When it comes down to vying for fixed college resources, things can get ugly. For example, I was once told by a senior basic pharmaceutical sciences faculty member that “pharmacy administration and quality are an oxymoron.” Worse still, the comment was made in the presence of students. Another faculty member informed me that there was nothing I could do about the situation because the senior faculty member was tenured and I was not. I must confess that this episode troubled me. However, I think these rare episodes can occur at any pharmacy school. I do not think this is in any way typical behavior of basic pharmaceutical sciences faculty. It is more a function of an individual’s opinions. Several other basic sciences faculty members at our college have voluntarily made an effort to understand the issues that pharmacy administration addresses. Rather than dwell on this negative situation, I have used this experience to motivate me to perform better.

### ***The Terror of Tenure***

Tenure. The very word sends a shudder down most junior faculty members’ spines. Many of my colleagues have mentioned to me that the tenure process is so vague that it is difficult to figure out what one really needs to do to get tenure. I have heard from others that some senior faculty members have used tenure as blackmail to get junior faculty to do things for them.

I have never felt threatened by the concept of tenure. I cannot say for sure how the Promotion and Tenure (P&T) Committee at our college makes its decisions, but I went through a pretenure review last year and passed. My opinion is that two faculty members cannot be compared (even if they are from the same department) when a tenure decision is made. The comparison is really between the achievements of the faculty member in question and a school’s tenure criteria. To that effect, I followed the criteria that were given to me when I submitted the evaluation packet for my pretenure decision. Unlike other faculty members, who have indicated that the guidelines do not provide much direction, I

found them quite helpful. The criteria were sometimes vague, but I think they were designed that way to allow the P&T Committee some flexibility in making decisions. I come up for tenure next year. Time will tell if my assessment of the tenure process was accurate or too naive!

### *A Supportive Dean*

It would be remiss of me not to include a description of my professional relationship with the dean in an account of my experiences over the last four years. My dean has been very supportive of the activities of the pharmacy administration graduate program at our college. He or she has always made it a point to praise our work. As I mentioned earlier, I have even used him or her as a mentor when dealing with difficult administrative duties. Since my experiences have been unique, without a supportive dean not much of what I have been able to achieve as a junior faculty member would have been possible.

### *FINAL THOUGHTS*

As I think of my trials and tribulations over the past four years, the positives outweigh the negatives. I am a better person and faculty member for the trials I have endured. The tribulations have reminded me that no job is a bed of roses. However, having overcome them has reminded me that my job has not been a bed packed with thorns. As my aspirations and goals change and mature, I may seek other faculty positions. The experiences I have had will help me shape my future.

I started out at the University of New Mexico not knowing exactly what would be expected of me in my research endeavors. Although I believe that I have been somewhat successful, I have become involved in too many research projects. Recently, a clinical faculty member has helped me understand how I can focus my research. My teaching activities, while almost unmanageable at first, have really kept me motivated. The interaction with students has been precious. My service-related activities have allowed me to make a number of very good professional contacts. Several mentors have been more than willing to help me, even when our college did not have a formal mentoring system in place.

When I think of all the wonderful relationships I have had with faculty and students, I am reminded of Dr. Joseph Wiederholt, the AACP Distinguished Faculty Member for 2000, who said, "Pharmacy educa-

tors are amongst the wealthiest people on Earth” in terms of the quality of their relationships. So, for those who feel their faculty positions stink, just like I did when I started out, think again: every cloud does have a silver lining.

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