Academic Leadership Development: A Case Study

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A dean at a private school of nursing implemented a leadership development program for early- to mid-career nursing faculty consisting of one 4-hour evening session per academic quarter for 7 quarters. Eight faculty members who had expressed interest in assuming a leadership role or been recommended by their supervisors as having strong leadership potential were invited to join. Program topics included leadership pathways, legal issues, budgeting and governance, diversity, the political arena, human resources, and student issues. Interviews with participants revealed 6 themes: the support a peer cohort provided, a desire for real-life application, a lack of previous exposure to related content or experiences, new perceptions of themselves as academic nurse leaders, the value of the program as preparation for academic nursing leadership roles, and broad program applicability. (Index words: Nursing leadership development; Academic leadership; Nursing faculty shortage) J Prof Nurs 31:298–304, 2015. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

A NATIONAL SHORTAGE of nursing faculty is well documented (Institute of Medicine, 2010). In the 2013–2014 academic year, 613 U.S. schools of nursing reported 1,358 full-time faculty vacancies, an average of two per school (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2013). This shortage is likely to be particularly severe among the ranks of senior faculty members. The average age of doctorally prepared nurse faculty holding the rank of professor is 61.3, and the average age at retirement for nursing faculty is 62.5 (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014b; Berlin & Sechrist, 2002).

Senior faculty members play critical leadership roles as deans, department chairs, and program directors. A recent survey of academic nurse leaders at more than 500 schools of nursing indicated that, as senior faculty members retire from academic leadership roles, they are replaced by relatively inexperienced colleagues; 38% of first deans had been in that position for 2 or fewer years, and 64% had 5 or fewer years of experience (Fang, Li, Aretti, & Bednash, 2014). In addition, few graduate programs prepare nursing faculty to assume academic leadership roles. Master's and doctor of nursing practice programs and doctor of philosophy (PhD) programs prepare expert clinicians and nurse scientists, and the competencies and expertise required for excellence in clinical care and research differ from those required for

academic nurse leadership (Morton, 2014). There is an urgent need to prepare academic nurse leaders who can "provide visionary leadership for their institutions and the profession that embodies expertise, commitment and creativity, and mobilizes the commitment of others to bring the vision to a reality…while dealing with difficult economic situations including sharp budget cuts, reductions in funding from external sources, faculty shortages, and stiff competition for scarce resources" (Morton, 2014, p. 279).

Academic nursing leadership is complex, comprising numerous knowledge domains, skills, and attributes. Glasgow, Weinstock, Lachman, Suplee, and Dreher (2009) identified five specific areas of knowledge required for academic nurse leaders: budget, politics, policies, accreditation requirements, leadership, and management. These typically align poorly with the disciplinary and scholarly knowledge that leads to academic success. In addition, the transition from faculty member to academic nurse leader goes beyond the acquisition of new knowledge. Young, Pearsall, Stiles, and Horton-Deutsch (2011) used qualitative methods to explore nurse faculty experiences of becoming an academic leader, identifying several themes. *Being thrust into leadership* involved leadership that emerged naturally from qualities such as risk taking, decision making, and scholarship but might have been initially unsought and unanticipated by faculty members. Academic nurse leaders may have identified themselves as leaders only after being recruited into leadership positions by others. *Taking risks* involved trying new approaches to teaching and speaking up, often challenging the status quo. *Facing challenges* required repeatedly building consensus around each new issue that arose. It involved self-awareness,

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reflection, perseverance, and learning to relate to others in new ways (Horton-Deutsch, Young, & Nelson, 2010). Finally, *advancing reform* as an academic nurse leader occurred through engaging with others, balancing serving as a role-related symbol with remaining authentic and creating an environment for change.

There is a gap in academic leadership as a focal area of graduate education (Morton, 2014). Until formal educational programs become available to aspiring academic nurse leaders, succession planning and supporting programs must suffice. However, few reports exist of such programs to develop academic nurse leaders. Glasgow et al. (2009) described a five-symposium series focusing on motivating faculty; balancing faculty requests with administrative requirements; fostering a positive, productive climate; understanding student profiles and benchmarks; and assessing program outcomes. The symposia were followed by a limited number of sessions with an executive coach, who was a clinical psychologist and organizational development specialist. A separate report described an interdisciplinary leadership development program at a single academic health center in which mid to early senior-level academic nurse leaders participated (Savage et al., 2014). Offered in 5 consecutive years to a 24-person cohort spanning six health profession schools (medicine, nursing, dentistry, optometry, public health, and health professions), six program sessions focused on knowing oneself and teamwork, building on a vision, leadership and strategic planning, finance and operations, communication and negotiation, and leadership perspectives and skills (Savage et al., 2014).

The purpose of this report is to describe an easily replicable leadership development program offered by the dean at a single school of nursing and to explore the experience of program participants.

The Dean's Leadership Development Program

Conducted at Samuel Merritt University (SMU), a private health sciences institution with 80 full-time nursing baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral program faculty on three campuses, the leadership development program consisted of one 4-hour evening session per academic quarter. The program was designed to represent a manageable time commitment for participants and allow for the development of leadership knowledge, skills, and qualities for individual participants. For the first program cohort, which began in October 2011, the dean selected eight participants who had expressed interest in becoming deans or department chairs in the future, were suggested by their supervisors as having strong potential for leadership, and who had not previously held such positions (one had just been named as a program director). Selected participants were early- to mid-career doctorally prepared faculty members; all were female, and half were women of color. The associate dean for academic programs also participated in the sessions.

Topics and resources for the program were selected on the basis of domains that previously new academic nurse leaders identified as ones that they would have found helpful. Each session covered two or three major topics that balanced theoretical (e.g., change theory) and practical content (e.g., time-saving technology tips). All sessions were highly interactive. Usually, each participant was assigned to deliver a brief presentation to the group, based on homework to be completed before each meeting.

Session 1: Logistics and Pathways to Leadership

Participants were asked to prepare for the first session by reading the report by Young et al. (2011) on nurse faculty experiences of becoming an academic leader. After program logistics were addressed and participants received a binder to contain program materials, the focus of the first session was pathways to leadership. Participants, including the dean and associate dean, described their professional and academic histories and their reasons for participating in the leadership development program. Discussion revolved around a leadership framework describing the progression of nursing faculty through stages of leadership: from emerging leaders to new and established leaders to senior and executive leaders. Additional resources were introduced, such as the on-line Harvard ManageMentor program that was made available to participants through the university's parent organization (Harvard Business Publishing, 2015).

Session 2: High-Level Leadership and Handling Grievances

Assigned preparation for the second session was viewing and listening to video and audio recordings related to high-level leadership, which were available on-line (Collins, 2014). In the second session, the academic vice president of the university (who is also a nurse) joined the group to discuss legal issues related to academic integrity and grievance. In addition to describing his path to academic leadership, he discussed the university's grievance policy and informal dispute process. He distinguished between the types of grievances that must be resolved at the level of university leadership and those that can be resolved at the level of faculty, course managers, and deans. Participants were introduced to two legal references for academic administrators (Center for Education & Employment Law, 2014a, 2014b).

In addition, the group began to discuss time-saving technology tips, such as templated text for e-mail and word processing documents, reminders and delayed delivery for e-mail, and voice-to-text capabilities for word processor and PDF documents. The tips included connecting participants with a subscription service summarizing the key ideas contained in business and management books and a Web site providing a free mailing list and an archive of brief articles related to faculty development (Getabstract.com, 2015; Stanford Center for Teaching & Learning, 2015a). Time-saving tips and resources were discussed in each successive section.

Session 3: Leadership Archetypes, Budgeting Concepts, and Shared Governance

As prework for this session, each participant was assigned one of eight leadership archetypes and asked to come prepare to discuss how the characteristics of that archetype contribute to effective leadership, how it might be effective or ineffective in nursing education, and the extent to which they saw themselves reflected in the archetype (Baghai & Quigley, 2011). Discussion related to finance focused on understanding budget lines and proposing and monitoring budgets and included institution-specific details, such as funding request processes, cost centers, and signature authority. Discussion related to shared governance solicited participant's experiences with the model and their perspective on its application in academic settings. An article providing an academic vice president's perspective on conditions necessary for shared governance and collaboration between faculty and administrators was provided for follow-up reading (Glotzbach, 2001). Between the third and fourth sessions, a participant left to accept a position as chair of nursing and health sciences at a large public university.

Session 4: Diversity

Each participant was asked to come prepared to discuss an example of an incident in which a culture of which she was a member was not respected by a leader and an example of an incident where, as a leader, she may have not respected another person's culture. The group then went through a privilege beads exercise (Allen). In the debrief that followed, participants discussed how it felt to assess their privilege status and how their personal experience might apply to working with student and faculty diversity. The discussion continued to address issues such as how leaders can attend to equality and fair treatment of all, the relationship of a diverse student body and faculty to accreditation and obtaining grant funding, and the role of a dean in responding to claims of bias. Two resources provided additional perspectives for participants to consider at home (Hassouneh, 2006; Menkes, 2011). At this session, participants decided to continue to meet, even though they had already been meeting for a full academic year.

Session 5: Navigating Politics

Participants were asked to prepare by reading an abstract of a book related to the qualities possessed by disruptive innovators and identifying the factors in an innovation organization at which they were most adept (Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2012). The group viewed a brief video on the essence of leadership, and each participant chose one point that resonated with her and discussed it (Anderson, 2009a). Each participant received a copy of a related book (Anderson, 2009b). The practice of "managing up" was discussed (Badowski, 2004). The president of the university (also a nurse) attended the session and discussed how she worked with university regents to advance her strategic initiatives, which both demonstrated the application of managing up and provided

an opportunity for participants to speak informally with the university's chief executive officer. The dean distributed thank-you notes to participants, each of whom wrote to someone who had influenced their leadership strengths, following three rules: simple, specific, and sincere.

Session 6: Requested Topics

In Session 6, topics were those requested by participants. To prepare, they read three articles from the Web site providing faculty development advice (Stanford Center for Teaching & Learning, 2015a). The first article pertained to passive–aggressive faculty colleagues (Stanford Center for Teaching & Learning, 2015b). The second article described three dimensions of leadership—influence, values, and vision—and participants were asked to draw a concept map of these dimensions (Stanford Center for Teaching & Learning, 2015c). The third article presented "ten tough realities" of academic administration (Stanford Center for Teaching & Learning, 2015d); participants were asked to come with questions for the dean and associate dean. Each article formed the basis for a comprehensive discussion of the issues, and the session ended after a discussion of leadership paths in academia. Shortly after the sixth session, a participant accepted a position as interim director of a graduate degree program during the regular director's sabbatical.

Sessions 7 and 8: Lessons from the Field and Recapping

For the seventh session, the group invited the participant who had left to assume a chair position to rejoin them and provide the valuable perspective of a newly hired academic nurse leader after having been in the position for a full academic year. She shared readings related to influencing people and increasing productivity at work and provided the group with a detailed description of her journey in her new role. Two years after beginning the group, all eight participants met for a final session that consisted of 2 hours of reflection on their learnings and plans for the future, followed by 2 hours spent welcoming the second cohort.

Resources required for the leadership development program included books, supplies, and food. Some resources that would otherwise have required a financial outlay were provided by the university (e.g., the Harvard ManageMentor program, getabstract.com). The total cost for books and supplies was approximately $25 per participant.

Method for Soliciting Participant Experiences

In the summer of 2014, an independent researcher conducted semistructured interviews with seven participants in the first cohort of the program. The interview guide consisted of questions pertaining to:

- most and least useful aspects of the program;
- how it could have been improved;
- whether participants had experienced similar content in a master's or doctoral program and how participation

affected participants' personal views of or plans for academic nursing leadership roles and their perceptions of others in those roles;

- the degree to which the program provided preparation for academic nursing leadership roles; and
- the types of educational settings in which participants believed a similar program would be beneficial.

The researcher took copious detailed notes during telephone interviews that lasted 20–60 minutes. Immediately after each interview concluded, she edited the notes, corrected spelling, and completed concepts that had been partially recorded; this process took an additional 10–15 minutes. The notes were iteratively analyzed using a grounded theory approach to identify themes (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Six themes emerged and were distributed to interview participants for discussion, validation, and editing.

Participant Experiences of the Dean's Leadership Development Program

Theme 1. A Peer Cohort Was Supportive

The aspect of the program most frequently mentioned as helpful was the peer cohort. As one participant said,

> "We had varying levels of teaching expertise and years in nursing, but we were relatively similar in terms of academic nursing leadership experience. We had a wide range of age and experience in service positions, but, in terms of leadership, there were many shared experiences and lack of experiences."

Another participant commented that the peer cohort helped her feel less isolated professionally. The benefit of the peer cohort continued after the program was over; a participant noted that "the exposure to the expertise of fellow participants and their scholarly and leadership experiences was motivating and provided for an informal peer support that remains incredibly helpful." Another said, "We built a collaborative of future nurse leaders who have moved on in formal or informal ways to take on leadership positions. I forged relationships that otherwise might not have occurred as readily."

Other aspects of the program that participants identified as helpful included a new form of access to the dean and associate dean. As one said, "Mentorship is too limited a word for what they provided." In a large institution with many faculty spread across three campuses, faculty access to academic nursing leaders is infrequent, and participants appreciated the opportunity to learn from the career trajectories of those in leadership roles. A participant noted that,

> "The most useful aspect was getting together as a group of young faculty and opening our minds to the idea of leadership, hearing how (the dean) and (associate dean) got where they are and what the steps were in their development."

The benefit of access to the dean, associate dean, and guest academic leaders arose from their willingness to share their personal perspectives; as one participant

noted, they were "transparent (about) the realities of their roles."

Specific program content that participants identified as helpful included leadership behaviors, budgeting, human resources concepts and issues, and student and legal issues. The few participants who described aspects of the program as less valuable mentioned specific content related to budgeting and the lack of a syllabus or other representation of the overall group goals and structure.

Theme 2. A Desire for Real-life Application

Participants suggested improvements to the program. A recurring theme was the desire to apply their learning to the practice of academic nursing leadership. As one said,

> "A project in groups or pairs would have been helpful. There are enough problems in any environment to do a project. Shadowing might also have been helpful if we could have gone to some of the dean's meetings, such as budget discussions with her team or strategic planning."

This participant also noted limitations to shadowing: "It would have been particularly helpful to shadow someone dealing with personnel issues, but we couldn't sit in on those meetings."

Another area in which participants wanted more information was conflict resolution. As one said, "(I would have liked more about) working with people who may oppose your view. How do I feel like a leader and work against people who may be in opposition to me?"

Theme 3. No Previous Exposure to Content or Experiences

Four participants reported that they had no previous exposure in a master's or doctoral program to content related to preparation for academic nursing leadership. One was familiar with budget concepts and management theory because her master's degree program had focused on management in clinical service settings. Two participants had experiences in doctoral programs that touched on the general topic of academic nursing leadership but did not provide a similar level of focus over time or comparably helpful information and experiences. Only one participant had a similar experience in the form of seminars with leaders in a university setting.

Theme 4. New Perceptions of Themselves as Leaders

Two participants had assumed that they would eventually move into leadership roles, but others described changed perceptions of themselves as potential academic nurse leaders as a result of participating in the program. As one said, "Even being invited to the group made me feel that the people in leadership saw something in me I didn't recognize. The program made (leadership) seem possible. Before, I hadn't thought that an administrative role would appeal to me." Four other participants noted that the

program propelled them to take a leadership position or gave them confidence in their leadership potential although they had not yet taken formal leadership positions.

However, one participant had the opposite experience: "They never get a break, have no downtime, and have to do budgeting. Why in the world would I want to be an academic nurse leader?" Another experienced disillusionment when she moved into a leadership role:

"I saw the leadership role as vision and change, but I am so bogged down with little things. It's difficult to manage everything. I'm questioning whether I want to continue to move into leadership roles. I felt confident, inspired, and excited, but I'm not in a meaningful role now."

The program also changed how participants thought about others in academic nursing leadership roles. In general, they perceived academic leadership as less mysterious and leaders as less intimidating. As one participant said, "The program was an invitation to think of us all as peers. I see my dean in a different light, as someone who's a little farther down the path than me."

Theme 5. Good Preparation for Academic Nursing Leadership Roles

Participants generally experienced the program as helpful preparation for academic nursing leadership roles. As one noted,

"The program gave me confidence and helped me realize how to utilize my resources. I didn't necessarily gain skills. I felt extremely unprepared for and challenged by operational issues like schedules, classes, and registration. But I had a sense of who I could talk to about them."

However, the participant who experienced a disparity between her expectations and the reality of her current position reported that additional content would have better prepared her. "We had no content on different academic nursing leadership roles—or the pitfalls of taking them on."

Theme 6. Broadly Applicable in Medium-to-Large Private Organizations

Several participants thought that a similar leadership development program would be useful in any organization in which it was applied, but others noted limitations. One participant noted that resource constraints might make it difficult to provide a similar program in a public organization, and one foresaw a need to adapt content to regulatory issues specific to public institutions. Two participants also noted that smaller organizations might lack either the resources to provide the program or leadership opportunities.

Discussion

The dean's leadership program benefited participants and the university and, ultimately, the nursing profession. The objective of the program was to prepare a cadre of early- to mid-career faculty for academic nursing leadership roles, and some participants moved into these roles within SMU or at external institutions during the program or after it concluded. Participant descriptions indicated that these career path choices were facilitated by a new appreciation of their own leadership capabilities, a demystification of academic leadership through enhanced access to university leaders, and identification of similarities between their own career paths and those of the dean and associate dean.

A secondary benefit was the development of a peer cohort at a common career stage. As noted in the introduction, nursing education is undergoing a transition as experienced senior academic nursing leaders retire and their positions are filled by less experienced, even novice, leaders. Leadership networks provide support for participants and increase their individual and collective ability to effect change; they are often a focus of leadership development programs across industries, including health care (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010; Savage et al., 2014). Leaders in networks share information, provide advice and support, and learn from one another; peer leadership networks provide leaders with trusted resources (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). Formal academic nursing leadership networks are intended to foster professional growth and development, information sharing, communication, and discussion of key issues (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2014a). Although one-on-one mentorship can also be an important part of leadership development (McNamara et al., 2014), participants' experiences confirm the value of a collaborative peer cohort in academic nursing leadership development.

The program described here was extended to a second cohort of seven participants that began meeting in October 2013 and was continuing to meet quarterly at the time of this submission. Participants have more recent doctoral degrees than was the case in the first group and include two men. Compared to the first cohort in the program, participants have been less clear about their personal academic nursing leadership goals and even more focused on establishing a healthy work–life balance. In lieu of a variety of readings, this group received a book on practical aspects of leadership at the second session, which has formed the basis for subsequent preparatory reading assignments (Myatt, 2013). In light of the experiences of members of the first cohort, options for additional experiences, such as a leadership project or spending time with a leader from a different organization, will be explored with participants.

The generalizability of participants' experiences is unknown, although their comments suggest that the program's general structure and content could be broadly applied. A strength of the program is that it is intended to be tailored to participants' unique needs and learning goals and can be adapted to include content relevant to nursing education programs in settings that vary by characteristics such as size and public/private funding. An additional strength is that it can be offered to varying numbers of participants; the time invested in preparing for

each session is independent of the number of attendees. However, the benefits of a peer cohort likely limit its effectiveness in a group with fewer than four participants.

In addition, in a smaller institution with fewer leadership opportunities, the marginal benefits of offering a leadership program would likely decrease with successive cohorts. At SMU, multiple campuses and restructuring activities yield consistent leadership opportunities, and the dean's leadership program was continued with a second cohort. The number of cohorts should be tailored to anticipated leadership opportunities within an institution.

An unintended benefit of the program is that it allows faculty members to be more discriminating about the balance of leadership, scholarly, and teaching activities they are interested in. After the first cohort concluded, conversations with participants about potential opportunities were more focused on the nuances of job responsibilities. In addition, as noted previously, a participant also decided that she was not interested in pursuing academic nursing leadership roles. Both of these outcomes provided substantial organization value by increasing the likelihood of a good match between informed candidates and leadership opportunities.

In addition, some participants expressed disinterest in activities that do not require nursing background or expertise, such as budgeting. This may encourage the organization to focus on the value that nurses uniquely bring to academic leadership and offload, where possible, nonnursing daily activities to staff with appropriate expertise. However, it is also important to recognize that participants may assume leadership roles in institutions where nurse leaders are responsible for oversight of these activities. No leadership role is comprised solely of those activities the leader enjoys.

The dean's leadership program faced few challenges. One potential challenge was low buy-in among participants because the program was both voluntary and free. Obtaining verbal commitment to full participation obviated it, and the level of preparatory work before sessions was negotiated by the group. There can be little doubt that preparing academic nursing leaders should be a focal area of graduate nursing education available to students at the doctoral level (Morton, 2014). Over the long run, this would ensure a continuing supply of academic nurse leaders with expertise in the relevant knowledge domains. However, in the absence of such programs, it falls to current academic nursing leaders to prepare their colleagues to effectively assume these roles.

Acknowledgments

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