

How the Leadership Academy has Advanced ASE's Sonographer Leaders

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TO DATE, sonographers make up 33% of ASE's membership and the demand for dedicated sonographers has never been higher. As an integral part of any cardiology team and as in any career, sonographer leaders are needed at every level. In 2015, ASE developed a five-year strategic plan that included a goal of mentorship and training of its dedicated

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volunteer workforce. To help implement that goal, ASE's Governance Task Force was asked to develop a leadership program that combined didactics, experiential learning, self-directed online learning, and access to ASE senior advisors. Thus, the ASE Leadership Academy (LA) was formed. The

19-month program provides an opportunity for members to increase their knowledge, work with a mentor and cohort peers, and develop leadership skills. These skills can be utilized to help participants grow in their careers within their own institutions, while concurrently creating a pipeline of emerging leaders with specific talents that would ultimately be helpful for ASE's committees and Board of Directors.¹

In October 2018, the ASE announced that 14 members had been chosen to be part of the inaugural class of the ASE Leadership Academy, including three sonographers. In 2020, three more sonographers were selected for the second LA class. The strategic goals not only guide the Society to include sonographers in the LA, but also suggest the crucial need to groom them for higher positions at ASE. In increasing numbers, there are sonographers achieving higher education, advanced credentials, and leadership positions within their institutions. This growth has revealed a new gap in societal leadership, and ASE has shown continuous commitment to pivoting

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as the field of echocardiography evolves. In an ever-changing healthcare climate, and as our field gets more specialized, sonographer leaders have a responsibility to throw their hats in and advocate for fellow sonographers.

Advanced practice sonographers Keith Collins, MS, RDCS, FASE, and Carol Mitchell, PhD, RDMS, RDCS, RVT, RT(R), ACS, FASE, have been instrumental in the progress sonographers have made in leadership within our field. When asked about the LA, Collins said, “By establishing the Leadership Academy with sonographers and physicians alongside one another, ASE demonstrates the commitment to sonographer leaders in our Society's future and provides the tools and training to let them shine. This systematic training benefits the sonographer's own personal growth, their employer and ultimately the Society gains a stronger sonographer voice.” Mitchell, having been the first sonographer treasurer on the ASE Board of Directors, said “I wish the Leadership Academy opportunity existed when I was first starting my career. I believe the opportunities created by the LA offer sonographers an opportunity to network, take graduate-level management and leadership courses, and facilitate opportunities to become leaders at both their institution and within ASE. The opportunity to take these courses facilitates mastery of new knowledge and skill sets that allow for expanded roles for sonographers both in professional organizations and in their clinical environments. Expansion of traditional sonographer roles will facilitate not only sonographer leadership roles, but also sonographer-led dissemination of new information in management strategies, education, and research.”²

The Leadership Academy experience teaches a wide variety of relevant topics with discussions led by inspiring leaders in echocardiography. Not only do members learn about topics that would be covered in an MBA or leadership course, but it serves as a platform for members to engage as equals, with members they may not otherwise cross paths with, and discuss these topics with peers and mentors. The LA offers a support system unique to the experience. When first starting the program, members are paired with a mentor. During the course of the program, these mentors prove to not only be guides in the workplace and ASE, but someone to bounce ideas off of, talk you off the ledge, and celebrate your victories as you gain confidence and skill in leadership. Another part of the LA support system is the networking connections you make with thought leaders in ASE. Once you are known as a LA participant, doors continue to open to make lasting connections.

We interviewed sonographers, **Kristen Billick (KB)**, BS, ACS, RDCS(AE/PE), FASE; **Ashlee Davis (AD)**, BSMI, ACS, RDCS, FASE, and **Eric Kruse (EK)**, BS, ACS, RDCS, RVT, FASE, from the inaugural LA class, to understand how the LA has impacted their sonography careers and about their overall experience. We even answered one question ourselves.

Q How did the LA help you grow in your career/in your institution?

EK: The leadership academy best prepared me with the confidence to continue to take on challenges and help identify my own leadership style. In addition, it prepared me to better assess difficult situations and develop improvement strategies using different approaches.

Q What was your favorite part of the LA experience?

AD: My favorite part of the LA experience was the bonds I made with the other members of my class. We spent many hours together having deep discussions about the things we were learning and experiencing in our own institutions, and that really created strong connections. I think it was even more profound because we were all experiencing a global pandemic together and able to really rely on each other for support. I continue to keep in contact with many people in my LA class, and they will all be lifelong friends.

MW: I was truly blown away with the topic of



‘Imposter Syndrome’ and how our entire class could relate to this feeling in some way. Even our mentors! **MJ:** The mentorship program initiated at the beginning of the LA has allowed me to discuss opportunities at ASE and within my career with someone who is there whole-heartedly to help me. I trust her feedback and guidance, as her experience adds real-life understanding to the topics taught in the course. My mentor has not only been there professionally, but has become a lifelong friend.

Q What leadership skill did you develop most in your time in the LA?

KB: The LA helped me to develop my change management skills. Almost immediately after transitioning into the Echo Lab Manager role, I was faced with some major difficult situations, including the beginning of the COVID pandemic. I had to change my thought process, my priorities, and use innovative thinking and problem solving to navigate my way. I reached out to my LA Mentor and LA peers many times to help me through different situations. I was able to develop new processes and use the change management skills I learned in the LA to make my echo lab safe and efficient without sacrificing quality.

Q What would you say to sonographers aspiring to be in this program?

AD: Go for it!

EK: Do it.

KB: This is an amazing opportunity to both grow within the ASE and grow within your own organization!

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– Neil Weissman, MD, FASE, Leadership Academy Program Director and ASE Past President

LA program director and ASE Past President, Neil Weissman, MD, FASE, said, “It is through initiatives like this that we will have more sonographers as ASE leaders. That is, leaders that **ARE** sonographers and not just leaders **OF** sonographers. We need sonographers in more leadership roles that have traditionally been held by physicians and Leadership Academy helps train those future leaders.” With the introduction of LA, sonographers will continue to have a prominent voice within the ASE.

Learn more about applying for the 2022-2024 ASE Leadership Academy class at: ASEcho.org/LeadershipAcademy

References:

1.Porter, A. (2018, October 11). ASE announces first cohort in its new Leadership Academy. Retrieved December 27, 2021, from https://www.asecho.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ASE_Leadership_Academy_2018.pdf
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