

Life and Times of a New Social and Administrative Sciences Faculty Member

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WHY ACADEME?

Choosing a career in academe was a “safe” and perhaps logical choice for me. My dad had been a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez campus, for most of his life. My sister is an Associate Professor of Food Chemistry at the University of Puerto Rico, Utuado campus. I, however, am the only one in the family with a Ph.D. You could say that I went into an academic career having some idea of what to expect. Ultimately, I feel that academe provides a path where I could have the flexibility to achieve my major goals in life: having a job where I could help others and having a family. That’s the reason I have selected this area as my professional path.

This was certainly not the way I envisioned my life to be ten years ago when I started graduate studies after pharmacy school. Back then, I remember resenting people’s comments that pharmacy was a good career path for women: “After all, you can work part-time and still have a profession!” I think part of the reason I went to graduate school was to

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differentiate myself from most of my female classmates, who I felt had that “part-time” mentality. I considered myself more career-driven than most of my cohorts back home. Pharmacy would be more than an occupation for me. I did not go into pharmacy looking for a professional part-time job. However, four years ago, when I was told that my faculty position was going to be an academic (nine-month) appointment, I felt happy about securing a job that could allow me to have time to enjoy my future family and still be considered a full-time professional. I figured once I was married and had children, I could actually spend the summer months with them if I kept my nine-month appointment. How ironic! I have obtained all of this education and, at some level, I am still hoping to achieve what my college classmates got many years ago: a family of my own. Since I was hired, however, most of my colleagues have been given the option to switch to 12-month contracts, and most of them have done so. Today, I am actually one of the few nine-month faculty members left at the School of Pharmacy. I do spend considerable time during my summers performing school-related work for professional development and preparation for promotion. I am not going on the “mommy track” just yet, but if I ever get there, I will do it with no major regrets.

WHY MCPHS?

During the fall 2001 semester, I will have started my sixth year as an Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Administration at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (MCPHS) in Boston, Massachusetts. I have an academic year, non-tenure-track appointment at this urban, private, teaching-intensive institution. The School of Pharmacy at MCPHS is divided into two departments: Pharmacy Practice and Pharmaceutical Sciences. I belong to the Pharmaceutical Sciences Department, which encompasses medicinal chemistry, pharmaceuticals, pharmacology, and the social and administrative sciences (SAdS). This configuration is quite different from my graduate school, which was a public, research-intensive institution in Indiana where the SAdS was a part of the Pharmacy Practice Department. But these differences did not bother me. After all, part of the reason I came here is because I was looking for something different from what I had experienced before. I think the fact that I did graduate research in the area of pharmacists' career choices helped me select MCPHS. I was looking for an environment that would suit my favorite parts of an academic job, such as teaching, and would not be as demanding in other areas, such as re-

search. Even my advisor in graduate school recognized that this might be a good choice for me.

I am one of five female faculty members in my department and the youngest of all members. The Department of Pharmacy Practice, on the other hand, has more females, younger faculty, and almost four times as many members. I can honestly say that faculty in my department have been very cordial and respectful. I know that some of them do not quite have a grasp of what the SAdS are all about, but they do understand that our discipline is research oriented, like theirs. That is the rationale for the departmental distribution in our school.

During my first departmental and schoolwide meetings, I would barely talk. I was more interested in hearing others talk, making mental impressions of their characters. I also wanted to determine “the right procedures” to follow and the behaviors that seemed to be conducive to positive interactions in my workplace. Now that I have figured out an effective communication style, I feel more willing to voice my opinion or make a contribution during group discussions. I would say it took me about a semester to learn the lines of communication at my institution, and my mentor was very helpful in this area. I feel that being cautious at the beginning was a wise choice. I found out that most people prefer honest, straightforward conversation, but there are always exceptions!

This is my first “real” job. MCPHS was one of two institutions with which I interviewed just before finishing my graduate studies. I recall being very nervous about my interview, but those who interviewed me were very gracious, understanding, and helpful. Having an SAdS background, I value the importance of interpersonal relations greatly. I felt and still feel that this is one of the greatest assets of the institution for which I work. Ever since my interview, I have had a really good feeling about MCPHS. I felt that I could fit into this academic environment. I believe the people I interviewed with had a lot to do with my decision to come to MCPHS. Once I accepted my position, my new group of colleagues (especially those within SAdS) made themselves available. They met me when I went apartment hunting with my mother and offered suggestions on where to live around Boston. Once I moved in, a colleague even helped me transport boxes from my apartment into my new office.

Over the years, the opportunity to develop both professional and social relations with a number of colleagues at MCPHS has helped me shape my academic persona. I interact quite often, on a casual basis, with some of the clinical and basic sciences faculty, as well as faculty members from other schools within the college. For example, a faculty

member across the hallway from my office belongs to the nursing department. I have to admit that, besides the men in the SAdS group, I mostly interact on a social basis with female faculty of varied backgrounds. I find it harder to relate on a personal level to other male faculty members, even though some of them were hired at the same time I was hired and we are fairly close in age. Perhaps I look for many informal mentors of my own gender because I need the female point of view on academic life. What I value most from these interactions is the opportunity to listen to and be reminded of different points of view, as I live in a very diverse city and I interact with students of varied backgrounds on a daily basis. I consider my small group of colleagues who have allowed me to be part of their existence at MCPHS quite a blessing.

Most of my professional interactions happen within my own discipline or with colleagues with whom I share interests or courses. I would consider these interactions quite positive. For example, my involvement in a course cotaught with a faculty member from the Pharmacy Practice Department made possible a number of poster presentations and a publication. It also allowed me to look into potential areas of research I had not explored previously. Some of the most important professional relations are those with mentors, who are always looking after my professional development.

MENTORING

When I was hired, the head of my department decided to assign each of the new junior faculty in the pharmaceutical sciences to a formal mentor. Although I did not select my mentor, I am very satisfied with the assignment and probably would have chosen him. My mentor was the senior-most faculty member within the SAdS and the person in charge of the search committee when I interviewed for the job. We met at regular intervals to discuss my progress or just to chat. We shared similar educational experiences; we both had Ph.D.s from Midwestern schools of pharmacy with social/administrative sciences graduate programs, whereas most of our SAdS faculty at MCPHS had degrees from nonpharmacy schools. However, the differences—namely, his years of experience in academe—were what mattered. He helped me make a smooth transition from a large university setting into a small, independent school environment. He pointed out the pros and cons of the institution, as well as its lines of communication and power. I view my mentor

as a wise brother who offers me advice but does not expect me to follow all of his suggestions word by word. To this day, I stop by his office to update him on my academic and personal life and to hear his valuable advice. Luckily, he always has the time to listen.

Three years after I was hired, it was decided that all junior faculty at MCPHS were to have a PAT (Peer Advisory Team) comprised of two senior faculty members. The main goal of the PAT is to provide formal mentoring to those junior faculty members previously without mentors (a concern for other departments at my institution). I kept my original mentor and added a female full professor from the School of Arts and Sciences as my second PAT member. I selected her because she is involved with the SAdS course I coordinate. Moreover, she was the first person I interviewed with when applying for my position, and I knew then that she was interested in my progress within the institution. I meet at least twice per semester with my PAT, as I have decided to go up for promotion in the fall of 2002. I enjoy the notion of having two mentors instead of one. One of the main advantages of this arrangement is having the wisdom of two professors with a proven track record at the institution. As a result of their qualifications, they both belong to many PATs within the school. I have no disadvantages to report on the PAT system. Since PATs guide junior faculty, one of their main objectives is to help faculty prepare for the promotion process. According to the school's faculty manual, junior faculty can go up for promotion after four years of employment, provided they meet the criteria for teaching, research, and service.

TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE

MCPHS is a teaching-intensive institution; however, we are also expected to show progress in the areas of research and service to get promoted to the next level. Although the college does not give tenure, promotion guidelines are comparable to those of tenure-track schools. Moreover, after a successful probation period of four years, faculty can earn multiple-year appointments depending on their level. For example, I have received two-year appointments until I get promoted to the associate level. I think that the purpose of these multiple-year appointments is to provide a quasi-tenure contingent with one's promotion level within the institution. The factors of not having tenure and multiple-year contracts have not had any specific impact on my career-related attitudes thus far.

The faculty manual currently states that applicants can be up for promotion after four consecutive years of work at MCPHS. Applicants for promotion have to show outstanding contribution in two of the areas under consideration and significant contribution in the third one. The faculty manual contains no other specific criteria, perhaps because this document applies to all faculty members at the school, which includes arts and sciences, health sciences, and pharmacy. My recent meetings with my PAT indicate that I am doing well in the areas of teaching and service and that I should pay a little more attention to building on research.

In my first year of employment, I was exempt from service activities and was given a smaller teaching load in order to transition into my new role as a junior faculty member. I was expected to teach two sections of "Introduction to Health Care Delivery" (SAS 220), (one in the fall and one in the spring). I also was expected to develop an elective course in an area of interest or team teach the management course during the spring semester. I sat in the management course during the fall semester and quickly decided that teaching my own elective would be something that I would enjoy much more. I developed a special topics course, "Career Planning, Development and Management" (SAS 321), although it was not offered that spring due to an insufficient number of students registered. Instead, during the spring semester of my first year, I audited the elective course "A Survey of Alternative and Complementary Healing Practices" (PHA 390) and worked on a proposal for an in-house grant. Luckily, my department chairperson seemed supportive of my pursuing these various interests.

By my second year, I had a better idea of what my teaching responsibilities would be. I spent the following three years teaching all the aforementioned courses. After my first year, my involvement with these three courses increased, and currently I teach nine credits (or three course sections) per semester. Last year, I taught two sections of SAS 220 in the fall and one in the spring, I cotaught a section of PHA 390 in the fall and one in the spring, and I taught one section of SAS 321 in the spring semester. I am in charge of coordinating the various sections for SAS 220, which includes planning meetings for all instructors involved with the course (three or four on any given semester); we address the content and other specifics of the course to ensure homogeneity among sections.

I have discussed my teaching load with junior faculty in other schools of pharmacy, and I have been told that this is considered a heavy teaching load. This makes sense, since I am at a teaching-inten-

sive institution. I do not mind the teaching load itself because I enjoyed the daily interactions with students a great deal. However, as the years at MCPHS progressed, I was expected to do more in the area of service and to maintain a certain level of scholarly activity. I believe that the ability to succeed at juggling these three aspects of an academic job is what helps one reach that level where one becomes “promotable.” I realize that it is quite a challenge to keep the same level of achievement in all of these areas. So far, assessment of my teaching has not been hurt. Student evaluations of my teaching have been consistently positive and encouraging.

Nowadays, I find myself thinking of ways to increase my scholarship (a.k.a. research) while maintaining my current teaching and service levels. When I was first hired, I felt as if I had the time and energy to be involved in many scholarly pursuits. For example, I applied for and received an in-house “mini grant” to start developing a research area during my first year at MCPHS. The topic of my grant was a continuation of my doctoral dissertation. This grant allowed me to hire an undergraduate student to help with clerical work and paid a small stipend for the time I would spend on this project during the summer months. I did most of the data entry during the summer with the help of a second student who enrolled for undergraduate research credits. Although I was on academic appointment, I found myself going to work even during the summer, since this was the best time to devote to this project and I had a stipend paying for this time. The difference was the ability to set my schedule (and the students’).

I enjoyed working with these students, but the experience made me wish we had a graduate program. After all, having graduate students keeps faculty involved in scholarly endeavors, even when these endeavors are not specifically theirs. I have tried to compensate for the lack of graduate students by allowing undergraduate students to do research with me. So far, I have had mixed results and have decided that, unless the student shows real commitment and interest for the experience, I am not going to accept every student who wants to do undergraduate research as an alternative to an elective course. When I made this decision, I felt that I was being selfish, but I also knew that I could spend a significant amount of time trying to be nice to students.

The mini grant supported the only piece of research that I have done. I guess I lost that energy from my first year rather fast! Oddly enough, I ended up getting a small article out of this piece of research before I put together an article based on my dissertation. (I do not suggest anyone follow this order.) Nowadays, I try to get my scholarship through other

venues, and I jump at any opportunity that would entail a worthy entry on my curriculum vitae. As my date for potential promotion comes near, I am trying to put together materials for publication based on efforts other than survey research. Since my institution is not research intensive, I am hoping that these other scholarly endeavors are weighed as positively as survey research in the promotion review process. I have to admit that although I went through a rigorous pharmacy administration graduate program, I have never had the inclination to go into a “publish or perish” working environment. By “publish or perish” I am referring to producing publications that are based on research, as opposed to teaching. My only concern is making sure that my scholarly activities are adequate to ensure I get a promotion in 2002.

As far as service activities are concerned, you could say that my service involvement has really come to fruition during the last two years. Until then, I had only been involved with participation on smaller subcommittees and advising students. Advising is one of the main service duties for many faculty members at MCPHS. Starting my second year of employment, I was assigned about 20 student advisees. My responsibilities as an advisor entail ensuring that students are following an adequate course progression according to their plan of study. Advisors are supposed to sign the students’ registration forms each semester. Moreover, advisors are sent copies of the students’ final grades as well as their warning notes if they appear to be failing a course. When I was first told about my advising responsibilities, I was quite apprehensive. It felt like I had to be a cross between a mini registrar and a college counselor. I felt like I was not the best person to do this job; after all, I did not even know the pharmacy curriculum off the top of my head. I know that someone else must have felt the same way and made his or her voice heard. During my third year, we were offered advising workshops and given a user-friendly advising handbook. All of these were helpful, but at times my advisees would come with issues I could not deal with at all. I would turn to my mentor for advice on advising, and he was quite helpful. Nowadays, I feel a bit more comfortable about my advising duties. I do not advise students as well as some of my colleagues, but I feel like I am improving and getting the hang of it. I have even helped newer faculty members with their questions about the advising process.

My other significant areas of service involvement include: coadvisor of the Academy of Students of Pharmacy (ASP), member of the Curriculum Committee and delegate to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP). My responsibilities as advisor for ASP include attending its meetings and functions at the college and providing guid-

ance in those areas where I can. In 2000, I accompanied the students to the ASP Midyear Regional Meeting for Region 1 in Albany, New York, and to the Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Having a coadvisor is very helpful, as this colleague is more experienced with advising student groups and is well connected with the state association. Moreover, we can take turns at attending student events in case of scheduling conflicts. I thoroughly enjoy my involvement with ASP. Since I was a member when in pharmacy school and I have been to every APhA meeting since 1991, I feel being an ASP advisor is a logical extension of my involvement with APhA. I think the students appreciate the fact that my coadvisor and I are really getting involved with the group and not just using this title as another line on our curriculum vitae.

I found out about my appointment on the Curriculum Committee when I read my yearly contract two years ago. I asked my department chair about this appointment, as I had never been involved with a “major” committee within the college. I was told that it was time for me to get involved in major committees, as this type of involvement is looked upon favorably in the promotion process. That seemed reasonable. But when the fall semester started, I found out that they wanted me to be secretary of the committee! I had never served on this committee, and suddenly I was expected to furnish minutes based on what was being discussed during the meetings? I discussed this matter with one of my mentors and was advised to decline the secretary appointment. My mentor agreed that the committee work itself was a big responsibility and that my development within the committee would be best served if I did not become the secretary until the following year. So I said that I would not do it. This answer was not well received by the leaders of the committee, so I ended up doing what reasonable people do when they want to build positive working relationships: I compromised. I agreed to be secretary after my first semester on the committee. I took my appointment seriously and, as a result, have been complimented on my good work as secretary. However, after a year as the committee’s secretary, I made it clear that it was time for someone else to take over this function. Most committee members agreed that one year as a secretary is reasonable, especially when the Curriculum Committee meets every other week year round, including summer.

I decided to run for alternate delegate for AACCP while on a “promotion-driven spell.” If I am going to get promoted, I need to make sure that I have enough service activities included in my vitae. Although I was already involved with advising, the Curriculum Committee and ASP, I figured that being involved with AACCP would be a good move,

especially since this is an appointment where I get to interact with delegates from other schools. I had been a member of AACP since graduate school, so I felt comfortable in undertaking such an assignment. One of my motivations for running for this position was to build a solid service section on my CV, but I also felt I could make a contribution in this area. I consulted with my mentor (who had been a delegate in the past), and he agreed this was a good choice for me. The school of pharmacy elects an alternate delegate for AACP every year. The alternate then becomes the delegate the following year.

REFLECTIONS ON MY ETHNICITY

I am one of only a few female Latino Ph.D.s in pharmacy academe. I have never felt much different from anyone else due to my gender or ethnicity while in graduate school or at my current job. I do not think that my unique demographic characteristics make me an expert on multicultural issues or entitle me to any preferential treatment. After all, I strongly believe that many of the issues I have described in this article are universal themes that all of us in academe face at some point in our careers.

One of the main cultural differences I have experienced during my ten years in the United States relates to attitudes toward life and work. I come from a culture where there is no “Protestant work ethic” or set of “workaholic” values. Living in the U.S., I have found myself striving to find a happy medium between these differing work-related attitudes. Some of these differences are very useful as examples in my elective career development course.

Being bilingual has provided me with the opportunity to get involved in unusual undertakings. For instance, last spring I was invited to talk about pharmacy on a local Spanish-speaking television show. Last summer, I was invited to accompany the MCPHS president on a trip to a pharmacy conference in Cuba. During this trip, I had the opportunity to do a podium presentation, in Spanish, on the feminization of pharmacy practice in the United States. I was more nervous about this presentation than I have been about many others. The reason was that I had undertaken my graduate studies in the U.S. and had done all of my scholarly work in English. Therefore, I had to spend more time than usual to ensure that my Spanish was “scholarly enough.” I am eternally indebted to my sister, who read all of my notes before I went to Cuba. As a result of this trip, the college plans to start collaborations with other schools of pharmacy in Latin America, namely, those in Peru and Cuba. I have

been named Special Assistant to the President for Latin American Initiatives, and this spring semester, I am coordinating the academic portion of an exchange program with two professors and four pharmacy students from Peru. Never did I imagine that I could be involved in starting such collaborations five years ago!

REFLECTIONS

So far, working in academe has been a great career choice. That is not to say that I have not had times when I wished I were doing something else. I think this is part of human nature. Academe has more flexible hours than many career paths, but some weeks are just as exhausting as the most demanding nonacademic jobs. In my case, I have come to realize that my 9-month contract sometimes turns into 10 or 11 months. Pursuing a career in academe is not as much about the money as it is about achieving intangible assets. I am willing to put in extra time for as long as I feel that my efforts are going to benefit someone. Sometimes I benefit, since I spend some of my summertime writing articles for future publication. Other times, my students benefit, as I use the weeks before the fall semester starts to update course materials. Finally, my colleagues benefit, as I am willing to meet even when not on contract to plan activities that help them achieve some of their goals.

Probably the biggest drawback of an academic life is that the salary earned does not seem to correlate well to the amount of years spent in graduate school. Becoming a college professor is definitely not about the money . . . unless you do consulting or move up the administrative ladder. I know that my students will make more money right after graduation than I do, and that is fine. The way I see it, I might earn less money, but I have more flexibility in scheduling my time.

I have learned a lot about academic life since I started my job six years ago. One of the most important lessons I have learned is to never promise to do something that you are not sure you can fit into your schedule, no matter how good it may look on your curriculum vitae. It is quite embarrassing to have to call someone and admit that you cannot keep your promise. I have learned to schedule fun time for myself. I try to take at least one non-work-related trip every year. Finally, I have learned that even in an area like academe, where so many aspects of your job can be constant for many years (e.g., courses taught), there can be enough variety (e.g., committee assignments, new students every semester) to keep you interested.