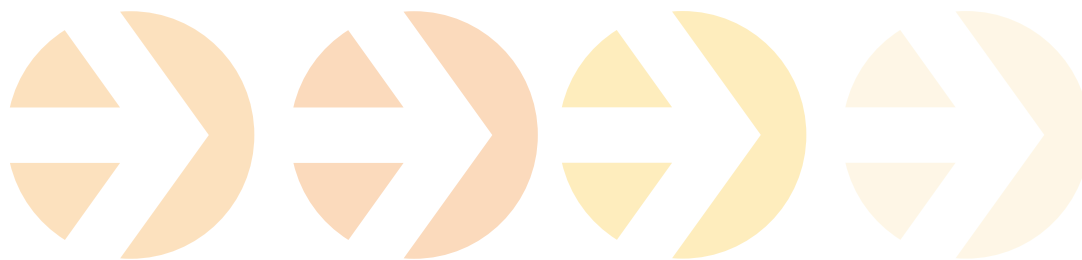




Cherokee Layson-Wolf and Margaret Hayes

Becoming 'Job Ready'

Growing program gives students the tools to thrive in a tight job market

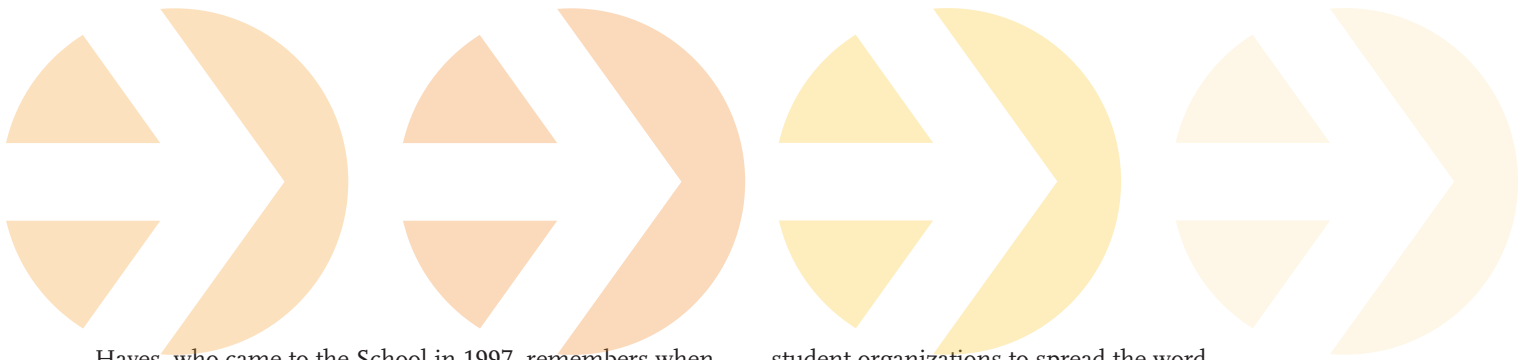


BY ELIZABETH HEUBECK

University of Maryland School of Pharmacy students have always been well-prepared to apply the skills they've learned in the classroom and the laboratory to post-graduate jobs in the workforce. But with the stubborn recession that descended on the American workforce in 2008 came a much tighter job market across every sector, including the pharmacy profession.

Couple that with the fact that an increasing number of advanced level students today graduate with little to no experience in the workforce because of the demands of their education, and the outlook for obtaining post-graduate employment appeared bleaker still.

Responding to the changes, the School in the fall of 2012 launched its Job Ready Program, an all-out effort to prepare students for a competitive job market, earlier and in a more deliberate way than ever before. "The whole idea was to bridge the gap between the skills students had, what was in the curriculum, and what employers were looking for," says Margaret Hayes, MS, director of student services and outreach in the School's Office of Student Affairs.



Hayes, who came to the School in 1997, remembers when employers were tripping over themselves to hire graduates. “About three years before we introduced the program, the job market was great,” she recalls. “Students had two, three, sometimes more offers — before graduation. Then the job market began to change all over the country, including here in the mid-Atlantic. Right before we started the program, there were 20-plus students who didn’t have jobs as of graduation. We began to look at what we could do to help them become better prepared to compete for the decreasing number of available positions.”

The Job Ready Program prepares students for post-graduate employment from every angle. The exhaustive list of the program’s activities that students can use to their benefit includes: a fall career fair; workshops on CV and resume writing; information sessions on career preparation, professional dress, and interviewing skills; mock interview sessions for employment and residencies; roundtable and panel discussions with employers; internship presentations by employers; research career roundtable discussions; and visits to industry.

“Most of these activities aren’t new offerings for us,” explains Cherokee Layson-Wolf, PharmD ’00, CGP, BCACP, FAPhA, associate dean for student affairs and associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science. “But the fact that these activities now are promoted and presented in a more coordinated fashion makes them more readily accessible and effective for students.”

As Layson-Wolf explains, so too do constant reminders of the importance of being “job ready,” which start long before students graduate. Whereas the School used to impress upon students in their third or fourth year the importance of preparing for post-graduation employment, it now gets that message out earlier through the Job Ready Program, which collaborates with the Student Government Association plus numerous other

student organizations to spread the word.

“Every time I get in front of students, I’m talking about the Job Ready Program,” Layson-Wolf says. “It isn’t just a listing of jobs we make available. It’s ‘How do you find possible employers? What do you do when you meet with them? How do you present yourself?’ So students start identifying with the program early in their pharmacy school career and see what kind of impact it can have on them.”

As graduates like Amjad Zauher, PharmD, know, the Job Ready Program’s impact can be meaningful. A 2013 graduate of the School of Pharmacy, he is employed at the University of Maryland Medical Center as a clinical pharmacist. He credits, in part, the Job Ready Program for his success.

“The School helped me with preparing my CV, mock interviewing, and in circulating my CV to employers in the area,” Zauher says. “I definitely found the program helpful. I was able to get a variety of different opinions on my CV that enabled me to create not only what I believe to be a very good CV that highlights my credentials in a constructive manner, but does so in a way that reflects my inter-

ests and goals. I also got great critical feedback from the mock interviews.”

Those on the other side of the table during the interview process have been impressed, too. Matthew Shimoda, PharmD ’84, pharmacy district manager for Supervalu/Shoppers Pharmacy, has been offering his services to the School of Pharmacy as a mock interviewer for approximately two decades. And he likes what he sees lately.

“I absolutely think that the candidates that we are interviewing this year from the School of Pharmacy have been much more prepared than in past years,” says Shimoda, a member of the School’s Alumni Association Executive Committee. “The candidates seem much more confident and engaged with the process. The message that the interview process is very important has been preached in the Job Ready Program, and I



Paul Ortiz, PharmD ’12, speaks with Olajumoke Amuwo of the Class of 2015, Jasmine Ebron of the Class of 2016, and Susie Park of the Class of 2017 during a Job Ready Program mentorship event.

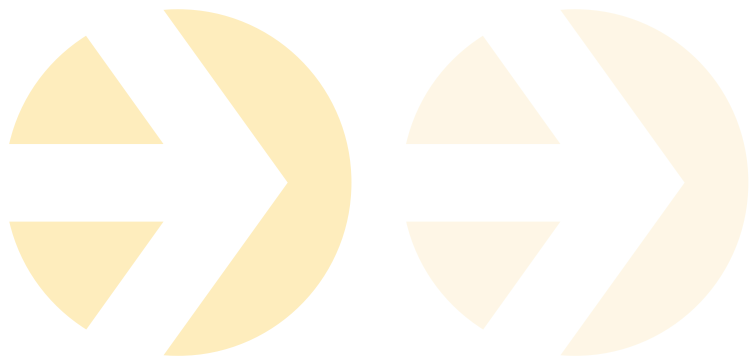


Students and employers gather in the atrium of Pharmacy Hall in October 2013 for the Job Ready Program's annual Career Fair at which students meet with prospective employers to learn more about job opportunities.

think it is being heard.”

In addition to revealing anecdotes from those on both sides of the job interview table, other positive signs of the Job Ready Program's success abound. In 2012, about 72 percent of the School's graduates had secured jobs upon graduation. In 2013, those with a job upon graduation jumped to 82 percent. Residency acceptance rates also rose after the implementation of the Job Ready Program. In 2013, 37.4 percent of pending graduates were offered a residency or fellowship, compared to 26.9 percent of graduating students in 2012.

As the program's success becomes increasingly evident, it's attracting attention not only from job-seeking students, but also from prospective employers. “Instead of me calling them [employers], they've started calling me asking how they can participate in program activities,” Hayes says. “I think employers see our program as a great way to get in front of



potential candidates.”

That could be in part because of Hayes' savvy in spreading the word to prospective employers and students. She's developed a presentation describing the scope of the Job Ready Program that she then saved on a flash drive and sent to area employers. She keeps students updated through a dedicated Job Ready Program website, email blasts, and Facebook page. Promoting the program to employers as well as to students is the best way to bring the two parties together. “We're constantly putting the message in front of them,” Layson-Wolf says.

It's a lot of work done primarily by one person. While the Job Ready Program comprises about 20 percent of Hayes' responsibilities, other schools on campus have entire departments dedicated to similar endeavors. “It's a testament to the support I get from Dean Eddington,” Hayes says.

Clearly, Natalie D. Eddington, PhD '89, BSP, FAAPS, FCP, dean and professor at the School of Pharmacy, is a proponent of the program.

“The job market for pharmacy graduates has been more competitive over the last five to six years due to a variety of issues, including the economic downturn of the late 2000s and an increase in new pharmacy schools, which translates to more graduates looking for jobs,” she says.

“As such, it was critical for us to enhance our career development activities to ensure that our graduates, in addition to being excellent pharmacy practitioners, also have the requisite skills to be competitive in the job market. We believe the Job Ready Program has been instrumental in the success our students are having in the tightening job market for pharmacists.”

Although the program is meeting with success, Hayes isn't satisfied with the status quo. She sent a survey to participating students — about 70 percent take part in some aspect of the Job Ready Program — and plans to fill any gaps she finds. “Every year I tweak the program,” she says. ☀

