

**Message from Diane M. Magrane, M.D.**  
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**May 2010: Unanticipated Legacies: ELAM Action Projects**

Not long ago, I sat at a dinner table with several ELAM alumnae. Near the end of the meal, one of them stood to leave. “Excuse me,” one said, “but I need to leave early to finish my Action Project. The curriculum committee is voting on the final proposal for the changes I began moving forward while I was in ELAM four years ago.” A few weeks later, at another ELUM gathering, I heard, “Tomorrow I begin a new job! It is the culmination of the project I began in ELAM nine years ago when I realized that I would have to take a new path to achieve what I wished to accomplish in health policy.” It turns out that such confessions are not unusual; the ELAM Institutional Action Project is a beginning to organizational improvements and, for some, a light behind a door of professional opportunity. A few, of course, are well underway when the Fellow begins ELAM and she is able to celebrate an important endpoint during the ELAM fellowship year. But for most, it marks the beginning of a leadership journey.

These conversations gave me pause to consider my own ELAM experience in 2002, when I entered ELAM as an Associate Dean who thought she was near completion of a five-year process to transform a discipline-based medical curriculum into one that fully integrated behavioral, clinical, organizational, and basic sciences. My action project was to move beyond this to develop a leadership program for faculty who would come to my school from all across the nation to develop their cross-disciplinary, team-based leadership skills and then take that learning home to others. The growth of this program would transform faculty leadership development. This was to be my legacy AFTER I finished implementing the new medical school curriculum. As many of you know, the cards took an interesting turn, and I entered a lesson plan of politics beyond what I had anticipated. The faculty did indeed vote for an extensively integrated medical school curriculum, and the Dean decided that someone else should lead the effort. I submitted a final progress report to ELAM, and in that report I described how I had used the Campaign Approach to change introduced to us by Tom Gilmore (1), how I expanded my repertoire of listening and leading to bring others along as described in [2], and how I abandoned my ideas for the faculty career development program in order to tend to the important matters of the school in this change project. Of course, the project was not abandoned at all.

My school moved on to create the integrated medical curriculum just as we all had planned it, and I moved on to a national position at the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) where we created a program called TeamWorks (3). This national program incorporated many of the principles of transdisciplinary, team-based leadership development and institutional work in my original vision of that 2002 Action Project submission. And where is that Action Project now? Well, just look at what we are doing with ELAM—Learning Communities collaborating as teams, organizational change that benefits from peer consultation, and skills of working with diverse people identified as core competencies of leadership. Good Grief! I am living my Institutional Action Project as Director of ELAM!

The stated purpose of the ELAM Institutional Action Project (IAP) is to integrate the resources and support of the ELAM community into a visible leadership contribution to the Fellow’s institution.(4) The project, which should be developed in consultation with the Dean and/or other senior executive mentors, should have a scope that extends beyond the Fellow’s own specialty unit. It can be a single project or part of a larger project. It may be an incoming challenge to a recently appointed position or it could be re-energizing a stalled important initiative. It is most likely to be successful if it is...

- Aligned with personal interests and passions and meaningful to advancing the Fellow’s professional life.
- Aligned with institutional needs and interests.
- Aligned with the interests of a mentor who is committed to helping craft and implement the project.
- Designed to achieve initial goals within the 6-8 months of the ELAM year. It could be a pilot program or a segment of a larger initiative.

It occurs to me that these Institutional Action Projects are “unexpected legacies” of the ELAM program. They are small changes that make big differences to academic medicine, dentistry, and public health in the long run. We know that small stirrings within complex systems (and no system is as complex as that of academic medicine!) can lead to major organizational movement over time. (4) Since ELAM has a goal of creating culture change through our Fellows and our activities, these Action Projects are integral to fulfilling our mission as well as to contributing to the organizational visibility and skill development that enhances each Fellow’s leadership potential. And THAT leaves me wondering how far this part of the ELAM legacy has reached. There are 54 new Fellows coming into the program who would love to learn from you as they consider the projects they will take on over the next year! ELAM would like to extend two invitations to those of you who are ELUMS that have developed Institutional Action Projects (IAPs). The first is to attend an Alumnae Institutional Action Project Mentoring session with the Fellows just prior to the AAMC Annual meeting. If you are planning to attend the AAMC meeting or if you live within the Metro DC area and are interested, please let us know by sending an email to Laura Lynch ([Laura.Lynch@DrexelMed.edu](mailto:Laura.Lynch@DrexelMed.edu)). The second invitation is to share your experience on the [ELAM LinkedIn networking site](#). Tell us how your ELAM Action Project has affected your career or your institution. Briefly describe your project and share how you have nurtured the project, its process, and its sequelae over time. In responding to either of these two invitations, you are likely to learn as much as you share—and THAT is another legacy of the ELAM Leadership Community!

## References:

1. Hirschhorn, Larry and May, Linda. “The Campaign Approach to Change: Targeting a Universities Scarcest Resources.” *Change*, May/June 2000. (also addressed on the CFAR web site at [http://www.cfar.com/html/focusareas\\_campaignapproach.html](http://www.cfar.com/html/focusareas_campaignapproach.html))
2. Benchmarks, Center for Creative Learning (<http://www.ccl.org/leadership/assessments/benchOverview.aspx>)
3. Magrane D., Khan O, MD, Pigeon Y, EdD, Leadley J, a Grigsby K, , Learning About Teams by Participating in Teams. *Acad Med* (in press)
4. ELAM syllabus 2010
5. Social Invention Group. Scientific Origins of Complexity inspired management (<http://socialinvention.net/complexlityscience.aspx>)