

New Challenges, New Opportunities: Perspective of a New Faculty Member

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As I begin to write, it is difficult for me to believe that I have been a faculty member for two years. It seems only a short time ago that I walked through the doors of the school wondering where this road I had chosen would lead me. I would not say that the road has always been a smooth one, nor has it always been bumpy. It has certainly not been what I expected at times, and it has surpassed my expectations at other times. I can say with certainty that the road, for me, has been the right one.

I chose a career in academe primarily because I felt that I wanted to teach. I say I felt I wanted to teach because I had limited experience in teaching prior to accepting my position at Shenandoah University. I simply knew it was what I wanted to do. My own educational experience at Purdue University was excellent, and I developed a strong respect and admiration for many of my instructors and professors there. I saw their commitment to making us good students; but, more than that, I felt they wanted to make us outstanding pharmacists and future colleagues. My desire was to bring this same dedication to another group of future pharmacists. The opportunities I had to teach pharmacy students as a part of my residency experience were very rewarding and were the part of the residency I most enjoyed. Also, during my resi-

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dency, I had the opportunity to speak and give presentations at various local, state, and national events. The participants in these programs often told me that I was among the best lecturers they had experienced. People still tell me that. I am not certain what it is about my personality or my lecture style that others enjoy. It may be that I care about the content I am teaching because I feel it is essential to being a good pharmacist, but probably more importantly, I care about the students and participants I am teaching.

So, how did I choose to come to Shenandoah University? The university is located in Winchester, Virginia, which is a small town in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley of northern Virginia. I grew up approximately one hour north of the school in south central Pennsylvania. When I first started looking at faculty positions, I wanted to look in an area of the country where I had never lived. I did not want to be limited by geographical constraints. However, geography played a big part in my choosing Shenandoah over a number of other positions. Right about the time I began my search for faculty positions, my stepfather was diagnosed with renal cell carcinoma. It was important to me that I was close by to spend time with him and support my mother and younger brother during this very difficult period.

I did not expect there to be much of an adjustment period because I had been in this area of the country for most of my life, but there certainly was. The biggest adjustment was moving from a university of approximately 40,000 students to one with just a few thousand. I missed, and still miss, the home football Saturdays at Ross-Ade stadium, the basketball games at Mackey Arena, the Co-Rec gymnasium complex where I exercised with friends, the constant buzz of activity that exists at large universities, and the many choices available when you are trying to find something to do in the evening and on weekends. Winchester and Shenandoah University do not offer these options, but there are advantages to small schools also. I will expound on these advantages later. Just to let you know, Shenandoah has recently fielded a football team. This does not exactly make up for all of the activities I miss, but it is an initial step in the right direction.

In addition to everything that I was considering, I had to consider the needs of my wife. Like me, she grew up in south central Pennsylvania, so she was looking forward to being close to her family again. However, she had also established herself in Indiana. She is an elementary teacher and was teaching at a school located in a rural town just outside of Lafayette. She really enjoyed the children and the parents she worked with there. If any of you have experience or spouses with experience in find-

ing an elementary teaching position, you know it is no easy task. At the time we moved, she had applied for teaching positions in Winchester and the surrounding areas but had not received any interview invitations or offers. I suppose that any time you leave an area you make sacrifices; so, based on all the considerations, we felt that it was the best decision for us at that time. The people I had met at the interview at Shenandoah were great, and I knew that I would be able to start teaching right away. These were the aspects I focused on as we packed our bags and moved from Indiana to Virginia.

Teaching is basically all I knew academe to be when I started because it was all I had ever seen. As a student and resident, I did not have the opportunity to witness what goes on behind the scenes. I walked into my office on the first day of my new job and started to write the lectures I would be delivering in the first couple weeks of the fall semester. I remember thinking to myself that this was a pretty good deal—writing lectures and teaching them to students. What was I going to do with all the spare time? I have always enjoyed autonomy because I usually have no trouble finding productive ways to keep myself busy. In fact, this was one consideration in choosing a smaller, teaching-focused school. I felt I would have more opportunity to determine for myself what was important. In general, I still believe this is true and is something worth considering when searching for the school with the best fit. Writing those initial lectures, I had no idea that there is so much involved in being a faculty member. It did not take me long to realize that teaching is only one component of the job. It will always be the most important component to me, but there is also research, school and university service, developing relationships with other faculty members, and student advising and mentoring. I soon found that the free time had disappeared (partly because of my inherent inability to say no to opportunities and challenges) and that the task became balancing all the demands for time and energy that are placed on a faculty member. I hope my description of the different aspects of my position will allow new faculty members to achieve the balance that I am still looking for. In addition, I hope it allows senior faculty and administrators to identify areas where they can provide support for new faculty.

At Shenandoah, the faculty members teach a wide array of courses reflecting their vast diversity of expertise. There is a strong emphasis on quality teaching at the school and the university. This is evidenced by the fact that there are numerous awards at both levels for quality teaching (School Teacher of the Year, University Student Government citations, etc.) and relatively few research-based rewards. Also, a good

teaching record as defined by peer and student evaluation is required for promotion at the university. I have heard from some of my new faculty colleagues across the country that they were not required to teach didactic lectures during their first semester or even first year in their position. That was not the case for me. I arrived at the school on July 20, 1998, with the expectation that I would be delivering 6 hours of lectures for the gastrointestinal module in 1 month.

Preparing lectures for the classroom at Shenandoah is slightly different than what is required at most schools. All of our course materials, including handouts and slides, are posted on the World Wide Web for the students to access. This is convenient for the students and faculty, but it does require some additional preparation, including entering your lectures into defined web-based templates and handling web copyright issues. When I started, I felt like I was technologically savvy. I soon realized that there is a big difference between word processing and web authoring.

Most often, I teach in the integrated care sequence of courses. This is similar to the traditional therapeutics courses offered at most schools, except that pharmacology and medicinal chemistry are integrated with pharmacotherapeutics into one course. Integrated care (ICARE) is broken down by disease states or organ systems into 11 smaller courses (e.g., neurosensory, infectious disease). I teach approximately 20 to 30 classroom hours each semester in these courses. In addition, I lecture in some of the Pharmacy Administration courses and facilitate one or two sections of the ICARE laboratory and two of our Nontraditional Doctor of Pharmacy teams. All of this adds up to approximately 8 to 10 hours per week of actual classroom time.

Until recently, I was responsible for serving as a liaison between all of the school's community pharmacy rotation sites and preceptors and the Chair of the Department of Pharmacy Practice. Recently, I was asked to begin precepting students in a community clinical rotation at a Rite Aid pharmacy close to the school. I will be assigned two students per six-week rotation block. I will work with the students to manage patients with a number of primary care disease states such as asthma and diabetes. Any faculty member who has ever precepted students knows that the majority of the time spent at the practice site with students present is spent teaching in some form. I estimate I will spend approximately two days per week with the students at the rotation site.

This probably sounds like quite a bit of time spent teaching, but it is just the right amount for me. It allows the students to get to know my teaching style and my expectations while allowing me to get to know

them in a didactic as well as experiential setting. My style of teaching in the classroom and in the practice setting has been described by many students as “demanding but fair.” In general, I agree with this assessment. I try to present the most current information in a way that is interesting and stimulating. I put quite a bit of time and energy into my didactic and experiential teaching. In return, I expect the students to put at least the same amount of effort into learning the material and applying it.

I think my teaching philosophy is well exemplified in a quotation I was given that now permanently resides above my computer monitor. It is from Ronda Beamon and reads, “Teaching is about igniting that flame, that desire of students to learn for themselves, not you. To do this work of learning because it means something in their life, not yours.” I realize that many will feel this is idealistic for today’s student. I have not found this to be the case. I am careful to explain to the students my expectations of them and what their expectations of me should be. By setting the ground rules up front, a tremendous amount of respect between us is established. For the most part, this respect is reflected in the performance of the student. This is not to say that every student in every class or every rotation will perform up to your expectations because that is certainly not the case. But, most give me their best effort because they realize they are receiving my best, and I am willing to accept that.

There are a few pointers I can provide from my personal experience to help anyone who is anxious about their initial classroom experiences. First, organization is infinitely more important than quantity. Believe it or not, there is no student who is going to learn everything there is to know about every topic. In organizing your lectures, present the must-know elements in such a way that students realize the importance of those points. This is probably the biggest single change I have implemented in my first few years of teaching. I try to take a few key points or ideas, teach them until I am sure the students understand them, and then fill in the remaining time with other, less essential, but still important content.

This brings me to another aspect of teaching that I was not particularly prepared for as a new faculty member: grading. I strongly feel that this is an area of academics that does not receive nearly enough attention. As a pharmacy student, I was keenly aware of my grades, and this focus on grades has not changed in the few years that I have been out of pharmacy school. However, one thing that is different in just those few years is the expectations of the students. This difference in expectation may be explained by a difference in academic settings or the students

themselves, but it has become apparent that average is no longer acceptable to the students. When I was in school, it was expected that some students would receive *A* grades, some would receive *F* grades, and most would receive grades somewhere in between. The current perception is that a *C* grade is not acceptable. In speaking with colleagues around the country, I have found that this perception is not unique to Shenandoah. I do not believe in and do not abide by this philosophy. The definition of a *C* grade is and has always been average. I explain to my students that being average in a classroom of very intelligent people taking professional-level courses is not something of which to be ashamed. In fact, it is something of which they should be proud. Of course, not every student buys into this wisdom, but by explaining this to the students, I have greatly decreased the number of complaints I receive at the end of a course. I find no joy at all in issuing a sub-par grade to a student. However, we are teaching students who will be health professionals. We are training students who are going to be taking care of our friends, spouses, parents, and children. In my opinion, we have a duty to ensure that these students are capable and competent.

I feel peer mentoring and evaluation are very important to optimal performance as a faculty member. In my postgraduate training, I received excellent mentoring from my residency advisors. I owe much of my desire to be a dedicated pharmacist and educator to them. I consider myself a self-starter, and I did not require frequent guidance or encouragement. However, it was comforting to know that my mentors were there if I needed them. One of my mentors, who also served as my residency director, performed regular periodic evaluations of my performance. I was also evaluated by the students I precepted. At Shenandoah, I continue to be evaluated by students in the classroom, but we have no formal mentoring system or peer evaluation system in place. Although I feel student evaluation is important, I do not think it should be the only method used for evaluation. In general, my experience has been that students tend to penalize demanding instructors or those who grade stringently. Instructors should not be punished for the demands that they place on students. In addition to formal peer evaluation, I think all schools should have a formal mentoring program, with a senior faculty member assigned as a mentor to provide guidance. Most new faculty members have limited experience in the classroom, and it would be helpful to receive tips from someone seasoned in classroom teaching. The mentor could serve as a research mentor for the junior faculty member as well.

Overall, teaching was the reason that I chose a career in academe, and it is the reason I will stay for some time. Yes, you have issues that develop with students. Sometimes you even have conflicts with other faculty. But, when you are standing in front of the class teaching a particularly difficult topic and you see on the students' faces that they understand—you see that “flame of learning”—it is all worthwhile.

I really did not have a good understanding of what was meant by “service” until I started at the school. As most of you know, service is work that a faculty member performs for the benefit of the school, university, profession of pharmacy, or community. These activities contribute to the professional growth of faculty members and students. At Shenandoah, we have a relatively small faculty, so each new faculty member usually has the opportunity to serve on a committee at the school level if he or she so desires. Since standing committees for the school and university for upcoming academic years are formed in the previous May, new faculty members may not get to serve on these committees, but there are many ad hoc and search committees formed throughout the year on which a new faculty member can serve. Service is a necessary component of productivity and is considered when one is evaluated for promotion at the school. However, there are no service-based rewards at the school level and very few at the university level. Over the past two years, I have been involved with the Faculty Affairs Committee, the Student-Faculty Liaison Committee, the Nontraditional Doctor of Pharmacy Experiential Committee, and a number of ad hoc and search committees.

The work of the Faculty Affairs Committee at Shenandoah has been fairly intensive because the school is relatively new and is still developing many of the policies and procedures that established schools have had more time to develop. This committee represents the entire faculty for the school and advocates for faculty welfare. Activities of this committee have included the development of promotion criteria for the school, the implementation of experiential evaluation forms for our students on rotation, and the revision and implementation of classroom evaluation forms that are used by the students to evaluate the faculty of the school. Many other issues are brought to the committee by the faculty.

The Student-Faculty Liaison Committee addresses unique and challenging situations. The charge of this committee is to hear cases on student conduct upon complaint of faculty or others. Although the work of this committee is not as intensive as that of the Faculty Affairs Committee, it is difficult because it often involves levying sanctions upon stu-

dents in the school. Although committee work in general can be time consuming and demanding on a professional and personal level, I enjoy it because it gives me the opportunity to work side by side with the other faculty of the school. My fellow faculty members were the main reason I chose to come to Shenandoah University.

The collegiality among the faculty at Shenandoah has been everything I could ask for and more. When I accepted the position, I was concerned about developing relationships with my colleagues. Everyone seemed personable at the interview, but I did not really know anyone. It was incredibly helpful to be starting with other new faculty in my department. I realize not everyone will have this luxury when starting an academic position, but it was nice for all of us to get our feet wet together.

Approximately one month after I arrived at the school, a two-day faculty/staff retreat was held away from the school. This went a long way toward building a collegial climate among faculty and staff. In fact, if there is one recommendation I would make to deans or department chairs looking to enhance relationships among faculty, it is to have an overnight retreat away from campus. The year after that initial retreat, we had a two-day retreat at the school, and it did not seem to establish the fellowship that the gathering away from campus did.

In addition to having good social relationships with my fellow faculty members, we have mutually beneficial professional relationships as well. I am often called on to do a lecture in another faculty member's course if the topic is within my areas of expertise. Likewise, I feel comfortable asking other faculty members to provide expertise in my courses. Much of the research currently being conducted at the school is in conjunction with other faculty members, both within the same department and among other departments. There is seldom a competitive nature to these projects, and they end up being great learning experiences for all involved.

This brings me to my research. Like many clinical practitioners finishing a practice residency, this is the part of this position I feared most. Shenandoah is a non-tenure-track university, but research is still required for promotion. From what I have seen, it is similar to a number of the pharmacy schools located at smaller private colleges and universities. In general, these schools tend to focus on service and teaching for promotion more and focus on research less. At first, this made me comfortable. However, after some thought, I realized that the chances of spending my entire career at Shenandoah were very slim. It is not that I do not like being here, but people tend to move on. I needed to think

about what would be required of faculty in my position at other schools that have a greater emphasis on research. What if I someday wanted to be hired and promoted at one of these schools? I encourage all new faculty members to think about this possibility as they develop a research plan, especially if they are at an institution that does not place a heavy emphasis on research. Start thinking about a research agenda soon after you start your new faculty career.

It did not take me long to realize that the time I would be able to dedicate to research would be an important consideration. When compared with the amount of time spent in the classroom, the extra time spent with students outside the classroom, and the time spent in school and university service, research time is fairly limited. I decided to focus my research in the area of practice-based research. This worked out well for me initially for a number of reasons. First, this is the only type of research I had ever conducted. Second, I would be able to use the students on rotation and the pharmacists I worked with at the practice sites to help conduct the research. Finally, and most importantly to me at the time, there was and still is very little clinical research in the area of community pharmacy. I had met many community pharmacists who were delivering innovative and highly successful care to patients, but few of them had the time and/or the desire to publish what they were doing. I decided to focus my research efforts on disease management programs conducted in community pharmacies.

To get started with this effort, I developed an asthma disease management program designed to be delivered to patients in community pharmacies and ambulatory care clinics. I identified Kroger as a company that wanted to implement the program in its pharmacies. Kroger is a large grocery store chain with community pharmacies located within many of its stores. I oriented its pharmacists to the program in a two-day continuing education session at the company's regional headquarters. At approximately the same time, I oriented our students who had been assigned to do their community clinical rotations at Kroger to the program. The primary objective of the program was to show improvement in clinical and humanistic outcomes in patients being managed by the pharmacists and students. Patient results are still being collected and tabulated at this time, but preliminary results look positive.

Not long after this program was initiated, a colleague from Shenandoah and a pharmacy resident joined me to author a grant proposal for a project that would demonstrate the effectiveness of diabetes disease management in an independent community pharmacy. Again, the objective was to improve clinical and humanistic outcomes in the patients. We

submitted a grant proposal to the Institute for the Advancement of Community Pharmacy for the project early this year. Recently, we received the news that the grant had been funded, and the project will be initiated soon.

In addition to practice-based research, I have had the opportunity to engage in research on educational strategies as well. I worked with two other faculty colleagues at the school in an effort to determine if preadmission indicators such as quantitative PCAT scores, performance on a basic math skills assessment test, demographic, and scholastic information were useful as a gauge of basic math skills for entering Doctor of Pharmacy candidates. This investigation was submitted for publication. Also, together with three other faculty members at the school, I submitted an article discussing how technological advances such as the Internet and synchronous chat have influenced pharmacy education. I have found that much of my writing takes place during semester breaks when there are few or no students at the school.

Probably the greatest surprise I have had in my current position to this point is that I really enjoy the research and writing I have done. As my practice site becomes more established and the developmental work of a new school begins to settle down, I look forward to spending more time in these endeavors. For now, I feel that the time that I have had to devote to this work has not been optimal, but I have been able to get some work done. I have found my department chair and the other administrators at the school to be extremely supportive of my research ideas. They have always encouraged me to pursue my interests. Keep in mind that most of the research I have completed does not require the purchase of expensive equipment and requires very little overhead to conduct. I cannot speculate on how these factors would affect the support I currently receive from the school's administration.

As you can see from my brief descriptions, the environment for collaboration among faculty members at the school is very good. We call on one another to contribute in areas of an individual strength, similarly to the way we call on one another to contribute in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, there is little feeling of competition. We tend to abide by the rule that the person who does the most work for a project is the first listed author, and the person who does the least amount of work is the author listed last. Due to the size and focus of the school and the university, I do not have graduate students to contribute to my research or writing. This somewhat limits the number of projects I can be involved in at any given time, but it allows me to completely focus my efforts in areas that are most interesting to me.

One resource that remains underutilized at this time is collaborative research with other health professions at the university. Shenandoah University has schools of nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, and a physician's assistant program. There are many opportunities for the pharmacy faculty to engage in interdepartmental research, and I encourage all who read this article to investigate similar opportunities at their schools. Research is the aspect of my position that I feared most when I accepted my position, but it is an aspect that I have found extremely rewarding and exciting. I encourage new faculty to start their research programs in areas that interest them and expand interests from that point. Also, do not hesitate to ask other faculty members for help if it is an area within their expertise. By engaging in collaborative research, I have accomplished much more than I would have if I had tried to conduct research all on my own.

Although some of my reflections on the first two years as a faculty member are unique, many of the fears and triumphs I have experienced are similar to those of my colleagues across the country. No, not everyone has had to address the sadness of losing a loved one or the anticipation and joy associated with a spouse starting a new career (second-grade teacher in Winchester) or the birth of a son (Daniel 7/18/99), but we all started with the ambiguity associated with not being sure what we were supposed to be doing because we were new at the position. Now, most of us have the feeling of not being sure what to do now because there is not enough time in the day. I am looking forward to spending more time in academe. I find great satisfaction in pursuing a career where I am continually challenged to learn new information and generate new ideas, develop expertise in these areas, and pass that expertise on to the students I teach. I was especially proud in May 1999 when the first group of pharmacy graduates in the history of Shenandoah University crossed the stage. As they were receiving their diplomas, I found myself asking whether I had given my best for these students. Were they, in fact, the health care providers I wanted taking care of my family and friends? I am proud of the answer that I was able to give, and I look forward to answering that question affirmatively for many years to come.