Educator's Podium

WCO Advocacy and Leadership Program Imparts Valuable Knowledge and Skills

Emiliano Teran, PhD



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Optometry holds immense potential to change lives by improving vision health, particularly among vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly. As a faculty member of an optometry program in Mexico, I have a strong interest in promoting initiatives that benefit vision health. This is what drew me to the Optometry Program in Advocacy and Leadership (OPAL) course offered by the World Council of Optometry (WCO). OPAL is a 10-week program offered to members of WCO. It is designed to provide optometry professionals with a comprehensive understanding of the principles and practices of advocacy and leadership so they may advocate for optometry on the global, national or local level. The program expanded my knowledge and skills in these areas, which will enable me to be a more effective faculty member and champion for children's vision issues. I have participated in numerous initiatives aimed at promoting children's vision health and overall wellness, and OPAL was an opportunity to further my commitment.

Taught by experienced educators Don Lyon, OD, MS, and Luisa Casas Luque, OD, PhD, the 2022 OPAL course covered a wide range of topics including strengths-based leadership, stakeholder engagement, message development and risk management. A combination of online lectures, live events and engaging activities created a dynamic learning atmosphere.

Opportunities and Insights

Meaningful opportunities and insights I gained from the experience included the following.

Connecting with a diverse group of optometric professionals

The WCO OPAL course provided a rich opportunity for me to connect with a varied group of global optometric professionals. Prior to the course, I often found myself working in solitude and facing

difficulties accessing relevant resources and support. Through OPAL, I connected with classmates from diverse nations and learned from their experiences and perspectives, which helped me understand my work in a wider context.

The chance to interact with seasoned instructors, who possess vast knowledge and expertise in the field, was another remarkable aspect of the course.

A standout aspect of the course was working with my mentor Sandra Block, OD, MEd, MPH, FAAO, FCOVD. Her support and expertise proved to be invaluable as I progressed through the material and strove to reach my advocacy targets. Dr. Block's guidance was instrumental in my success and I am thankful for her mentorship during the program.

I am grateful to have learned and been motivated by all of these individuals. This exceptional opportunity has already made a significant impact on my work, and I am confident that the connections made through the course will be invaluable as I progress in my career.

Understanding and leveraging my strengths as a leader

A key result of the OPAL course was recognizing and utilizing my personal strengths as a leader. Before the course, I did not give much thought to how my individual strengths may affect my leadership approach. But through the course's concentration on strengths-based leadership, I was able to identify my unique strengths and contemplate more deliberately how to use them for a positive outcome. For instance, I realized that one of my assets is the capability to establish strong connections with others and motivate those around me. Knowing this has helped me to be a more productive faculty member, as it enabled me to cultivate a sense of community and collaboration within my program.

Connecting with key stakeholders

The OPAL course also provided participants with practical tips and strategies for success. One especially beneficial lesson was the process of identifying and connecting with key stakeholders. To advance an advocacy cause, it is important to recognize stakeholders and form meaningful connections with them. OPAL educated attendees on techniques and tools for achieving this goal such as stakeholder analysis and stakeholder mapping.

I am eager to apply the skills I gained in stakeholder engagement to form stronger partnerships with local organizations and community leaders. These alliances will be crucial in determining the needs of the children in my community and creating tailored solutions.

Crafting effective messages

Additionally, the course taught me how to communicate effectively through message crafting. I learned how to craft clear, concise, impactful messages using language and storytelling. I aim to use these newfound skills to reach a wider audience and inspire more action surrounding my cause of promoting children's vision health.

A Worthwhile Investment in the Future

I am grateful for the fulfilling and transformative experience of OPAL. Being part of a community of like-minded individuals dedicated to creating positive change was truly enriching. While the journey of creating change and making an impact is not always smooth, OPAL has equipped me with the necessary strategies and confidence to tackle challenges. I learned the significance of resilience and discovered ways to remain determined and enthusiastic even when faced with obstacles. The skills and knowledge I gained will be priceless as I continue working toward better vision health for children in my

community and making a difference in the world.

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