

# THE AAVMC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

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## OVERVIEW

As a follow-up to previous strategic planning, AAVMC launched the Leadership Academy in summer 2012. Conceived at the “Power of Ten” leadership development initiative hosted by Elanco Animal Health earlier that year, the Leadership Academy’s purpose is to provide leadership development for emerging leaders in academia and to provide a forum for building lasting ties between faculty members at veterinary schools and departments around the world. While there are many types of leadership development training available, the AAVMC Leadership Academy is unique in that it is focused on helping develop tomorrow’s leaders of academic veterinary medicine. Effective leadership results from a clear understanding of who we are as individuals and how this shapes the ways we show up in leadership roles combined with knowledge and skills to interact with and thoughtfully influence people and processes within organizational environments. The AAVMC Leadership Academy addresses the components of effective leadership by following three recurring threads that include communication skills, emotional intelligence and living leadership (applied leadership skills). The AAVMC Leadership Academy is sponsored by Elanco Animal Health and AAVMC is grateful for Elanco’s continued and unwavering support of the program.

## INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, the Academy for Advancing Leadership (AAL) proposed assisting AAVMC in analyzing the impact of its Leadership Academy by developing and implementing a Leadership Academy Outcomes Assessment multiphase plan to evaluate the program. A timeline was established for conducting interviews and focus group sessions in February

and March of 2020 as the initial phases of the outcomes assessment plan. Invitations were issued and participation confirmed in keeping with the approved schedules.

Key findings from the data gathering efforts revealed all stakeholders were highly complementary of the Leadership Academy. They recognized and validated the need for and efficacy of the program in numerous ways. The overall perception was that leadership training can help in the retention of talented people in the field of academic veterinary medicine and the Academy seems to rise above other leadership options offered to their colleagues. Focus group participants (Past participants, Deans, and Associate Deans) viewed the Academy as a defining marquis offering from AAVMC, and this perception can be purposefully deepened through additional relevant programming drawn from its framework.

In September 2020, the Academy for Advancing Leadership (AAL) executed the final phase of its Leadership Academy Outcomes Assessment plan by preparing and administering a survey to all previous AAVMC Leadership Academy graduates. On October 28, 2020, AAL launched the comprehensive survey to analyze the impact of the Leadership Academy program and develop a profile of the Leadership Academy alumni by gathering perceptions of the program from past participants. A timeline was established for fielding the surveys and analyzing the data that was in-line with approved schedules.

Key findings from the survey revealed an overwhelming majority of respondents found participation in the Leadership Academy to be very influential on their careers, in part by providing the necessary tools to reach career goals and be a more effective leader. The majority of survey respondents indicated that as a result of their participation in the

Leadership Academy, they had gained more and better tools to reach career goals, be a more effective leader, and expand their professional network. Additionally, well over half of the survey participants indicated that the Leadership Academy was more useful in their professional leadership development than other formal leadership programs in which they have participated.

While the prevailing view of the Leadership Academy is that it is a highly effective program for leadership development in the field of academic veterinary medicine, there were still areas of improvement highlighted by respondents.

Among the areas identified were a need for more curriculum around diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as finance, communication, and conflict resolution. Also, respondents overwhelmingly wanted to maintain the in-person delivery model of the program, given individuals' increased comfort level with video conferencing due to COVID 19, utilizing more platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams to create more engagement opportunities include pre- and post- Leadership Academy should be considered.

The remainder of this report describes the methodology for collecting and analyzing the data and summarizes the key findings as well as provides recommendations based on respondents' answers.

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey Design and Administration

In September, AAVMC generated and provided objectives from the data gathered in Phase I-III to AAL. The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with the AAVMC team. The instrument included a combination of selected-response items (Likert-type scale), closed-ended items (yes/no or select one options), and open-ended items. Content validity of the survey tool was established through a review with the AAVMC team.

### Data Collection

This study targeted all previous AAVMC Leadership Academy graduates. Based on internal AAVMC alumni data, the total surveyed population size was estimated at 249.

The survey was created and distributed in electronic format (SurveyMonkey, 2019) during October of 2020. A two-wave emailing across two (2) weeks was used to increase the survey response rate. Reminders were sent to those who began and had not completed the survey. A different reminder was sent to those who had not yet started the survey. The survey was closed on November 11.

## Statistical Analysis

We attempted to utilize Pearson's chi-squared test due to the likelihood that the distribution of responses is due to chance rather than any relationship between the variables. However, because the crosstabs that were run resulted in a majority of cells with fewer than 5 cases, we were unable to use the results of the Pearson's chi-squared test. Other potential analysis such as Fisher test or Yates correction were not available to us. As such we were unable to establish whether any statistical relationship exists between the independent variables and the distribution of responses.

## RESULTS

### Closed ended questions

Overall, there was not much variance in perceptions of the Leadership Academy across the five categories of independent variables examined:

- cohort
- demographics
- degree/board certification
- position, rank, and tenure (before and after participation in Leadership Academy)
- career goals

Across all of the independent variables, the Leadership Academy was viewed by well over half of participants as at least moderately influential on their career progression. A majority of respondents entered the Leadership Academy with a sense of their career goals and what was needed to achieve them and fairly positive view of themselves as a leader.

Despite pre-program views more than half of respondents across most of the independent variables indicated that as a result of participation in the Leadership Academy, they had modified their career goals, felt they were better positioned to achieve them and had a different view of themselves as a leader. This suggests that even among a career focused and confident group of participants, the Leadership Academy provides additional necessary tools and perspective for achieving professional goals. This is evidenced by the fact that nearly 90% of survey respondents stated the Leadership Academy was at least moderately helpful in preparing them to achieve their goals.

When asked about how the Leadership Academy compared in "professional usefulness" to other formal leadership development programs, 54% of those that had participated in another leadership program said the Leadership Academy was "much more useful". An additional 21% reported the Leadership

Academy was slightly more useful than other programs in which they had participated.

Despite the fact that responses did not vary greatly across the independent variables and that we were unable to determine statistically valid relationships between variables, there were some interesting distributions within the demographic groups, specifically related to race, ethnicity and gender. 71% of minorities found the Leadership Academy to be very or extremely influential on their career progression compared to just 46% of whites. Minority respondents (59%) were also more likely than white respondents (43%) to view themselves as a leader prior to participation in the Leadership Academy. However, minority participants (41.2%) were also more likely to have changed their view of themselves as a leader after participating in the Leadership Academy relative to white participants (28.2%). Additionally, a greater share of minority respondents (59%) than white respondents (41%) found the Leadership Academy “much more useful” than other leadership programs.

In terms of gender, men (58%) were more likely than women (46%) to agree or strongly agree they had a clear vision of their goals prior to the Leadership Academy. Men (60%) also tended to agree or strongly agree they viewed themselves as leaders prior to the Leadership Academy compared to women (35%). However, after participation in the Leadership Academy, men (26%) and women (23%) were nearly equal in stating they agreed or strongly agreed their view of themselves as leaders had changed. Similar to the comparison between minorities and whites, a greater share of female respondents (51%) than male respondents (36%) found the Leadership Academy “much more useful” than other leadership programs. It is important to again note that due to small cell issues discussed in the methodology section, these data should be interpreted with caution.

### Open-ended Questions:

Based on your professional experiences since participating in the AAVMC Leadership Academy, what changes to the delivery model of AAVMC Leadership Academy would you recommend for preparing the next generation of leaders in academia?

**Major Themes:** The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated a desire to maintain the status quo for the delivery model. Many of these comments referenced the significant value of in-person meetings with some comments stating the program “needs to be kept in person”.

That being said the next most common theme was the suggestion of a hybrid model. Most of these suggestions were related to the current pandemic and a realization that in this type of environment in-person meetings would be a challenge. A few respondents suggested that even after the pandemic,

utilizing video conferencing to stay engaged between in-person meetings would be of value.

Among some other themes with multiple mentions were creating more pre-meeting materials to prepare for the program in advance, having more post meeting opportunities (e.g., peer mentoring, networking opportunities, more alumni engagement, etc.) and more interactive activities (e.g., fewer lectures and more immersive experiences)

### Topics/curriculum

Based on open-ended questions, there were four primary areas that respondents would like to see have a greater presence in the Leadership Academy curriculum.

- Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) was the most frequently mentioned area for greater inclusion in the Leadership Academy curriculum. Among some of the specific areas mentioned were learning how to launch DEI initiatives, coping with bias, and exploring best practices for incorporating DEI in hiring. There were also a few respondents who suggested the DEI discussions were too focused on race and needed to be more expansive.
- Finance and budgeting was another common theme. Many of the comments in this area focused on wanting more training around strategic budgeting, understanding financial metrics, dealing with financial uncertainty, and becoming a financial leader.
- Communication was often mentioned by itself but was also referenced several times in the context of DEI. Broadly, there was a wide variation of suggestions related to communication. The comments ranged from wanting more programming around how to lead difficult conversations to communicating via social media. There was also interest in learning how communicating with different audiences particularly as it related to dealing with students and improving public speaking skills.
- Conflict resolution was typically mentioned along with communication but some of the references were distinct enough that they warranted their own thematic area. These comments tended to focus primarily on a need for effective strategies for managing the challenge of having difficult conversations, specifically with faculty.

Other areas mentioned to a lesser degree were crisis management (primarily in relation to the current pandemic), change management, navigating academic politics, work/life balance, and managing generational differences.

## Delivery model

Based on open-ended questions, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated a desire to maintain the status quo for the traditional in-person delivery model. Many of these comments referenced the significant value of face-to-face meetings and interactions with several comments specifically stating the program “needs to be kept in person”.

That being said the next most common theme was the suggestion of a hybrid model. Most of these suggestions were related to the current pandemic and a realization that in this type of environment in-person meetings would be a challenge. A few respondents suggested that even after the pandemic, utilizing video conferencing to help participants stay engaged between in-person meetings would be of value.

Among some other themes with multiple mentions were creating more pre-meeting materials to prepare for the program in advance, having more post-meeting opportunities (e.g., peer mentoring, networking opportunities, more alumni engagement, etc.) and more interactive activities (e.g., fewer lectures and more immersive experiences)

## SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

In reviewing the findings from this survey in the context of findings from the first three phases of the Leadership Academy Outcomes Assessment Plan, there is consistency in the overall perception of the academy. Participants across eight cohorts, different races, ethnicities, and genders, representing a range of positions and professional goals all stated overwhelmingly that the Leadership Academy has had an influential role in their career progression. Even among respondents who entered the Leadership Academy with a clear vision of their career goals and a strong sense of their leadership abilities, the experience seemed to allow for some self-reflection that for many resulted in the modification of goals and a better understanding of their leadership qualities.

Based on the early phases of the outcomes assessment, among the definitions of success for the Leadership Academy, was “developing and fostering leadership skills for up-and-coming leaders...” and “providing folks the sets of skills to become effective leaders...”. From the results of the survey, it is clear that alumni of the Leadership Academy leave with a greater sense of the skills they need to be an effective leader, even among those who entered the Leadership Academy believing they already possessed those skills.

Definitions of success for Leadership Academy graduates were expressed as “expanding their networks”, “achieving personal goals”, and “are more confident and likely to apply

for leadership positions”. It is clear from the survey that alumni leave the Leadership Academy with an expanded network as 96% of respondents agreed with the statement, they had expanded their network as a result of participating in the Leadership Academy. We were not able to measure the achievement of personal goals but 92% of respondents indicated they gained the necessary tools to reach their goals as a result of Leadership Academy. And while this survey is unable to determine causality, 37% of respondents who were associate professors at the time of participation are now full professors and 21% of associate/assistant deans are now deans.

While this year long assessment of the Leadership Academy has shown it to be a highly valued and critical component for preparing the leadership pipeline in academic medicine, it has also revealed several areas where curricular programming and delivery along with additional evaluation could further strengthen the Leadership Academy.

## Programming

- Given the number of references to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the open-ended responses, it is clear there is a desire to see it incorporated more in the Leadership Academy curriculum. There is interest in diversifying students and faculty in veterinary medicine and creating an inclusive culture. The Leadership Academy could be a place where alumni are to learn about best practices and innovative ideas that can be modeled back at their schools.
- The survey responses highlighted an interest in having more post Leadership Academy opportunities for engagement as well as some possible pre- Leadership Academy engagement. Much of the post program interest centered on continued formal engagement with alumni. Pre-Leadership Academy programming was suggested as a way for participants to do some advance work that would allow them to take better advantage of programming during the Leadership Academy.
- COVID 19 has created an environment where people have been forced to learn how to effectively utilize virtual meeting platforms. The Leadership Academy could utilize participants increased comfort with this forum to subsidize the in-person experience with numerous virtual meetings that allow for continued engagement without the time consumption and cost of travel. It is important to note that respondents overwhelmingly did not want the in-person experience replaced so virtual meetings should only be used as an enhancement to the face-to-face experience.

## ASSESSMENT

There are several key areas the Leadership Academy should explore that the current assessment plan did not cover:

- How representatively diverse is the Leadership Academy? While the survey in Phase IV was able to view perceptions of the Leadership Academy by various demographic characteristics, it is not clear how demographically representative the survey respondents are to the participants in the Leadership Academy. More importantly, how demographically representative are the participants in the Leadership Academy compared to the broader pool of potential participants? This is an important area to examine particularly given the frequency with which diversity, equity, and inclusion was mentioned as a curricular shortcoming.
- Are there barriers to participation for faculty at certain types of schools or certain demographic populations? While not a focus of this survey, a listing of the schools represented by the Leadership Academy participants was examined in the context of the broader listing of AAVMC member institutions. No patterns emerged from the analysis to explain why some schools participated and others did not. A future study with a specific focus on this topic should be considered.