

Making a Difference: Teaching

Dr. Leslie Phillips, the associate director of undergraduate studies at the School of Pharmacy, never really wanted to be a pharmacist.

“My whole life, I wanted to be a teacher,” Dr. Phillips says. “When I was a kid, I used to pretend I was a teacher and play with chalk. When I was studying, I would pretend I was teaching to the class and write on the back of the closet door.”

“I was quite disappointed when the School of Pharmacy switched to white boards,” Dr. Phillips quips with a smile.

Dr. Phillips’ plans of becoming a teacher were sidetracked in the 1970s by a flooded teaching market. At the suggestion of her father, she instead got her diploma in pharmacy and started working in a community pharmacy.

But Dr. Phillips soon realized that community pharmacy was not where her heart lay, and she returned to her thoughts of becoming a teacher – this time of pharmacy. She pursued first a bachelor of science in pharmacy, then a doctorate, and finally achieved her dream when she joined the faculty at the School in the mid-1990s.

Since that time, Dr. Phillips has been the recipient of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Award for Excellence in Pharmaceutical Teaching seven times: 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2007 and 2009.

This is a significant award that is voted on by the graduating class of each year to reflect their admiration for a particular teacher over their four years of pharmacy studies.

When asked what makes her so successful at teaching, Dr. Phillips says that she is very practical.

“I always make sure that I show them how the content is relevant to what a pharmacist actually does,” she says. “I try to structure my lectures as questions that mimic the thought process of a pharmacist, and I always try to have a story on hand about a patient to help illustrate a learning point.”

Creativity is also an important element of Dr. Phillips’ teaching. For instance, when teaching her students about anti-psychotic medications, she gives the students headphones playing virtual auditory hallucinations that mimic the distractions experienced by someone suffering from schizophrenia. She then asks them to try and respond coherently to a series of questions.

Dr. Phillips knows that teaching pharmacy is not about transferring knowledge for the sake of knowledge – it’s about training students to be practicing pharmacists who can meet the health needs of people in real situations.

Dr. Phillips says she loves teaching pharmacy just as much now as when she started.

Not bad for someone who never wanted to be a pharmacist.

