

The Mexican American Association of Pharmacy Students (MAAPS)

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SUMMARY. The Mexican American Association of Pharmacy Students (MAAPS) was organized at the University of Texas at Austin by a group of Hispanics of Mexican descent who shared common professional interests, values and cultural backgrounds. The members of this organization perform many activities for the College of Pharmacy including: assisting in recruiting, retaining qualified students who have been accepted into pharmacy school, providing health care education to the community and maintaining open communication channels between the students and the College administration.

The members benefit from the support they receive from each other and through their involvement in various service projects. Their activities make a difference in the community. One of the most important examples of these is "Project Mentorship." The objective here is to assist in the development and retention of minority children in elementary school, especially those at high risk of failure. Mentors must devote at least thirty (30) minutes per week in order to participate.

Students, the College of Pharmacy and the community all benefit from MAAPS involvement and activity. This is a good example of how social and professional networks help in minority pharmaceutical education.

The Mexican American Association of Pharmacy Students (MAAPS) became a recognized campus organization in fall 1981. It was organized by a group of Mexican Americans who shared common professional interests, values and cultural backgrounds.

Despite the fact that the organization was brought into existence by a group of Mexican-American students, the members represent a variety of

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cultures and backgrounds. MAAPS encourages all qualified students to join. A small percentage of the members are prepharmacy students. These students enjoy the contact with others already in the college. The close rapport they develop increases their confidence in reaching their goals in pharmacy.

The organization has accomplished many objectives since its beginning: assisting in recruitment; retaining qualified students within the College of Pharmacy; providing health care education to the community; and maintaining open communication channels between students and the College administration. These objectives have been met by the members through sponsoring drug awareness programs and conducting hypertension and diabetic screening services for the Mexican-American community of East Austin.

The members benefit from this organization through the friends they make and through their involvement in service activities that make a difference in the community. After all, our profession is exactly that, one of caring.

PROJECT MENTORSHIP

One of our most recent service projects is called "Mentorship." It is organized in conjunction with the Austin Independent School District. The objective of this project is to assist in the development and retention of minority children in school. The children with which we work are considered high risk, more likely to fall into destructive life-styles, such as alcohol or drug abuse. They are identified by their teachers and are referred to the principal or campus coordinator for the project. A MAAPS mentor is then assigned to work with the child who has similar interests and hobbies.

Each mentor is asked to devote at least thirty minutes each week to this project. If the they can afford more time to see the child more often, they are encouraged to do so. Although the children are excused from class when the mentor visits, the mentor is asked to come when it is mutually convenient. It is apparent that this program is very important to the schools. The teachers have expressed great enthusiasm when we visit and have even shared stories with us of students who have already shown improvement in just the two months since the program's inception. The parents, particularly the mothers, have also shown great interest and encourage the participation of their children.

When a mentor visits a child, it is a special time that they share together. They may go to the library to read a book or take a walk together around the campus to share thoughts. In the beginning, the child is often shy and inhibited, but with time the barriers fall away and they become comfortable with each other allowing a special trust and friendship to be formed.

The members in our organization have been alerted to the problems of our Hispanic population. By assisting in these types of projects, they are brought to the core of the problem. We become involved and then, can understand better the needs of the Hispanic disadvantaged children. Thirty minutes a week is so little time that you might think it could not make a difference. But just the opposite is true. The children eagerly await their mentor's arrival, ready to show off good grades, to tell stories and to demonstrate how good they feel to have a special friend. The members who participate in this service project are rewarded time and time again by the reports of good conduct, improved attendance and scholastic achievement. We are making a difference.

Keeping these children interested in education also does a world of good for the community. With the difference that we are making, there is a good chance many of these children will not fall victim to the same problems as other high risk students who do not have the safety net of the Mentorship Program. Many community problems seem to stem from teenagers who have dropped out of school. These drop-outs tend to live a life of crime and drug abuse and become a burden to society. The children participating in this program often have a sibling or parent who is involved in some kind of destructive life-style. It is often difficult to compete with these familial role models, but if we can keep their interest focused on education we are on the right track toward improving our community.

OTHER PROJECTS

In the 1989 fall semester, MAAPS became affiliated with the South Austin Youth Services (SAYS). This organization is a federally funded outreach program that assists underprivileged and at-risk Hispanic and Black families and young people in this area. MAAPS and SAYS joined forces to motivate students to stay in school and to inform them about career opportunities in pharmacy. As the semester progressed, we participated in their family health festival, gave tours of the pharmacy school to at-risk teens, donated funds to their Thanksgiving Dinner and hosted speakers to learn more about outreach programs. We continue to be a

resource for SAYS in providing guidance and support to the disadvantaged Hispanic youth in South Austin.

Another important service project in which MAAPS members look forward to participating every spring is the Vial of Life Program. We distribute plastic vials to the parts of Austin that are predominantly Hispanic. Each contains a form on which a person can write important medical information (e.g., present medical condition, allergies, current medication). The vial is then attached to a rack in the person's refrigerator, then a decal indicating program participation is placed on the person's front door. When needed, Emergency Medical Services personnel have been trained to look for the vial. This process can save precious time and supply valuable information. MAAPS members really enjoy participating in this service project. It gives us an opportunity to practice our communication skills and, at the same time, serve the community. One woman actually called us to say that the Vial of Life Program saved her husband's life and to express how very grateful she was.

Each fall, MAAPS members dress up in their favorite costumes and attend the Travis State School Halloween party to serve as assistants to staff. The majority of the clients here are mentally retarded or suffer from multiple sclerosis. The work load is divided into four shifts of forty-five minutes each, though we usually volunteer for the entire evening. The clients are brought to us and we escort them around the gymnasium to various games and food booths. If a client lacks the necessary motor skills to feed himself, it is our responsibility to assist him. The school provides corn dogs and hot dogs as well as a variety of games such as the ring toss, basketball throw and horseshoes. In addition, there are several haunted houses. While the supplies are all furnished, MAAPS members provide smiles and companionship for the evening. This service project is very rewarding for our members. Not only does it make us appreciate all the blessings we enjoy, but it also makes us more patient and understanding of the needs of others.

Another service project in which MAAPS members participate is blood pressure screening. Members are trained by the professional personnel at the University of Texas Student Health Center. They learn the importance of maintaining normal blood pressure and how to use a sphygmomanometer. We distribute literature from the American Heart Association on the causes of hypertension and on proper nutrition. If a pressure is screened above normal, the patient is advised to seek further medical attention.

As you can see our members keep very busy.