

The Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (ELAM) Program for Women Fourteen Years of Academic Women Leaders in Medicine, Dentistry, and Public Health

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In 1993, Dr. D. Walter Cohen, then president of Medical College of Pennsylvania, Dr. Patricia Cormier, vice president for institutional advancement, and Dr. Page Morahan, associate provost for faculty affairs, conducted a needs assessment of medical school deans, researched leadership programs and literature on leadership development, and began to design a program that would address the challenges of advancing women leaders in academic health centers.

At that time, there were only three women deans of medical schools and no women deans of dental schools. They knew full well that transforming the face of academic medicine by increasing the diversity of academic medical leaders would require significant culture change and persistent efforts to sustain the success of women leaders. The first class convened in September 1995 with 25 accomplished women fellows.

Fourteen years later, the program has grown tremendously and the class size has expanded from 25 to 48 fellows per year, each selected from a highly competitive pool. The program continues to support the development, advancement, and continuing success of women leaders in schools of medicine, dentistry, and, most recently, public health.

A Legacy Program

ELAM honors the legacy of the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, the first medical school for women in the U.S., and one of the schools from which Drexel University College of Medicine draws its roots. When the Female Medical College was opened in 1850, it was not unusual to hear discussions of whether women "would be able to succeed in the demanding arena of academic medicine" and whether they might be "too delicate to endure the physical requirements of clinical practice."

The graduates proved them wrong, and several took on leadership activities in Philadelphia and elsewhere. Ann Preston, M.D., a member of the first graduating class, addressed the lack of clinical facilities for the school's students and interns by establishing the Woman's Hospital of Philadelphia. When she was appointed as dean of that school, she also became the first woman dean of any medical school in the United States. Today, each class of ELAM fellows studies a complex organizational teaching case that is adapted to today's academic and health care environments to restore solvency to the "Ann Preston School of Medicine." This is one way in which the history of the women of the original Female Medical College lives on in the leadership development of contemporary women leaders.

The ELAM program is a core program of the Institute for Women's Health and Leadership, which is part of the Drexel University College of Medicine. Initial support was provided by a grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. In 1998, Patricia Kind honored the program with an endowment on behalf of herself and her mother, and the program became known as the Hedwig van Ameringen Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine Program for Women. Today, the program has a healthy

development effort that includes ongoing support from alumnae, faculty, and friends. Additionally, sustaining memberships of deans of medical, dental, and other schools support targeted efforts aimed at ELAM's graduates. The ELAM staff and faculty work closely with organizations that share its mission of leadership, including the Society for Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (SELAM International), the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), and the American Dental Education Association (ADEA).

Increase Women Leaders; Support Their Success; and Change the Culture

The first decade of ELAM focused on its primary goal to increase the number of women in leadership positions at academic health centers. In the course of this initiative, the program targets two additional goals: the sustained success of women who achieve leadership positions; and a change in the culture of academic health centers to value the contributions of women.

ELAM teaches that leadership can be exercised by anyone at any level and that every ELAM graduate can demonstrate her leadership skills and make a positive contribution to her institution regardless of the position held. At the same time, the program measures its success by the number of ELAM graduates assuming executive positions in academic medical centers. ELAM graduates now account for 22 current or past deans of medical, dental, public health, and other schools and more than 100 department chairs. Of the 15 women deans at U.S. medical schools in December 2008, five are ELAM alumnae. ELAM alumnae include presidents of two universities, provost of another, and two chief officers at the AAMC.

Curriculum for Women Leaders and Organizational Change

The design of this program for women leaders as a single-gender experience was based upon research that describes the unique circumstances of women scholars and leaders and their perceived need to develop a safe community in which they can practice new leadership behaviors and share personal stories of challenge and vulnerability without having to hold up the role model position as the "first" or "only" woman leader. Being among a community of other accomplished women leaders also enhances the sense that "If she can do that, so can I," the very important development of self-efficacy that leads to professional success. (For more on factors that sustain women's leadership see A Continuum of Leadership Development).

This innovative national program is organized around three curricular threads: organizational perspectives and knowledge (a mini-executive M.B.A.); emerging issues in leadership and academic health administration; and personal and professional development. Each thread is developed through readings, classroom instruction, on-line discussions, small group case analysis, and institutional project development. Learning is enhanced by meetings of internal learning communities and by high level mentorship from senior institutional officers. Fellows begin their lessons in early summer of each year with on-line assignments that prepare them to enter the intensive learning experience in finance and self-awareness in September. The winter session focuses on organizational culture and contemporary challenges. The program year culminates in one spring session with a Forum on Emerging Issues, at which fellows are joined by their deans for a highly interactive 1-1/2 days to explore a topic or methodology selected to add value to the deans and their institutions, as well as the fellows.

Learning communities of seven to eight fellows and a senior woman faculty advisor meet throughout the duration of the program. They open by sharing their personal career stories and discussing their leadership experiences during the first session. They then converse regularly through telephone conferences between sessions, providing peer support and advice for individual leadership development work and institutional improvement projects. They work collaboratively to facilitate on-line discussions of contemporary topics for the class and to synthesize and analyze information from their interviews with chief institutional officers. While they explore effective ways of working in groups, they share strategies for managing their personal and professional challenges and growth. After graduation, many alumnae maintain close contact as they help one another weigh professional development opportunities, deal with managerial crises, and celebrate life's many breakthroughs.

The Proof Is in the Outcomes

While ELAM fellows and their deans calculate the program benefits based on their personal experiences during and after their participation, ELAM has long placed emphasis on a scholarly, scientific approach to program evaluation. ELAM is the only national leadership development program in academic medicine that has conducted extensive research on its efficacy. A longitudinal study in [Academic Medicine](#) found that ELAM alumnae achieved significantly greater scores on 12 of 15 established leadership indicators, compared to women who had not sought formal leadership training (Morahan, 2008). Another study showed that deans of U.S. and Canadian medical schools who had more ELAM fellows in leadership positions in their schools reported greater benefit to their institutions ($p = .01$). (Morahan, 2009) In 2006, nearly half of all U.S. and Canadian medical and dental schools had three or more ELAM participants, while almost 20% had more than six participants per school. Deans also reported that the ELAM program had a very positive influence on its alumnae, increasing their eligibility for promotion.

Leadership Development after ELAM

ELAM alumnae have ample opportunity to enhance their leadership education and strengthen their community of practice (within and beyond their own class group to other ELAM classes' members) in several ways. One is through ELAM itself, which maintains close ties with its graduates, posting weekly announcements of open senior-level positions, circulating newsworthy items, hosting ELAM-wide reunions at AAMC and ADEA, making available resources for those seeking new positions or solutions to thorny issues, and so on. The other is through the Society for Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine (SELAM International), a hybrid organization that functions, in part, as an alumnae organization and also welcomes non-ELAM members. SELAM also offers continuing education workshops, publishes an electronic newsletter, and provides a platform for professional networking.

The longevity of and continuing demand for the program provides strong evidence of substantial need to retain focused attention on the increasing number of women faculty prepared for reaching and succeeding in leadership positions. Therefore, until we achieve equity in our institutions, ELAM intends to hold fast to its goals and programs.

References Describing the Outcomes and Impact of ELAM

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