Andrew Haines, a fourth-year pharmacy student, has his sights set on becoming a hospital pharmacist. Third-year pharmacy student Jamie Elsner is looking forward to her residency, which will introduce her to various aspects of the pharmacy profession and help her narrow her professional interest. Bonnie Li, also in her third year of pharmacy school, is contemplating a career that focuses on geriatrics.

Though the career paths of these three students are likely to diverge widely, each will share a powerful influence that they nurtured at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy: A keen understanding of the process of government and the ability of individuals—both students and pharmacists—to be a part of this important entity that shapes and informs the profession. Driving this understanding are impressive internships, informative courses, and active engagement in student groups.
Andrew Haines: Finding his Voice Among the Policymakers

Andrew Haines has learned a valuable lesson as a student, one that often takes pharmacy professionals years to internalize. Haines understands that pharmacists have a voice before their legislators. In fact, he believes government representatives are eager to hear from their constituents.

It’s because of opportunities at the School of Pharmacy that Haines has reached these mature conclusions.

Since he began pharmacy school, Haines has been exposed to the legislative process. The School’s Leadership in Advocacy and Pharmacy course set in motion Haines’ understanding of the legislative process. “It taught me the importance of grass-roots initiatives and forming long-lasting relationships with elected officials,” he says. In addition to raising Haines’ awareness of the importance of advocacy in the pharmacy profession, the course served as the perfect precursor to his more in-depth legislative involvement.

That came this year, as Haines chose to do one of his required practical rotations with the University’s Office of Government and Community Affairs in Annapolis during the 2013 legislative session. As Maryland’s legislators would rise early to make their way to the State House in Annapolis each weekday morning beginning in January, so too would Haines. He and other fellow pharmacy students/interns carpooled to the state capital, Monday through Friday, and took their place among the policymakers.

One of Haines’ roles during the rotation was to sit in on committee meetings, where legislators would discuss bills under consideration—from broad-based budget bills to those specific to pharmacy, such as the possibility of expanding the role of pharmacists in delivering vaccinations.

Another aspect of Haines’ rotation involved engaging other students in the legislative process. He and other interns helped to plan the School’s annual Legislative Advocacy Day, a student-run event that connects pharmacy students to legislators.

“Other interns and I contacted legislators of whom the students were constituents, requesting shadowing opportunities,” Haines explains. Like it sounds, this shadowing experience involves following legislators to committee meetings and spending time with them in their offices, with the opportunity to address bills under consideration regarding the pharmacy profession.

Though rubbing shoulders with policymakers may seem irrelevant to the future careers of most pharmacy students, Haines explains why the opposite is true. “Now I know that I have a voice. As a future leader in pharmacy, I think that will give me confidence to talk to legislators to tell them about how I can do my job best and how they can help me. I feel confident that if I tell a legislator my opinion, he or she will respect that,” Haines says.

Jamie Elsner: Supporting Student Leadership

While Haines’ legislative-related experiences in pharmacy school have taught him how to become an advocate for his profession, Jamie Elsner’s have taught her how to support fellow students in their quest to take on leadership roles.

As 2011-2012 president of the School of Pharmacy’s chapter of the American Pharmacists Association-Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP), Elsner has a big job to do.

In addition to overseeing an executive board comprised of 32 student members, she has two primary roles: ensuring that the School’s chapter of the association aligns with its national vision and considering the future of the organization as a whole. But Elsner’s favorite part of her role involves boosting individual members of her chapter. “I want to be able to provide students the opportunity to grow while they’re in school, to have opportunities for leadership, policy, and advocacy,” she says.

Clearly, Elsner finds inspiration in inspiring others. She describes a situation whereby the association was holding elections and a student who had run for a given position didn’t get it. “She approached me and said she still wanted to be involved,” recalls Elsner, who readily supported the student’s goal to launch a pre-pharmacy mentorship program with University of Maryland, College Park pre-pharmacy undergraduate students.

“She came to me with the idea, I helped her with logistics, and she ran with it,” Elsner says. “It was beyond rewarding.”

In addition to inspiring fellow students, Elsner has done some pretty inspiring work herself. She was selected as one of only four student pharmacists to serve on the APhA-ASP Awards Standing Committee, a national appointment with an array of responsibilities. In addition to evaluating each chapter’s performance and presenting them with feedback and
recommendations for improvement, Elsner and fellow committee members identified recipients for APhA-ASP awards, which were presented at the 2013 APhA Annual Meeting and Exposition this March in Los Angeles.

While the experience of serving on a national committee expanded Elsner’s horizons, it ultimately circled back to guiding others. “It was an honor to serve on this committee,” she says. “The experience helped me understand the importance of mentorship in shaping the future leaders in pharmacy.”

Bonnie Li: Uniting Students and Legislators

Despite being a student, Bonnie Li already knows what it’s like to promote pharmacy issues with the Maryland General Assembly. That’s the primary role of the Maryland Pharmacy Coalition (MPC), an organization composed of pharmacy students and professionals that Li co-chairs.

Her ascent to this heady position originated in her first year at the School, when Li demonstrated an interest in student government by attending Legislative Advocacy Day. In her second year as a pharmacy student, Li became a student representative for the MPC. This gave her an up-close look at the role of the coalition, and she learned how the MPC organized its Legislative Day.

As co-chair of the MPC, Li reflects on her legislative learning odyssey. “I had never spoken with legislators before [coming to pharmacy school],” she says. This year, she made that opportunity happen for other students.

The MPC’s Legislative Day brings together students and legislators to address issues of significance to the pharmacy profession. This year 360 attendees, including pharmacy students and pharmacists from all over Maryland, convened for the event on Feb. 14, 2013, at the state capital. Every participant had appointments scheduled with legislators to discuss bills under consideration. This year, of great interest to the pharmacy representatives in attendance was a bill that would broaden pharmacists’ ability to administer vaccines. “Every year, the issues are different. You never know what’s coming up,” Li says.

The preparation leading up to Legislative Day is almost as momentous as the event itself. “It was a huge effort; a ton of students were involved in making these appointments [with legislators]. We go over all the statements. The MPC members vote and educate students who attend on what to say to officials,” Li explains.

Though the preparations were laborious, Li knows the effort was worth it. “We can have a unifying voice for all pharmacists in Maryland,” she says.

A Tradition of Legislative Responsibility

From the time students enter the School of Pharmacy, they’re exposed to their legislative role as future pharmacists. “Early on, the faculty talk to students about their responsibility of being part of the profession, of advocating for the profession,” says Jill Morgan, PharmD, BCPS, associate dean for Student Affairs. “I think it [the focus on legislation] has always been a part of student life at the School of Pharmacy.”

The School’s emphasis on pharmacy in the broader context of legislative affairs has far-reaching implications. Morgan suggests that more students at the University of Maryland enroll in the School’s dual law-pharmacy program than would otherwise. She also notices that, most years, some of the pharmacists in attendance at Legislative Day are recent graduates of the School of Pharmacy.

That strong attendance of pharmacists at Legislative Day hasn’t gone unnoticed by Li. “I think it’s really important when pharmacists attend. It shows students that you can advocate for your profession,” she says. As pharmacists have acted as government-savvy role models for Li, she hopes to follow in their footsteps. “I really want to stay involved and attend Legislative Day every year I can,” Li says.