

EVALUATION OF THE OFFICER AND CHAIR TRANSITION PROCESS OF A STUDENT ORGANIZATION AT A DOCTOR OF PHARMACY PROGRAM: BUILDING BETTER LEADERS

RACHEL BASINGER, PHARM.D, BCACP, CTTS, DIPACLM
EDWIN SILVA GUTIERREZ
TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Leadership is taught in the doctorate of pharmacy curriculum, but the majority of leadership development is sharpened through a student's active participation in professional student organizations. A survey was conducted to identify areas for improvement in the current transition process of a student organization at a doctor of pharmacy program in Dallas, Texas. The survey included both incoming and outgoing officers and chairs of an organization with a total participation of 22 out of 24 officers and chairs. Results revealed moderate preparedness of outgoing leadership, strong advisor support, and optimism from the incoming leadership. Students stepping into their new roles felt more prepared than their predecessors did when they started the position. Both groups commented that a more structured training meeting and ensuring training resources are up to date would improve the transition process.

Leadership development is the cornerstone of professional growth in healthcare education, especially when early experiences shape future roles in clinical practice. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) requires all pharmacy programs to incorporate several competency areas into their doctoral curriculum. These competencies include medical knowledge, patient care, communication skills, system-based practice, professionalism, problem solving, practice-based learning, and critical thinking¹. Leadership is taught in the doctorate of pharmacy curriculum touching on several of the above-mentioned competencies, but most of the leadership development is sharpened through a student's active participation in professional organizations. Pharmacy students that are involved in professional organizations often assume leadership positions that demand time management, delegation, and strategic skills planning.

Prior research shows that structured leadership training enhances student confidence, role clarity, and long-term leadership engagement. However, poorly coordinated leadership transitions can lead to burnout, loss of continuity, and diminished organizational performance. Lack of training can hinder the growth of students leading to feelings of inadequacy or failure.^{2,3}

Phi Delta Chi, a student organization at a doctor of pharmacy program in Dallas, Texas established in 2020, has a leadership transition process. In this organization, all officers and chairs are elected at the end of the spring semester to serve the following year. During the year, these officers and chairs are required to update the documentation for their position as resources in a shared Google Drive. Furthermore, each officer and chair are required to host an individual training meeting with their successor. The structure of the shared resource folder and training meeting is determined by the outcoming officer or chair. In addition, the university and school hosts training sessions to review general student organization policies and procedures. This training is required for all officers and advisors and optional for chairs of any organization.

Despite the various resources available, both internal and provided by the school, the transition of leadership from one year to the next has been found wanting. Leadership has asked for a better process, but there has not been a formalized review of the strengths and weaknesses of the procedure. The present study evaluated the current leadership transition processes of this student organization to identify strengths and areas for improvement in the overall process.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional survey-based design with two parallel surveys distributed to 2024-2025 outgoing and 2025-2026 incoming officers and chairs. The survey was delivered electronically via email and open from May 13, 2025 until May 30, 2025. This time frame was chosen to capture outgoing officers and chairs at the end of their tenure and before the newly elected officers and chairs assumed their roles. Terms of office in this student organization extend from the start of the summer semester to the conclusion of the spring semester. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. All elected and appointed officers and chairs were eligible to participate in the survey and there were no exclusions.

The survey included both quantitative and qualitative items, consistent with previous student survey-based studies, as well as additional questions developed by the study organizers.^{4,5} The surveys were tailored to the experience of each group. With more experience to comment on, the outgoing leadership survey was slightly longer with 15 versus only 10 questions for the incoming leadership survey. The quantitative measures used a 5-point Likert scale to assess different domains for outgoing participants included preparedness, feeling of success, feeling supported, responsivity as compared to other organizations, collaboration and chapter advisor support. Higher numbers on the Likert scale represented positive response to the various questions. For incoming leadership, the Likert scale was used to assess domains that included understanding of their position and responsibilities, rating the transition process, and the feeling of being supported from the chapter advisor. The qualitative questions for outgoing leadership included open-ended questions about their transition meeting, what they wish they knew before starting, advice for new leadership, and ideas for improving the chapter or transition process. For the incoming leadership, the qualitative questions included previous leadership experience, inspiration to accept this leadership position, about their transition meeting, and what resources are missing or needed. Both surveys also included free response section for general comments as depicted in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. *Questions asked to outgoing leadership*

How prepared did you feel to take on your leadership role at the beginning of your term?
Did you have an official transition meeting with the previous officer or chair? If Not, why not?
Were there other resources, trainings, or individuals that helped you succeed in your role? If so what where those resources, trainings or individuals?
How challenging was it to be successful in your position?
How often were you provided the support when you needed assistance to complete the duties of your office?
Describe one accomplishment from your term that you are especially proud of.
What do you wish you had known at the start of your term?
How does leadership responsibilities of your position compare to other pharmacy organization workload that you have been a part of?
How well did you collaborate with other officers and chairs?

How supported did you feel by your Chapter Advisor(s)?
How has serving in this role impact your personal or professional development?
What advice would you give to Brothers considering leadership in Phi Delta Chi?
Are there any changes or improvements you recommend for how this role operates in the future?
What leadership or operational resources would you recommend the Chapter provide to future officers or chairs?
Please share any other comments:

Table 2. Questions asked to incoming leadership

What previous leadership positions have you served in Phi Delta Chi or other professional organizations or employment?
What inspired you to run for this position?
What personal or professional skills are you hoping to develop through this leadership role?
Did you have an official transition meeting with the previous officer or chair? If no why not?
How would you rate the transition process into your new role so far?
Do you feel like you have a clear understanding of the expectations for your position?
How confident are you in your understanding of the expectations for your position?
What resources or guidance do you feel you are missing or still need?
How supported do you feel by your Chapter Advisor?
Please share any other comments:

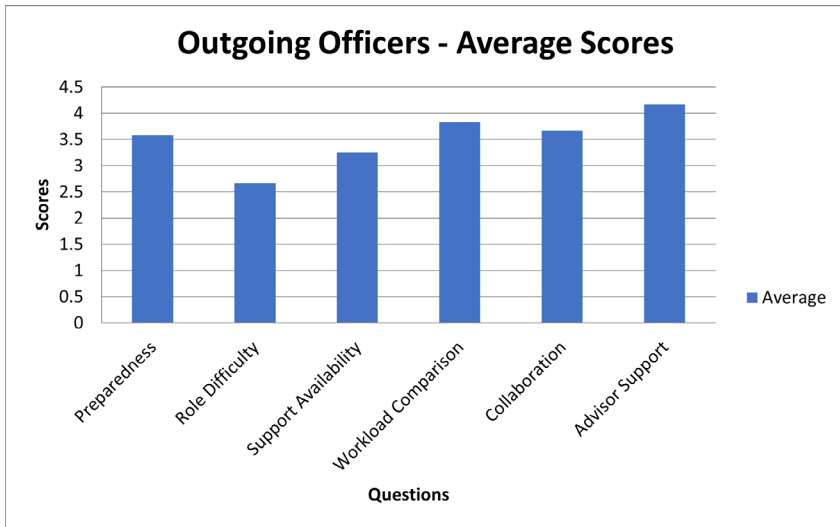
RESULTS

A total of 24 students were invited to complete the survey. Participants included first through fourth year (P1–P4) pharmacy students and most of them were female. All the outgoing leadership responded ($n=12$; 100%) while two of the incoming officers did not respond to the survey ($n=10$; 83.3%). The total response rate was 91.6%.

The quantitative categories for outgoing officers that were neutral trending positive were for preparedness, support when needed, workload

compared to other organizations, and collaborations with others. Advisor support ranked highest with agree to strongly agreed. Difficulty of the role ranked the lowest with average score indicating the roles were challenging. See figure 1.

Figure 1. Average Likert score categories for outgoing leadership

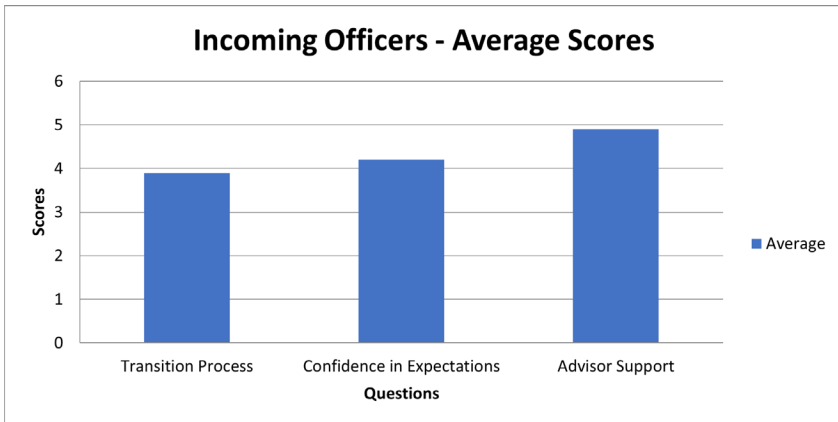


The outgoing leadership reflected on their terms with a seeming mix of pride and lessons learned. Many pointed to accomplishments such as clearing chapter debt, expanding recruitment, hosting successful fundraisers, and improving reporting systems. They acknowledged that while they each had a transition meeting with their predecessor and access to helpful resources, the support they received from one another could at times feel inconsistent with workloads heavier than expected. Several wished they had known more about their position and how to properly execute their ideas such as planning fundraisers, managing paperwork, and the challenges of engaging members. Perceived limited understanding of roles and inadequate training resulted in several comments regarding burn out. Student leaders felt inadequately ready to fulfil their duties. In addition, lack of involvement by others made their effort feel unappreciated. Despite these hurdles, they emphasized the positive impact leadership had on their personal and professional growth, including conflict resolution, teamwork, and confidence-building. Their advice to future leaders was

centered on persistence, teamwork, asking for help when needed, and ensuring clearer roles and outlines with a stronger support system.

The ratings for the incoming leadership regarding the transition process, confidence in meeting expectations, and advisor support were all ranked positive. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Average Likert score categories for incoming leadership



The incoming leadership reported having a wide range of past leadership backgrounds from no prior experience to having been a leader in multiple other organizations before. Many were inspired to run out of passion for the organization, encouragement from their peers, and their desire to strengthen their leadership and communication skills. They felt confident and supported in their new positions, with all those that participated in the survey noting they had transition meetings and understood their role and expectations. The skills most often given for possible growth included communication, collaboration, and presentation abilities. Most felt they had access to adequate resources, though a few noted challenges navigating shared drives and accessing documents. In general, the new leadership expressed a strong sense of clarity, motivation, and optimism for their new leadership position.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals both strengths and weaknesses in leadership transition within a professional pharmacy organization. Advisor support emerged as a consistent strength, though slightly higher with the incoming

than the outgoing leadership. Mentorship has been previously identified as an important and central to leadership identity development.⁴ The qualitative findings highlighted the need for a more structured leadership transition meeting to enhance organization continuity and increased leadership performance. Clarity in roles, expectations, and proactive mentorship have been associated with stronger leadership outcome.⁶ Shared resources were identified as important but insufficient onboarding on where to find and how to use these resources limited their effectiveness.

Burnout was another notable theme. Leadership reported difficulty balancing organizational responsibilities with academic demands as stressful and very difficult. Burnout could be a contributing factor to skewing a student's feeling of accomplishment and success. Addressing burnout requires both academic institutional and student organizational support. Cultivating a culture that values healthy school-life balance would be important not only to the student's individual success but that of the student organization.

Based on the survey outcomes, potential improvements include implementing a standardized check list for transition meetings, ongoing leadership development workshops, and creation of role-specific handbooks. In addition, education to better understand the roles of fellow officers, chairs, and committees may help identify areas for collaboration to enhance feelings of community and share workloads to potentially reduce the chance of burnout.

The study strengths included the combination of a qualitative Likert scale and qualitative open-ended responses. These types of questions allowed for both measurable trends and deeper insights into the leadership transition process. Including both the incoming and outgoing leadership provided a more holistic view of leadership from two different perspectives. A high response rate also shows that the information gathered is representative of the organization's leadership.

The study did have limitations as well. It was conducted at a single pharmacy organization on a single campus. The pharmacy program included in this study has four separate regional campuses in which students attending the Dallas campus tend to commute for school. Organizations

with members that live closer to campus and spend more time with each other may have more face-to-face communication opportunities. However, with more pharmacy schools expanding to regional campuses or hybrid online programs, student organizations utilizing virtual meetings and communication is expanding and the barriers identified in this study may be applicable to these types of programs. Other limitations include small sample size which limits the generalizability of the results. There is also the potential for biases with self-reporting questionnaires. Since the information was deidentified, there is no ability to rule out individual confounding factors that may have contributed to individual hurdles or success. The experiences of each individual year and the personality of each person greatly effect the transition meeting held and a survey of one year may not capture organizational strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, the study was also cross-sectional so progressions overtime could not be measured.

CONCLUSION

The study provided valuable insight into student perception of the leadership transition process for this organization. Overall, the transition process has several features that were found to be helpful, such as access to resources and required transition meetings with the outgoing and incoming officer or chair. However, these same strengths of the process were also noted to be areas of greatest improvement as well. This single organization-single center study is a great starting point for taking a deeper look into how student organizations can develop pharmacy leaders and promote adequate training during the transition period. Future studies should include multiple organizations, and longitudinal data collection to show any positive or negative changes over time.

REFERENCES

1. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education. (2025). *Accreditation standards and key elements for the professional program in pharmacy leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy degree* ("Standards 2025"), <https://www.acpe-accredit.org/pdf/ACPEStandards2025.pdf>
2. Martin, J. E., & Williams-Diehm, K. (2013). Student engagement and leadership of the transition planning process. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 36(1), 43–50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143413476545>
3. Gaufin J.R., Kennedy K.I., Struthers E.D. (2010) Practical and affordable ways to cultivate leadership in your organization. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*, 16(2), 156-161. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0b013e3181c8cb63>
4. Komives, S. R., Owen, J. E., Longersbeam, S. D., Mainella, F. C., & Osteen, L. (2005). Developing a leadership identity: A grounded theory. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(6), 593–611. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0061>
5. Posner, B. Z. (2012). *Effectively measuring student leadership*. *Administrative Sciences*, 2(4), 221–234. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci2040221>
6. Wang, X., Wang, M., & Xu, F. (2022). The role of synergistic interplay among proactive personality, leader creativity expectations, and role clarity in stimulating employee creativity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.699411>