A Marketing Plan for Recruiting Students into Pharmacy School-Based Graduate Programs. A Report[1,2]

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INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the Recruitment Issues Subcommittee of AACP's Social and Administrative Sciences (SAS) Graduate Programs Standards Committee was given a task to develop a marketing plan to recruit students into pharmacy school-based graduate programs in the social and administrative sciences (*e.g.*, healthcare ethics, health services research, management, marketing, pharmacoeconomics, psychology and sociology). The subcommittee, composed of SAS faculty and students enrolled in pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs, proceeded to develop a plan that incorporates many but not necessarily all of the elements of a formal marketing plan(1). The impetus behind the development of this marketing plan was to identify immediate and explicit steps for increasing the number of students applying to and graduating from pharmacy school-based graduate programs in the social and administrative sciences.

The competitive nature of the market for pharmacy graduates in North America is making it increasingly difficult to attract qualified candidates for graduate education. In part, this difficulty is due to the wide range of alternatives available to pharmacy graduates who would be potential graduate school candidates. Pharmacy graduates are in great demand for entry-level pharmacist positions at very competitive starting salaries. Alternatively, students who wish to continue their education after pharmacy school can choose from residencies, fellowships, or other graduate programs leading to master or doctoral degrees in the basic and pharmaceutical sciences (MS/PhD), Business Administration (MBA/DBA), Health Administration (MHA) or Public Health (MPH/DPH), as well as other programs. Pharmacy schools wishing to attract qualified graduate students may benefit from systematic marketing efforts both at the school and Association levels.

This paper outlines a marketing plan for recruiting students into pharmacy school-based graduate programs, hereafter referred to as SAS graduate programs. Although recruitment of graduate students into Social and Administrative Sciences programs is emphasized, many of the considerations discussed are applicable to the recruiting efforts by AACP's other Academic Sections as well. The remaining sections of this report: (*i*) address challenges and opportunities when recruiting graduate students; (*ii*) discuss the need to clearly define the "product" that graduate programs are trying to sell to potential students; (*iii*) profile the types of students appropriate for graduate education; (*iv*) identify which groups of students should be pursued by pharmacy school graduate programs; (*v*) compare SAS graduate programs to other opportunities for graduate study; (*vi*) propose promotional strategies for SAS graduate programs; and (*vii*) suggest assessment approaches for measuring the performance of the marketing strategies adopted.

RECRUITING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges in Recruiting Pharmacy Graduates

Many barriers exist to attracting pharmacy students into graduate programs. One challenge is competing with employers for pharmacy school graduates. Another is differentiating pharmacy graduate education from other postgraduate educational opportunities. These challenges are compounded by potential candidates' lack of understanding about the process of graduate education or career opportunities resulting from a graduate degree. These challenges are detailed in this section.

The shortage of pharmacists in the current employment market has resulted in very high salaries for new graduates. Immediately upon licensure, new pharmacists in some geographic locations can command salaries on par with those earned by full professors at many of the nation's schools and colleges of pharmacy(2). The allure of high salaries is enhanced by the large student loan debt loads accumulated by many pharmacy graduates by the time of graduation. Asking students to incur an additional 2-5 years of debt by attending graduate school can be a hard path to sell. Exacerbating this situation is the fact that a newly-minted, PhD-trained SAS faculty member with a full-time, calendar-year appointment can expect to start out earning only 66-75 percent of the starting salaries offered entry-level pharmacists by some national chain pharmacies(2). These circumstances translate into significant opportunity costs for pharmacists to continue their education in graduate programs.

In addition, financial issues play a role when students consider competing postgraduate educational opportunities. Residencies and fellowships are two alternatives to graduate school which offer higher stipends than most graduate programs. Residency and fellowship stipends typically range from $20,000 to $35,000 per year while stipends offered to graduate students generally range between $10,000 and $16,000 annually.

Issues unrelated to finances need to be addressed when marketing graduate education programs. One challenge is a lack of understanding about the social and administrative sciences among pharmacy students. Anecdotal reports from SAS faculty members indicate that professional students often question the relevance of SAS courses to pharmacy practice. This perceived lack of relevance and resulting disinterest in SAS courses as undergraduates may contribute to a lack of pharmacist interest in pharmacy-related SAS graduate programs or careers.

Another concern is that many potential graduate students are not

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ready for graduate school. Some graduates have a passionate desire to enter the job market after completing a challenging six or seven-year professional program. Other graduates may lack the maturity necessary to succeed in graduate school. Both types of students may be better served by gaining pharmacy practice and life experience after graduation rather than going straight from their undergraduate pharmacy program into graduate school.

Challenges in Recruiting Nonpharmacy Graduates

Students do not have to graduate from pharmacy school to enter into a pharmacy school-based SAS graduate program; however, recruiting graduates from other disciplines may be difficult due to the low profile of these SAS graduate programs. Graduates from business, psychology, sociology, and other nonpharmacy disciplines often lack awareness of, or familiarity with pharmacy-school based SAS graduate programs. Degree emphases in the pharmacy-related social and administrative sciences (*i.e.*, "Pharmacy Administration") often have poor name recognition when compared to more widely known programs such as the MBA, MPH, or D.B.A. Compounding this lack of recognition is the significant variety in content and requirements among pharmacy school-based SAS programs. This can make it difficult to construct a coherent and understandable description of the SAS degree.

Students whose undergraduate degrees are not in a health-related field may also need remedial training before undertaking graduate level courses in pharmacy school-based SAS programs. For example, knowledge of the U.S. healthcare system or contemporary pharmacy practice is often necessary to address problems in the medication use process. Gaining this knowledge may require prerequisite training and experience before a student can perform satisfactorily in graduate level pharmacy courses.

Potential candidates from abroad pose a unique challenge to the social and administrative sciences. At many foreign pharmacy schools, training focuses on the basic sciences. Foreign pharmacy graduates often lack the clinical training or background in social and administrative sciences which provide the foundations for many SAS graduate programs. These weaknesses can be accentuated if students have not sufficiently mastered the English language or lack an understanding of North American culture. Training deficiencies can put students at a disadvantage in U.S. pharmacy school-based SAS programs.

Other Challenges in Recruiting Graduate Students

Many students are specifically interested in SAS graduate programs that emphasize the field of pharmacoeconomics. Although pharmacoeconomics is a highly visible area of study, it is only one of many different areas of emphasis in SAS. Student over-emphasis on pharmacoeconomics can create recruiting challenges for programs that focus on other SAS fields such as pharmacy management, health policy, and the social sciences.

Opportunities for Recruiting Pharmacy Graduates

While the list of challenges to recruiting students into pharmacy-based SAS graduate programs may appear formidable, there are many characteristics of SAS graduate programs which can make SAS graduate education very attractive to students who do not wish to follow traditional pharmacy practice opportunities.

Traditional pharmacist careers in retail and hospital pharmacy do not appeal to all students. Students aware of significant dissatisfaction and burnout associated with traditional pharmacy positions(3,4) are often willing to pursue extra education to find careers in less traditional sites such as academia, managed care, or the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmacy-related SAS graduate education can offer entry into these fields, providing students with unique skills and training that will make them competitive for careers in these areas.

Another advantage of graduate education in general is that it is often refreshingly different from undergraduate professional programs. The rigidity of professional programs can be constraining to many students who wish to pursue special interests and ideas. Mature students and adult learners frequently find regimented learning to be inhibiting. Graduate programs can offer the opportunity for these students to focus their studies on topics directly related to their specialized area of interest. This can be a particularly desirable feature for experienced, practicing pharmacists who wish to return to school.

Another opportunity for graduate recruitment is that the high starting salaries of new pharmacists do not seduce all pharmacy students. Many students graduate without significant debt and have more flexibility in the type of postgraduate opportunity they find acceptable. Others are willing and able to postpone taking a high paying, less desirable job to work toward an equally high paying, more desirable job. Still other graduates are willing to postpone entry into the workforce to obtain an SAS graduate degree, which over the long term can result in higher salary potential in industry and other fields.

Finally, once students graduate from a professional program, they may wish to return to school at a later date. With the changing nature of the healthcare field, life-long learning is no longer just a good idea. It is often the only way that professionals can continue to advance in their careers. Pharmacy graduates who have practiced for a few years often are ideal candidates for graduate school. They tend to have greater motivation, focus, and financial resources to succeed in graduate school than recent pharmacy graduates. The success of nontraditional PharmD programs indicates that many pharmacists are willing to spend time and money to further their education.

Opportunities for Recruiting Nonpharmacy Graduates

The Social and Administrative Sciences can be a desirable career path for nonpharmacy school graduates. In fact, many of pharmacy's prominent SAS educators have undergraduate degrees in fields other than pharmacy. Recruiting students from outside of the field of pharmacy can be a good strategy for SAS graduate education.

There are a number of attractive features of pharmacy graduate programs for nonpharmacy graduates. For students interested in academia, faculty in schools and colleges of pharmacy tend to earn higher salaries than many of their counterparts in other academic departments on campus. Job opportunities are often better, in addition. Financial pressures on colleges and universities are causing the elimination of positions or new-hire freezes in many academic departments. Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology majors, to name a few, can find the academic job market extremely competitive in their disciplines(5). Meanwhile, pharmacy-related SAS academic positions are relatively more abundant due to increasing numbers of new schools of pharmacy and the number of academics leaving for industry. The comparatively greater job opportunities and salaries can make a pharmacy school-based SAS graduate degree attractive to nonpharmacy graduates interested in careers in academia.

Foreign students are another group from which potential SAS graduate students can be drawn. There is tremendous interest in pharmacy school-based SAS programs among foreign students. The Internet has facilitated the ability of students from outside of the United States to obtain information about SAS graduate programs at U.S. schools and colleges of pharmacy, non-practice pharmacy-related job opportunities in the U.S., and U.S. culture. The personnel shortage in many segments of pharmacy has made it easier for foreigners who obtain U.S. pharmacy-related graduate degrees to obtain employment in the U.S. and remain in this country as permanent residents.

PRODUCT DEFINITION

What Are Graduate Students Buying When They Enroll in Graduate School?

When promoting any product or service, it is essential to have a clear description of its attributes and features. This is important for developing a clear, consistent, and easy to understand promotional message which can help consumers to recognize the core benefit received from a product or service. It helps potential buyers perceive features of the product or service that differentiate it from other alternatives available in the market.

One problem with promoting pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs is that no simple description of content or benefit to graduates exists. The following is a proposed definition and descrip-

Table I. Market segments which might help increase enrollment in SAS graduate programs

Segment 1: Potential students

Persons currently in the pharmacy profession
- Current pharmacy students in a school with an SAS graduate program
- Current pharmacy students in a school without an SAS graduate program
- Recent pharmacy graduates
- Pharmacists who desire a career change or increased potential for advancement
- Pharmacists already possessing a graduate degree (e.g., MBA, MPH)
- Graduates of foreign pharmacy schools
- Student leaders in national and local pharmacy student organizations

Persons outside of the pharmacy profession
- Graduates of other health care programs (*e.g.*, nursing, clinical psychology)
- Graduates of non-health care programs (*e.g.*, business administration, sociology, and psychology)

Segment 2: Influencers
- SAS faculty at schools of pharmacy with SAS graduate programs
- SAS faculty at schools of pharmacy without SAS graduate programs
- Clinical pharmacy faculty members
- Faculty in SAS-related non-healthcare academic programs
- Pharmacy professional organizations
- Deans of schools and colleges of pharmacy
- Graduates of pharmacy school-based SAS programs
- Employers of SAS graduates

Segment 3: Potential Employers
- Pharmaceutical Industry
- Managed Care
- Hospital Pharmacy
- Chain Pharmacy
- Long-term Care
- Government
- Associations
- Academia

tion of pharmacy school-based graduate programs in SAS designed to give a short description of the programs and stimulate some interest in the discipline. It describes the core product of a SAS education, i.e., the ability to explore problems with the medication use process and devise solutions for them. It also suggests ways in which SAS education can be differentiated from other educational alternatives. The copy below may be appropriate for inclusion in a brochure that could be provided to potential SAS graduate students:

> Graduate degrees in the Social and Administrative Sciences (also known as Pharmacy Administration) prepare graduates to apply methods from managerial, economic, and social sciences to problems associated with the distribution, use, and consequences of pharmaceutical products and services. Examples of areas of emphasis include: (*i*) the decisions, processes and behaviors through which prescribers, pharmacists, patients, and payers utilize Pharmaceuticals; (*ii*) the social, psychological and organizational processes through which health policies are established, implemented and evaluated; (*iii*) the methods for describing and evaluating medication use in populations; (*iv*) the relationships among health care providers, social institutions, and patients; and (*v*) the costs of pharmaceutical products, the medication use process, and patient outcomes. Students in Social and Administrative Sciences specialize in a broad array of disciplines that permit the development of a theoretical foundation with which to approach these problems. Some areas of specialization in SAS are listed below.

- Pharmacoeconomics & Outcomes Research
- Pharmacoepidemiology
- Marketing
- Management
- Education
- Informatics
- Health Care Law
- Health Care Policy
- Gerontology
- Organizational Behavior
- Psychology
- Operations Research
- Sociology
- Anthropology

Methods from these disciplines are incorporated with methods and knowledge from the pharmaceutical sciences to provide a unique perspective when researching the utilization of Pharmaceuticals. The following are a small sample of questions which might be of interest to people in the discipline of Social and Administrative Sciences.

1. Which drug is most cost-effective for a population of patients suffering from a given condition or disease?
2. What is the distribution of adverse drug events across the United States?
3. What are the consequences of direct-to-consumer advertising on prescription drug prescribing and utilization?
4. How can pharmaceutical prescribing and distribution systems be improved to optimize medication prescribing, dispensing, and administration errors?
5. How can pharmacists help patients better adhere to their prescribed medication regimen? What is "optimum" adherence?
6. Why do patients choose alternative medicines and what benefits do they receive?
7. How can professionalism best be instilled in pharmacy students?
8. Can Internet technology be used to increase access to pharmacy services or improve its quality?
9. What are the potential consequences and costs of a Medicare prescription drug benefit?
10. How can the gap between actual medical practices and evidence-based best practices be reduced?

The importance of a clear definition of SAS education cannot be overemphasized. Students who enter graduate school take a "leap of faith" that the time and money spent will provide some "value" to

Table II. Desired attributes of potential graduate students

Required Characteristics

- Ability to read, write, and speak English fluently
- Keen interest in the medication use process
- True understanding of what it takes to be successful in a SAS graduate program and as a SAS graduate (*e.g.*, motivation, dedication, initiative, self-direction)

Preferred Characteristics

- A pharmacy degree
- Clinical health care training
- An understanding of the United States Health Care System
- An understanding of problems and issues within the medication use process
- Pharmacy practice experience
- Life experience
- A record of achievement within academia and outside
- A clear sense of one's personal mission in life
- Previous training or experience in the desired area of interest

them. Their faith is not enhanced when presented with an ambiguous or confusing description of their educational process and potential outcomes. The ability to present a clear, unambiguous promotional message to students about SAS education is critical to reducing student concerns and enhancing student commitment.

MARKET SEGMENTATION

Three primary groups of people might be targeted to increase enrollment in pharmacy school-based SAS graduate education programs: (*i*) Persons who might ordinarily be expected to enroll in graduate programs; (*ii*) Persons who can influence students to enroll in graduate programs; and (*iii*) Employers for these students after graduation. Each of these segments consists of sub-segments, which are outlined in Table I.

TARGET MARKETS AND MARKETING GOALS

Target Markets

Targeting markets involves identifying a desirable market segment and focusing marketing efforts on that segment(6). The primary target market for AACP should be Segment 1 (potential students), because they are the primary customers for pharmaceutical graduate education. Segments 2 (influencers) and 3 (potential employers) should be secondary target markets for which objectives and strategies may be developed in the future. Over the coming years, for example, it may be wise for AACP to enlist key influencers to help identify individuals who might be interested in SAS educational programs. AACP may consider establishing relationships with potential employers of SAS graduates to encourage these employers to offer more internships and fellowships for SAS students. Further, AACP might develop educational materials targeting potential employers of SAS graduates to help businesses understand the benefits of employing SAS graduates in contrast to hiring graduates with educational backgrounds completely outside of pharmacy. The remainder of this marketing plan will address targeting Market Segment 1.

Segment 1 is comprised of numerous sub-segments, and the attractiveness of each sub-segment will vary for each pharmacy school graduate program. One school might target foreign pharmacy graduates while another school might focus on recruiting from among students currently enrolled in their professional program. Alternatively, some schools may prefer to assemble a mix of students from several of the sub-segments so that the graduate program brings together students with a variety of backgrounds. Therefore, any marketing objectives developed by the SAS Section of AACP must be sufficiently flexible to help each school attract those student segments most appropriate for their graduate programs.

As mentioned previously, not all students in Segment 1 are appropriate for graduate school. It is important that targeted students be qualified not only to successfully meet the admission requirements for graduate school but also to successfully complete the program of study and succeed after graduation. Promotional efforts should be designed to attract graduate students with many of the qualities described in Table II.

Marketing Goals

The purpose of the previous analysis and discussion was to establish a foundation from which marketing goals and objectives could be developed. All steps of a marketing plan should take into account the issues of market environment, product definition, market segmentation, and targeting the markets discussed in the previous sections. The present section describes marketing goals designed to increase the number of graduate students who apply and graduate from SAS graduate programs.

Previous authors have offered marketing goals for SAS graduate programs. Draugalis *et al.*(7) suggest the following steps when recruiting graduate students:

1. Develop awareness of graduate opportunities among undergraduate students.
2. Stimulate student curiosity in SAS topic areas.
3. Enhance their understanding of SAS course material.
4. Encourage them to enroll in graduate school.
5. Develop their commitment to graduate school.

These authors(7) argue that using marketing communications strategies such as advertising, public relations, and direct sales would be helpful in developing awareness and curiosity about SAS graduate education. In order to enhance student understanding of SAS course material and the procedures for enrolling into graduate school, the authors developed a videotape to show potential graduate students that depicted the opportunities available to SAS graduates.

Holdford and Wright(8) describe how commitment to graduate education can be enhanced. Their research of pharmacy students found that commitment is increased when benefits of a program are perceived to be of value, goals and objectives of the student and the program are similar, communication between faculty and students is good, and faculty are perceived to be acting in the best interest of the student. Three of these four issues - similar goals and objectives of students and faculty, communication between faculty and students, and student perceptions of faculty - are beyond the scope of the current marketing plan and are specific to individual programs. However, the present plan can address student perceptions of the value of SAS graduate education through the use of coherent marketing communications.

Based upon these recommendations, the following goals for the current marketing plan are proposed:

1. Increase awareness about pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.
2. Increase understanding about pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.
3. Enhance awareness about SAS-related careers in pharmacy.
4. Make it easier for interested people to inquire about pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.
5. Increase the number of students who apply for pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.
6. Increase the number of students who complete pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.
7. Increase name recognition for pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs among potential graduate students, influencers, and employers.
8. Develop a set of measures to evaluate progress towards the above-mentioned goals.

POSITIONING

Effective promotion of any SAS graduate program requires that students have a clear image of the program in their minds, particularly when compared with competing alternatives. Image is established, in part, by how the programs are positioned by pharmacy schools through their promotional communications. Communication strategies must take into account: (*i*) the features of the programs them-

selves; (*ii*) the needs and wants of the target markets; and (*iii*) competing alternatives to pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs. Issues associated with: the first of these strategies have been outlined previously in the Product section of this paper. The following sections will address needs and wants of graduate students, and competing alternatives to SAS graduate education.

Needs and Wants of Potential Pharmacy School-Based SAS Graduate Students

Smith *et al.* (9) found that students are motivated to attend graduate school for one or more of the following reasons:

1. To improve their job prospects.
2. To pursue nontraditional career opportunities in areas such as education or the pharmaceutical industry.
3. To make a career change.
4. To learn about and explore new ideas.
5. Intellectual stimulation.
6. Desire for an advanced degree.
7. Financial reward.
8. To be able to find more challenging work.

Furthermore, these authors were able to identify differing motivations between undergraduate, masters, and PhD students with regards to further education.(9) Students who pursue graduate school are more motivated by intrinsic job factors such as intellectual stimulation and challenge than the average student. Students who forgo graduate school to enter the pharmacy workforce tend to be motivated more by extrinsic job factors such as financial rewards. Moreover, MS students tend to be more extrinsically motivated than PhD students.

These findings suggest that promotional appeals describing masters degree programs should differ from appeals promoting PhD programs (i.e., each appeal should highlight different benefits). Potential graduate students being recruited for doctoral level graduate study might be more responsive to appeals that emphasize the intrinsic benefits of education such as the ability to find a more interesting career, intellectual stimulation, and the ability to be challenged. For potential PhD students, extrinsic benefits such as financial rewards should be emphasized only as a side benefit of graduate education.

Competing Alternatives to SAS Education

Successful positioning demands that pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs be analyzed vis-à-vis competitors, identifying key differences of interest to target markets and highlighting these differences in promotional communications. Competing opportunities for graduate education must first be identified. Promotional communications then need to highlight the strengths of pharmacy school-based SAS programs and underscore the limitations of competing alternatives such as pharmacy residencies and MBA programs. It is essential that these differences be made distinct and salient in the minds of target markets.

A variety of educational alternatives compete with SAS graduate programs in the minds of potential students. The most common competitors are listed in Table III. Selection of a post-graduate alternative by students depends, in varying degrees, upon a program's cost, name recognition, flexibility in regards to the student's personal life, time required for completion, whether the program is a prerequisite for certain jobs, and the student's ability to get accepted into the program. Other considerations of importance to students include the ability of graduates to differentiate themselves from graduates of other programs, the opportunity to individualize the program to the student's personal interests, and the program's relevance to student career choices. These final three attributes represent the greatest strengths offered by pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs when compared to other alternatives.

Advantages of Pharmacy School-Based SAS Graduate Programs Over Competitors

Traditional Graduate Degree Programs. Pharmacy school-based SAS graduate education often offers more flexibility for students to individualize their educational training. Students who have a clearly defined career plan can use this flexibility to develop skills and experiences that help them differentiate themselves from people graduating from other postgraduate experiences. Pharmacy school-based SAS graduate education can also be more relevant to students because such programs function in a pharmacy context. MBA, MPH, MHA, and nonpharmacy PhD programs often require students to take courses that may not be applicable to pharmacy problems.

Table III. Graduate education opportunities competing with pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs

- General and Specialty Residencies
- Masters of Public Health or Health Administration
- Masters of Business Administration
- Fellowship programs not associated without a graduate degree program
- PhD programs in a variety of disciplines, *e.g.*, business, education, sociology
- Post-BS PharmD Programs
- On the job training or company-sponsored management training institutes

Combined Degree Programs. New, innovative pharmacy school-based combined degree programs attempt to provide additional value over traditional pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs. The two most prevalent incarnations of combined degree programs emerging are PharmD/graduate degree programs and Fellowship/MS programs.

Combined PharmD/MS and PharmD/PhD programs attempt to allow the student to earn both degrees concurrently with lower cost and in less time than if the student had pursued the two degrees consecutively. In addition, combined degree programs can tailor the requirements for both degrees to better match a student's career interests. Although many administrative hurdles must be overcome to establish truly integrated PharmD/graduate degree programs, several of these programs do currently exist (*e.g.*, Howard University, University of Maryland, Mercer University, University of Montana, University of the Pacific, University of Tennessee, and Virginia Commonwealth University).

A hybrid of the combined PharmD/graduate degree program model which has emerged is the combined PharmD/MBA, offered as a joint venture between schools of pharmacy and schools of business administration within the same university (*e.g.*, Drake University, Mercer University, Shenandoah University, University of Southern California), or even between different universities (University of Maryland/University of Baltimore). This degree is not really a SAS degree because it typically originates in schools of business. As a result, these programs may be considered either complements or competitors to the SAS degree depending upon one's viewpoint.

Combined post-PharmD Fellowship/MS programs (*e.g.*, in pharmacoeconomics) are currently a very popular post-graduate educational alternative. They are less expensive for students because these programs usually offer stipend and tuition waivers. Another benefit of these programs is their ability to combine didactic education with project-centered, on-the-job training with potential employers (*e.g.*, pharmaceutical companies, managed care organizations).

Positioning SAS Graduate Programs

Efforts to position pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs should incorporate two appeals. The first appeal should focus on the utility of a pharmacy school-based SAS degree to pursue interesting, non-traditional pharmacy-related career opportunities. Many non-traditional pharmacy positions are difficult for entry-level pharmacists to obtain because the positions require advanced training. Communications to potential students should emphasize how pharmacy school-based SAS graduate training can help potential students develop the skills and knowledge necessary to acquire challenging but desirable careers studying the medication use process.

Table IV. Comparing a pharmacy school-based SAS degree to nonpharmacy SAS degrees

A Masters in Business Administration (MBA) is a general graduate business degree designed to teach people without significant business education to become a manager. Courses are designed to be broadly applicable to any type of business. A typical MBA program requires students to take courses in accounting, economics, management, statistics, marketing, finance, and business law. Students then chose one of those areas of specialty for further course work. No thesis project is required.

The Masters Degree in Health Administration (MHA) program is a graduate business degree specializing in the health care field. The degree attempts to prepare students for careers in health care management. In the VCU MHA program, students complete 60 semester hours of graduate study over a four-semester sequence, followed by a required one-year administrative residency. The curriculum consists of core and elective courses covering a variety of topics such as health care finance, marketing, information systems, management, and health law.

The Master's Degree in Pharmacy Outcomes Management & Research is a graduate degree specializing in the field of pharmacy. The program is designed to teach many of the same skills learned in the MBA and MHA programs but places a greater emphasis on problems unique to pharmacy. The masters program prepares the student to deal with pharmacy practice problems in depth, using all of the skills developed in the classroom. This is accomplished primarily through completion of a major research project called a thesis. Since the degree is offered concurrently with the professional pharmacy degree, certain efficiencies can be realized that permits students to graduate sooner than might be expected with the MBA or MHA degrees. Core courses for this degree cover topics such as statistics and research design, pharmacoeconomics, epidemiology, and pharmaceutical benefits management. Elective courses cover a broad range of subjects, which allow students to pursue a specialized area of interest.

Students should be made aware how the skills and knowledge learned in pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs can help them develop a unique advantage over people coming from nonpharmacy SAS programs. In addition, communications can highlight the relevance of pharmacy school-based graduate curricula to pharmacy careers. Key words to emphasize might be "individualized," "differentiation," "intellectually stimulating," and "value."

The second appeal can be directed at pharmacy students and pharmacists who are considering graduate school. Key attributes to emphasize might be "professional" and "pharmaceutical." This appeal focuses on the emotional ties students and pharmacists already have to the profession. Communications should tap into this professional identity to differentiate pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs from nonpharmacy training. For example, appeals might emphasize how pharmacy school-based SAS programs focus on improving patient outcomes with pharmaceutical products and services, while MBA programs focus on enhancing the profitability of businesses. Other appeals might emphasize how MHA and MPH programs highlight many non-drug-related topics that may not be relevant to pharmacy, and tend to address policy issues at a population level rather than focus efforts at the patient level.

These appeals are displayed in the following comparisons of an MBA, MHA, and combined PharmD/MS program in Pharmaceutical Outcomes Management & Research used in promotional literature at Virginia Commonwealth University (Table IV). The comparisons were developed to educate pharmacy students about differences among graduate programs. Similar descriptions could be developed for residencies, fellowships, and other post-graduate alternatives.

PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES

AACP promotional strategies should be designed to assist and facilitate promotional strategies of individual member schools. AACP should consider working together with other national pharmacy organizations such as the American Pharmaceutical Association (APhA), the American Society of Health-systems Pharmacists (ASHP), and the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (IPSOR) to promote pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs as a postgraduate educational option for pharmacy students and pharmacists. One example of such an effort might involve the development of a poster suitable for presentation in meeting expositions attended by many pharmacy students (*e.g.*, APhA Annual Meeting, ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting). An additional effort by AACP might involve alliances with the International Pharmacy Federation (FIP) to promote U.S. pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs to foreign pharmacy graduates.

One important aim of any recruitment policy is to maximize the number of students who will be successful in graduate school. This requires that information about graduate school be presented in an exciting, informative manner that will encourage those students with the desire and capabilities to pursue this career option. It also implies that students be provided with sufficient information about what to expect from a pharmacy school-based SAS graduate program so that those who lack direction, motivation, and capability will be discouraged from entering graduate school prematurely. It is important that students be sufficiently informed about the differences between graduate school and undergraduate or professional programs that students can decide whether graduate education is appropriate for them.

AACP World Wide Web Home Page

AACP would benefit from having a subpage on its Internet site to promote pharmacy school-based SAS graduate education programs. The page must be easily accessible (*i.e.*, clearly marked on the AACP home page and outside the firewall). Anyone who is interested in SAS graduate education should be able to easily access this information in an Internet search. The home page can direct browsers to descriptions of SAS graduate programs, how SAS degrees differ from other graduate degrees, and what types of jobs can be found after graduation.

The home page can have information individualized to different target segments. There can be a separate page for career changers, current pharmacy students, foreign students, non-pharmacist graduates, etc. Interested readers can hypertext to those pages from a central page. Information specific to the needs of each target segment can be included. For example, the page for current pharmacy students can provide information on how students can prepare themselves for graduate school, such as electives to take, skills to develop, and job training that might benefit them. Pages for other target segments may omit this information or provide it in a different manner.

The page can include testimonials about the value of the degree from graduates of pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs who have developed careers in different areas. This is a strategy used by ISPOR. Testimonials can additionally come from current graduate students and employers of SAS graduates.

AACP should develop hypertext links to the home pages of member schools that have SAS graduate programs. Reciprocally, home pages of member schools should be linked to AACP as well as to associations and trade organizations of interest to SAS faculty. These links can be used to highlight issues of interest in the social and administrative sciences related to pharmacy and identify organizations that may hire SAS program graduates. In addition, school promotional and personal communications can direct students to the AACP home page to seek more information about SAS graduate programs.

The web page could be used to promote and facilitate an interchange between potential graduate students and colleges. The web site could host a "chat room" for students (or others) interested in gradu-

ate programs. Students could talk about their backgrounds, potential interest areas, and goals, and might even be able to post their curriculum vita on the site. This Webpage could be part of the AACP home page or it could just be linked to it. AACP might even consider allowing schools to advertise on the site or post new job listings.

Personal Selling

Personal selling can be defined for the purpose of this paper as a conversation with a prospective student for the purpose of recruiting that person into graduate school. Personal selling is the most effective promotional tool when trying to get a potential customer to commit to buying a product(10), in this case, convincing a prospective student to apply to a SAS graduate program. Conversations between potential students and either faculty members or other students can have tremendous impact in influencing students to enroll in graduate school.

Each school with an SAS graduate program should already have strategies in place to identify interested students and sell them on the idea of graduate school. AACP can assist faculty in their personal selling efforts by offering a forum at meetings which allows faculty to share their successes and failures in promoting their graduate programs. In addition, a list of strategies could be developed to assist faculty in their selling efforts. This list could be posted on the AACP home page for members or made available in an AACP publication. A list of contact people at schools of pharmacy who can act as resources about SAS graduate programs could be posted to the site. This would be particularly useful at schools that do not have their own graduate program, but who have students interested in such programs.

Public Relations

SAS Section members should attempt to piggyback graduate program marketing efforts onto activities in which they are already engaged. For example, many SAS faculty members are involved in high profile presentations and projects. It would not take much effort to include a very short announcement about pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs in these activities. This would take some coordination and commitment from SAS members but could have significant impact on the image of the social and administrative sciences to potential graduate students.

AACP can be more directly involved in public relations activities by developing high profile presentations at major conventions designed to promote graduate education. For example, the SAS Section could take the lead on a current "hot button" issue such as workplace quality of life. The key is to make it clear that such programs are being sponsored by the SAS Section and link the program's topic to the social and administrative sciences.

Brochures and Posters

A brochure could be developed to supplement personal selling and public relations efforts. The brochure could highlight some of the information provided on the AACP home page and include the Internet address so students could get further information, and could be distributed at annual meetings of local, regional and national pharmacy organizations. It could be distributed at career fairs and college placement and guidance offices.

Different brochures could be developed for different target markets. For example, a pamphlet for nonpharmacy students could include a section on the unique skills and abilities people outside the profession bring to pharmacy. Brochures for pharmacist career changers can highlight how SAS graduate training can build upon practice skills already developed.

As mentioned earlier, a poster highlighting the same information as the brochure could be developed and presented at an AACP booth during meetings of national pharmacy organizations. It would be more efficient for AACP to coordinate this effort than for every school with an SAS graduate program to undertake this initiative on their own.

Video

A video could be developed which describes many of the points about pharmacy school-based SAS programs mentioned above. The advantage of the video program is that it can be easily distributed and presented to large numbers of potential customers. Another advantage is that it provides a consistent message that can be tested for acceptability, clarity, and relevance. A video similar to the one proposed was developed over a decade ago by Draugalis *et al.* (1989). Production of a new video should draw upon the expertise gained by these pioneers.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The impact of each component of this proposed marketing strategy should be measured. Measurement instruments remain to be created or adapted, and data generated by these instruments should be collected and monitored by a central depot such as AACP. For example, the number of hits on different sections of the website could be measured. Additionally, pharmacy school-based SAS faculty could annually report to AACP the number of inquiries received from persons interested in obtaining information about pharmacy school-based SAS graduate programs.

LIMITATIONS

This marketing plan is based primarily upon ideas from the personal experience of members of the SAS Recruitment Issues Subcommittee and from the published research literature. Although it incorporates principles which have proven effective in the marketing of products and services, the plan as presented is based upon many assumptions and speculations that are not necessarily supported by research evidence.

CONCLUSIONS

No nationwide systematic effort exists in pharmacy education to increase the number of graduate students in Social and Administrative Sciences. Most student recruitment is conducted by a relatively small number of individuals at pharmacy schools across the United States. If the field of Social and Administrative Sciences is to increase the number of graduate students above current levels, a more formalized marketing effort is needed.

This paper proposes a plan about how AACP and its members can take immediate steps to increase recruitment efforts. Many of the ideas presented have implications for recruiting graduate students beyond the SAS Section, and are applicable to other pharmacy disciplines such as pharmaceutics, medicinal chemistry, and pharmacology.

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