

NLM/AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program
Evaluation Study
Executive Summary and Recommendations
Prepared by AAHSL Future Leadership Committee
October 2013

The AAHSL Future Leadership Committee conducted an evaluation of the value and impact of the NLM/AAHSL Leadership Fellows Program for fellows who have participated in the program since 2005. The study was approved and funded by the AAHSL Board of Directors and designed and carried out by consultant Nancy LaPelle, Ph.D., in consultation with the committee. The goals of the study were to assess the impact of the program on the professional development and careers of fellows and the effectiveness of the curriculum in preparation to be a director.

The Leadership Fellows Program is jointly sponsored by the National Library of Medicine and the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries. Founded in 2002, it prepares emerging leaders for director positions in academic health sciences libraries. A small group of fellows is paired each year with mentors who are AAHSL directors. The program combines fellow/mentor and cohort experiences and includes both in-person and virtual learning.

The evaluation study, conducted during March-October 2013, consisted of two phases: (1) a survey of all fellows in the last seven completed cohorts (2005-2006 through 2011-2012), and (2) individual telephone interviews with fellows from those classes who held AAHSL director positions when the study began. Of the 35 fellows from that period, 33 completed the questionnaire, and all 13 eligible fellows gave interviews.

The findings update an evaluation completed in 2007, with funding from NLM, of the initiation of the program and the first three cohorts of fellows and mentors, and they supplement the annual evaluations from participants. The new study provides the opportunity to look at impact over a longer period of time and to take advantage of a corps of participants who have achieved the goal of the program and are able to reflect on how it meets the needs of persons in the director position.

The survey in phase one asked fellows to rate the impact of the program and its benefits and relevance. It also collected information on changes in career interests and job positions. Fellows pointed to relationships resulting from being in the program and a network of peers and mentors as key significant benefits. Participation increased their confidence and broadened their perspective.

Among the findings, respondents said it had an extremely or substantial positive effect on their professional development (91%), helped enhance their career goals (85%), and assisted them substantially or was key to achieving their career goals (73%). The program design met or exceeded their expectations (100%) and was immediately relevant to work responsibilities (73%). Fellows said relationships formed during the program were key to helping them achieve their career goals (33%) or substantially assisted (39%).

Most (94%) said it solidified or increased their interest in becoming an academic health sciences library director. Almost 46% had been appointed to a director position. Of those who had not yet been appointed, the most frequent reasons were not yet finding the right opportunity or currently holding a challenging position.

The second phase of the study—**the interviews conducted with fellows who had been appointed to director positions**—discussed impact in more depth while focusing additionally on the role of the director. The 13 interviewees also responded to the survey, so the results overlap. The interviews examined the impact on career choices and opportunities, influence on the hiring, selection and negotiation process, what is most important for a new director to know and what challenges are faced, if the program helped to meet those needs, and how the curriculum, mentor, or other relationships have been important. The interviews sought to learn how the curriculum could be enhanced to make it more useful to fellows as they transition to director positions.

The importance of the network of relationships was reinforced in the interviews. Fellows could call upon these persons for career guidance. The program also made them more attractive and visible candidates and accelerated the process of becoming a director. It exposed them to different settings and models of libraries and directors, and it helped them make career decisions. Most had consulted with their mentor about the application and interview process. They wanted the program to provide more information and skills on negotiation of the appointment contract. Since becoming a director, they have all consulted their mentor, other fellows, or other mentors in their cohort for advice and support.

These new directors identified several areas as critical to being successful, including building relationships with campus administrators and faculty and peer library directors, knowing how to manage change, and leadership skills (such as offering vision, setting priorities, understanding the political environment, managing a complex budget, and gaining staff support). The biggest challenges they faced most frequently were budget cuts, organizational culture, and staff building and organization. They felt that the program addressed these concerns, but they would have liked even more on financial strategies, supervisory issues, and leadership skills. Fellows pointed in particular to the benefits of attending the AAMC conference and the Capstone meeting and their pairing with their mentor.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the findings and suggestions in the consultant's evaluation report, in the context of ongoing modifications to the program and the perspective of the program coordinators and faculty.

The evaluation confirms the success of the basic design and goals of the program. Over the course of the seven years covered by the study, changes have been made to the curriculum. In particular, the virtual component or the Web-based cohort curriculum has been modified significantly to change scope, topics, mentor participation, and fellow preparation. The design and content of the in-person cohort meetings have been refined extensively to reflect feedback

from participants and incorporate expertise of program faculty. The recruitment, selection and matching process has continued to evolve and become more rigorous. The support for mentors has increased, and the community across cohort lines has been strengthened.

The curriculum consists of the formal elements of the three cohort meetings and series of journal clubs, support for attendance at the AAMC conference, and site visits and work with a mentor. The informal curriculum is also valuable. Fellows have the opportunity to observe and communicate with their own mentor and other leaders on the site visits and at meetings, to build relationships, to identify leadership strategies, and to recognize and incorporate the range of these learning opportunities.

The Future Leadership Committee will spend the upcoming months reviewing the results of the evaluation study to inform specific changes to the program. It will also consider the input of current participants, faculty, and others. It will report study results to all interested parties, including the AAHSL Board of Directors, Leadership Fellows Program cohorts (including participants in this study), and NLM.

The following recommendations identify general areas for further consideration:

- **Curriculum design and content.** Review all components for focus on director-level strategy and role, context of environment, leadership, concrete career guidance, and continuity. Consider suggestions made by study participants.
- **Selection and matching process.** Continue to monitor strength and diversity of candidate pools for both fellows and mentors and effectiveness of procedures.
- **Mentor preparation and guidance.** Ensure that mentors have the needed support and direction, while allowing the flexibility for individual preferences and local strengths to work with their fellows.
- **Network of participants.** Continue to encourage communication across cohort lines. Examine strategies for supporting career development of fellows beyond completion of the program.

The program sponsors, NLM and AAHSL, have made an extraordinary, long-term commitment to the program. They recognize the value of their investment in the development of the individual and to the quality of leadership in the profession. They should continue to provide the funding and other resources and reach out to find the best fellows and mentors. Building on the success of the program to date, AAHSL should continue to examine the curriculum and management to achieve the goals of the program.

The committee thanks the participants in the study for their time and thoughtful input. The effort is an indication of the loyalty of prior cohorts to the program, as almost every fellow in seven classes responded (and earlier cohorts helped to pre-test the survey). Without the contributions of all the fellows and mentors, the program would not possess the impact it has demonstrated.