On Academics

TEACHING EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC HEALTH: A CALL TO ACTION

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> "'Publish or perish' is the mantra of faculty members at most major universities nationwide. While research and its resulting publications are vital to [universities], teaching excellence must be, too. But unfortunately, that is not always the case—especially in professional schools that rely on 'soft' money, salary funding that individual researchers raise for themselves through grants."[1]
>
> —David Kleinbaum, first recipient of the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH)/ Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence

In a period of evolving expectations, shrinking budgets, and expanding student enrollments, the traditional balance of the "three-legged stool" of teaching, research, and service may be shifting emphasis from teaching to research as a faculty priority. Barondess notes:

> . . . the American academic health center emerged from a tradition that bound research, teaching, and patient care. In recent decades, major changes in its faculty array and activities have been generated by extramural funding patterns that have emphasized the research functions of the faculty and, more recently, subspecialty care by faculty members, to the detriment of teaching functions and of immersion in major health care and health promotion issues. The latter are arising more prominently in the public agenda than in the academic agenda.[2]

This is not to suggest that quality teaching is not interdependent with a faculty member's research and service efforts. However, in most universities, it is becoming increasingly clear to young faculty that their success as measured in promotion and tenure decisions, as well as salary, is linked to externally funded research endeavors rather than teaching excellence. This shift in priorities presents a potential threat to the teaching mission of schools and colleges of public health.

THE ASPH/PFIZER AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

In 2005, in recognition of the importance of good teaching in public health, ASPH and Pfizer, Inc. announced the establishment of the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence. The award was established to recognize graduate public health faculty from full ASPH-member accredited schools of public health for their teaching excellence. In particular, the award supports faculty who are outstanding in teaching and mentoring students toward distinction in public health research, teaching, and practice. The ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence seeks to bring visibility to one outstanding faculty member annually, and will honor that individual for excellence in teaching.[3]

Each school or college of public health may nominate one candidate; a lead faculty nominator and a secondary faculty nominator submit a form accompanied by a description and supporting evidence of the nominee's outstanding contributions in one or more of the following areas: (*1*) classroom teaching; (*2*) mentorship of students at the baccalaureate, master, and/or doctoral levels; (*3*) mentorship of faculty; (*4*) teaching outside one's university, including continuing education programs, short courses, and programs for the general public; (*5*) innovative teaching-related contributions to one's field, such as textbooks and other teaching materials; (*6*) publications and/or presentations on teaching methodology; (*7*) high-level, national leadership to improve teaching and mentoring within schools of public health; and (*8*) demonstration of a national and/or international reputation as an educator. Nominees must be currently teaching and must demonstrate a notable record of success (a minimum of 10 years in graduate and/or undergraduate public health education). In addition, a letter of support from the school of public health dean and two letters of support from students attesting to the nominee's teaching and mentorship contributions are required. An independent Award Review Committee selects the awardees.

The annual award recipient is recognized at the ASPH Annual Meeting and is awarded a $10,000 cash prize and plaque. The recipient is also invited to make a formal presentation addressing teaching excellence at the subsequent year's Academy Forum (detailed later in this article). Dr. David Kleinbaum, Professor of Epidemiology at Emory University Rollins School of Public Health in Atlanta, Georgia, was recognized as the first recipient of the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence in 2005. In 2006, Dr. Lu Ann Aday, the Lorne D. Bain Distinguished Professor in Public Health and Medicine at the University of

Texas School of Public Health in Houston, Texas, was named the second recipient of the award. In 2007, Dr. Richard Riegelman, Professor of Epidemiology—Biostatistics, Medicine, and Health Policy at The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, Washington, DC, became the third recipient. Announcement of nominations for the 2008 ASPH/Pfizer award were in March 2008 (information not available at the time of publication).

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ASPH/PFIZER ACADEMY OF DISTINGUISHED PUBLIC HEALTH TEACHERS

In an effort to sustain and expand the importance of teaching excellence in schools and colleges of public health, a group of award nominees and the first teaching award recipient formed a Steering Committee to establish the ASPH/Pfizer Academy of Distinguished Public Health Teachers. The intent of this Steering Committee was to create a forum to promote and foster excellence in teaching in ASPH-member schools. Establishment of this Academy was approved by the ASPH Board of Directors and is now supported with an additional $50,000 grant award from Pfizer, Inc.

Following initial correspondence and a conference call, the Steering Committee met on February 5, 2007, to develop the following recommendations about the form and function of the Academy of Distinguished Public Health Teachers. While at a formative stage, the founding members of the Academy have proposed an ambitious agenda that includes the following initiatives.

(*1*) Establish a mission and structure for the Academy and a selection process for membership that will broadly represent all schools of public health and their individual disciplines, and develop a definition for participation in the Academy. The Academy's defined purpose is to elevate the excellence, visibility, scholarship, and impact of learning and teaching in public health. It achieves these goals by publicly honoring faculty who excel in learning, teaching, and student mentoring; by sharing and disseminating discoveries in learning and instructional scholarship and experience; and by providing opportunities and resources to promote the role of teaching and learning among public health colleagues, programs, and schools. The Steering Committee also recommended policies for initial membership in the Academy as follows:

- Membership in the Academy is granted for a five-year term to all nominees for the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence, and membership may be renewed in five-year increments. Specific renewal criteria are to be defined later, but an emphasis will be placed on active contribution toward the activities of the Academy. Presently, 27 of the award nominees from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 award cycles have accepted membership into the Academy.
- Each annual recipient of the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence will be automatically awarded a lifetime membership in the Academy.
- In an effort to avoid discouraging schools of public health from renominating a candidate for the ASPH/Pfizer Award, schools that renominate a candidate may also nominate a second faculty member for membership in the Academy during that year.
- Those renominated for the teaching award will automatically receive an extension of their membership in the Academy so that their membership will continue for five years from the most recent nomination.
- Continued membership in the Academy will be primarily dependent on active participation in the activities sponsored by the Academy.
- An honorary membership level for faculty committed to teaching excellence, but who are not nominated for the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence, is to be considered at a later date.

(*2*) Establish an Academy Forum to create an opportunity for Academy members to meet face-to-face with one another to discuss various innovations in teaching and to network. Specific venues for the forum include an annual meeting of members. The first meeting took place at the 2007 ASPH Annual Meeting, concurrent with the Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association. The Steering Committee proposed that the recipient of the ASPH/Pfizer Teaching Award be announced during the general ASPH reception, and then be invited to speak at length during the meeting of the Academy in the following year. In 2007, this presentation was inaugurated as an open session for interested parties, and was complemented by three additional presentations by Academy members and a panel discussion. (These presentations are available at http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=1008.) Following the public session, a closed session exclusive to Academy members was held as the first business meeting and served as an opportunity for members to meet and discuss topics of interest.

(*3*) Develop a website where Academy members can share teaching-related resources.

(*4*) Manage a listserv to offer regular and timely communications among Academy members.

(*5*) Support a new column on academic excellence in *Public Health Reports* (*PHR*). The Academy provided general guidance and advice regarding the scope of the column and will assist the ASPH/*PHR* Advisory

Committee in soliciting articles. Should there be a large number of contributions to this column, the Academy will consider publication of articles online or in other venues. Publication of *From the Schools of Public Health: On Academics* began in the November/December 2007 issue of *PHR*.

(*6*) Establish and sponsor an ASPH/Pfizer Early Career in Public Health Teaching Award, which is specifically for young educators who demonstrate innovation and effectiveness in their teaching methods, but who have not yet had the time to achieve the performance levels expected of the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence winner (e.g., publications and research). Due to funding considerations, the Early Career award does not include a cash award, but does include a travel stipend for recipients to attend and be recognized at the annual ASPH meeting and Academy Forum. The winner of this award receives a one-time five-year membership in the Academy, which cannot be renewed unless they are nominated for the ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence. The first recipient of the Early Career in Public Health Teaching Award—Dr. Rob Stephenson, MSc, PhD, Assistant Professor of Global Health, Emory University Rollins School of Public Health—was recognized at the 2007 meeting.

(*7*) Explore, foster, and potentially develop funding mechanisms for the establishment of endowed teaching chair positions for faculty in public health who are outstanding teachers. The Steering Committee, along with the second and third ASPH/Pfizer Award for Teaching Excellence recipients, has agreed to act as the leadership group as the Academy of Distinguished Public Health Teachers evolves and develops a more formal structure. Activities of the Academy of Distinguished Public Health Teachers may be monitored at http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=1008.

We invite and challenge our public health colleagues to embrace the importance and quality of the educational leg of the academic three-legged stool, and to join us in elevating excellence, visibility, scholarship, and impact of learning and teaching in public health. We welcome your comments, which you can share by contacting Elizabeth M. Weist, MA, MPH, at: ASPH; tel. 202-296-1099, ext. 129; e-mail <eweist@asph.org>.

The authors thank Barbara DeBuono, MD, MPH, and Dee Santana, both of Pfizer, Inc., and Harrison C. Spencer, MD, MPH, Allison J. Foster, MBA, CAE, and Elizabeth M. Weist, MA, MPH, of the Association of Schools of Public Health for their contributions to the establishment of the Academy of Distinguished Public Health Teachers.

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