



The Pathway to Residency

By: Diana Jason, PharmD, SIUE School of Pharmacy Class of 2009

In May, 2009 Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) School of Pharmacy graduated its first class of PharmD's. As one of the students in this inaugural class, I would like to provide my perspective of what it was like being a student pharmacist in a new program and how it prepared me for residency. It is my hope that I can provide some insight for students that are thinking about residencies or faculty and preceptors that are wondering what steps they can take to prepare their students.

I put together this five part formula which contains areas that specifically helped me embark on my journey of becoming a pharmacist and starting a residency:

1 Flexibility in the Pharmacy Curriculum

Born and raised in the Chicagoland area, I immediately appreciated the extra warmth, friendliness and lack of traffic that the southern half of the state provided. However, a new school provides opportunities as well as challenges. There was a basic curriculum planned out before the class of 2009 started, yet there was flexibility built into it based on student feedback. At times, we felt like pioneers blazing a new path. At other times, we felt like guinea pigs as new programs and classes were tested on us. In the end, as the first graduating class, we felt a sense of ownership in the school. Few people get the opportunity to be a part of an inaugural class. What is applicable to other programs is the importance of allowing students to voice their concerns and making changes based on them when possible.

The curriculum at SIUE was also flexible in that the third professional year students were able to choose electives that specifically interested them. It was a great opportunity to get a sneak peak at specialty areas like psychiatric pharmacy, infectious disease, nuclear pharmacy, drug-induced diseases, diabetes, etc. Many students took more credits than they needed just because they were so interested in the various electives offered.

2 Engaged and Passionate Faculty

It is not easy securing new faculty, yet SIUE had some of the best faculty members a student could ask for. They seemed to truly enjoy their jobs and would make themselves easily accessible outside of the classroom. Professors were genuinely interested in teaching and conveyed that passion in the classroom. As a result, they were incredible mentors and motivators. Many

sacrificed their own personal time to be at student organization events, help out with health fairs and mentor students. I used them as resources and picked their brains about the whole residency process.



3 Quality Experiential Education

Because SIUE was a new school, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) made regular visits. The curriculum was developed with ACPE's new standards for early experiential learning in mind and was one of the earlier schools to initiate introductory pharmacy practice experiences (IPPE's). These early experientials provided the opportunity to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom to real life. It also allowed for students to take a peak at different areas of pharmacy and start thinking about future career options. This was even more helpful in the fourth professional year during advanced pharmacy practice experiences (APPE's). My advice is to pick a variety of electives and try to find out what you like as well as dislike. Also try to differentiate if you truly liked a particular area of pharmacy or you just had a great preceptor and visa versa.

4 Leadership Opportunities and Organization Involvement

All of the organizations at SIUE were started from scratch. In the beginning there were not a lot of events and it was easy to sign up for everything because it all seemed new and exciting. By the time the class of 2009 graduated, there were several student organizations each with many events and programs providing education and services to the community. Being involved enhanced my understanding of health care reform and other political issues facing pharmacists. It also provided me the opportunity to be involved in health screenings, patient care projects and political advocacy.

When a student prepares for a presentation to educate patients in the community, it is much different than studying for an exam. It is more similar to what you do in a residency where it is not for a grade, but rather is solely for the benefit of patients. There

are also many leadership opportunities within an organization, anywhere from serving on a committee to being an officer, which in and of itself is a great learning experience. Organization events are a lot of fun, extremely rewarding, and are a great topic of conversation during residency and job interviews.

5 Life Long Teaching and Learning

SIUE had a series of teaching electives leading to a teaching certificate. This program involved courses on instructional strategies and assessment. It also included an APPE where students served as faculty members. It culminated with a study abroad program where students collaborated with the University of Costa Rica to share insights about pharmacy curriculum and provide patient education in Costa Rica. In my residency, I am appointed as adjunct faculty. Having this teaching experience has put me ahead of other residents in this area. Even for residents or pharmacists that do not teach in a school of pharmacy, there are always journal clubs, case presentations, and patient education opportunities. Learning how to teach is invaluable.

Also important is self-learning. There is no spoon feeding in residency. In school, there was usually a nice PowerPoint that could be downloaded, in which we could take notes on our laptops as our professors lectured to us. In residency, if you need to learn something, you have to go and find it. This entails sifting through the primary literature and sorting through clinical guidelines. Unlike a multiple choice exam, where there is always one right answer, in real life, there may be multiple answers or no answers to your question.

The Pathway to Residency: The Real Journey Begins

It is indeed a stressful period going to Midyear and trying to narrow down the residency programs. Fortunately, SIUE offered several residency roundtables and CV writing programs which made the whole process a little less overwhelming. Waiting for the match results seemed like an eternity, yet the time has sure flown by now as graduation has passed, exams are over and I am very much in the midst of my residency.

I was encouraged by my mentors to go somewhere new for residency as pharmacy is a little different in other areas of the country. I chose to pursue a PGY-1 residency at the Philadelphia Veteran Affairs Medical Center with a focus on ambulatory care and the opportunity to serve as adjunct faculty at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. Residency is challenging, time consuming, stressful and incredible all at the same time. If you pick something that you are truly passionate about, then the experience will always be rewarding even during the difficult times.

In pharmacy school, I learned a little bit about a lot of topics. Residency provides the opportunity to expand that knowledge base. Pharmacy is a constantly changing, evolving profession with new drugs and information coming out all the time. It is impossible to know everything. What is more important than spitting facts out from memory is how quickly and efficiently you can find the answers. It is imperative to stay up-to-date and know where to go to find the necessary information when a

problem arises. That drug information class I had in pharmacy school is priceless.

I hope that I have provided a little bit of insight for student pharmacists that are pondering a residency and for the faculty, preceptors and mentors that will be working with these students. As I am a native to Illinois, it is my plan to take my experiences from the East coast and eventually bring them back to the Midwest. If you have any further questions regarding my experiences or want any advice on the residency process, please feel free to contact me at Diana.Jason@va.gov.

Diana Jason was the recipient of IPhA's 2008 Alan Granat Memorial Scholarship

This award was established as a memorial tribute to Alan Granat, who served as Executive Director of IPhA from 1979 until his death in 1989. The award will be presented annually by the IPhA Foundation to a pharmacist and/or pharmacy student who has exhibited a commitment to pharmacy and community, as evidenced by membership and participation in pharmacy organizations and community involvement. To be eligible, pharmacists must be members of IPhA, Illinois residents, and licensed to practice in Illinois. Eligible students must be entering their third year of a Pharm.D. program, be student members of IPhA, and have their permanent residency in Illinois.

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