

Developing Leaders

by Stefan G. Koenig, Ph.D.

In January I had the privilege of participating in the American Chemical Society's 2010 Leadership Development Institute (LDI) in Fort Worth, TX. The invitation to partake in the Younger Chemists Committee (YCC) Leadership Development Workshop afforded me a glimpse into the efforts that ACS officials make on behalf of their membership and the chemistry enterprise as a whole. The number of programs available to benefit members is substantial, and many are geared toward adapting members to a changing global marketplace by growing their leadership capabilities. Given the current economic realities, chemists should consider these training opportunities when contemplating volunteer roles and their professional development.

The history of ACS training programs dates back 45 years and has evolved to more effectively coordinate Society activities. In recent years, local, regional, and national officers – the vast majority of whom are volunteers with full-time careers – have gathered at LDI to discuss how best to serve the membership. For 2010, this event focused on creating successful leaders by enhancing management and communication skills, demonstrating the value of volunteerism to employers, and sharing best practices. The weekend included networking events, coaching in organizational skills, and keynote lectures by the ACS presidential succession.

A newly created Leadership Development System (<http://www.acs.org/leaderdevelopment>) offers a curriculum for vocational and volunteer advancement. This comprehensive set of 17 courses is available at scheduled local, regional, and national gatherings or in a self-paced format online, anytime. Importantly, members benefit from taking courses at a discounted rate. Seven of the modules are of the online variety; the remaining ten are composed of 4-hour facilitated sessions and one advanced 8-hour capstone course. “The Extraordinary Leader” class, based on research by John H. Zenger and Joseph Folkman, described in a book of the same title, addresses key findings: (1) leaders can, in fact, be created, and (2) superior ones make an enormous difference, while (3) building strengths and (4) fixing flaws are critical.

The Younger Chemists Committee was created by ACS to address the particular needs of early-stage chemists, with a vision to foster successful careers, as well as active roles within the Society. Since 2002, YCC has selected a group of promising chemists, 35 years and younger, for the Leadership Development Award (<http://membership.acs.org/y/ycc/awards/ldw.htm>). Participants invited to attend the LDI explore the attributes of effective leaders, learn how to become part of the ACS hierarchy, and network with current officers. This is an exciting window into the mechanism by which representatives develop the Society. Interested individuals need letters of support for their applications.

ACS is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization with a mission “to advance the broader chemistry enterprise and its practitioners for the benefit of Earth and its people” and a vision to improve “people’s lives through the transforming power of chemistry.” It recognizes the evolving global chemical enterprise and, as the largest scientific society, is an authority for chemistry-related professions in the U.S. and around the world. By providing leadership training opportunities, ACS encourages members to adapt to changing times by updating their skill sets. Pursuing this available training, participating in Society volunteer roles, and using our voices to give the chemist’s perspective on pertinent social, political, and business matters, will further ensure that the chemical sciences remain relevant and respected.