

Reality and Dreams: State of the Academy

Mohammad R. Torabi, PhD, FAAHB

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It has been an honor and privilege for me to have served as President of the American Academy of Health Behavior during this past year. Its mission has been professionally near and dear to my heart. As you have heard me saying in the past, "research is the backbone of our profession." It gives us legitimacy as an interdisciplinary profession so we can make a difference in the health and well being of fellow mankind. Research and evaluation in health behavior and education provide us with objective, unbiased, and reliable knowledge that empowers researchers and practitioners to fill in the gap in the literature and translate the findings in practice. Research allows us to remain at the cutting edge of better understanding the whole complex health behavior phenomenon so the profession will never be viewed as an outdated or static field.

I believe research is to our profession as oxygen is to our lives. Thus, our profession simply cannot survive without ongoing research providing the breath of life. This is why I made my commitment to the Academy and its mission. On behalf of the Academy and its leadership, I am absolutely pleased to inform you that the Academy is alive, well, and making great strides toward becoming prosperous and well recognized nationally and possibly internationally as a research organization in the field of health education,

promotion, and behavior.

The success of the Academy would not have been possible without the commitment of our AAHB Board of Directors, founding members, past presidents, as well as the membership at large. The success is far more admirable because we do not have staff, secretaries, national headquarters, or financial resources like other national health organizations. The Board of Directors serve as the policy makers as well as movers and shakers. The leadership of the organization and AAHB Fellows have made professional, personal, and financial sacrifices and commitments to the noble cause of the Academy. As this year's President, I could not have asked for more committed colleagues than those I have had the pleasure of working with. I would like to briefly highlight at least one contribution that each member of the Board of Directors made to the Academy.

- Our President-Elect, Dr David R. Black, has done an excellent job in leading our strategic plan as well as being a calm and stabilizing force within the Academy.

- Our Past-President, Dr Robert J. McDermott, was not only a wonderful advisor to the Board, but he also worked diligently in formulating the process of selecting the AAHB Research Laureate for 2005.

- Dr Mary Dinger did a great job as our Treasurer.

- Dr Michael Young has served as the Academy's Secretary and has kept us all in line.

- Dr Bruce Simons-Morton has done a superb job in master planning this year's conference program, which is expected to be one of the best conferences we have had so far. It is a credit due to his

Mohammad R. Torabi, Chancellor's Professor and Chairperson, Department of Applied Health Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Address correspondence to Dr Torabi, Department of Applied Health Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405. E-mail: torabi@indiana.edu

commitment to the cause of the Academy that he has been elected as our future President-Elect.

- Dr Dennis L. Thombs, Chair of Professional Development, successfully led a team to prepare a position paper from AAHB entitled "A Vision for Doctoral Research Training in Health Behavior," which will serve as a blueprint for curriculum development and revision in major PhD-granting institutions. It will be published in the *American Journal of Health Behavior*.

- Dr Lori W. Turner has served with distinction in the role of Chair of Membership and Development.

- Dr Bradley O. Boekeloo has served our Academy with plenty of energy and enthusiasm as Chair of Publications and Communication.

- Dr Steven Y. Sussman, serving in the area of Research Development and Publications Policy, has created a new direction for this area.

- Dr Rita D. Debate has done a great job as Chair of our Abstract Committee for this year's program.

- Our Delegates-at-Large, Dr Karen D. Liller, Dr Mary A. Nies, and Dr Robert F. Valois, have been instrumental in serving the Academy in various capacities.

- Dr Mark Kittleson was appointed as an honorary member of the Board. He has been our technology representative and resource professional who continues to serve the Academy with superb service and loyalty.

- Because of Dr Bill Zimmerli's interest, experience and, commitment to AAHB, he was appointed to work with the Board of Directors for fund-raising.

- Last, but not least, our Executive Director, Dr Terri Manning, has done a very good job for logistics of our annual conferences and the Academy, in general.

At the closing ceremony of our Conference in Sedona, Arizona last year, as incoming President I outlined my remarks entitled "Optimistically Looking Ahead: Closing Remarks, 4th Annual Academy Meeting." In those brief remarks, I outlined some of the challenges that our Academy faces as we forge ahead. I would like to highlight what progress we have made responding to those challenges since last year.

1. "...we have financial constraints preventing us from doing our business like

other national organizations."¹ We have made some progress by conducting fund-raising and by appointing a committee to look at a means for increasing our base budget. We have explored working on a sellable publication that may contribute to the profession as well as help our Academy. This revenue-generating initiative should remain as a top priority.

2. "...we should have a strategic as well as tactical plan in place for generating revenue for the Academy."¹ We started a strategic plan 2 years ago that now is being fully developed under the leadership of our President-Elect, Dr Randy Black, and his committee members. It is important that we just don't have a strategic plan that we shelve away, but we back up our strategic plan with a tactical plan with timetables and who does what. This is an ongoing process. During this process we need to have every member who is interested in serving be involved in the Academy.

3. "Our Academy members should continue to lead by example."¹ I believe our Academy has exceeded everyone's expectations. Our members, including its leadership, are leading researchers nationally and internationally. During the short period of time that our Academy has been in existence, practically every recipient of the American Association for Health Education Scholar of the Year Award as well as the Research Council Award from the American School Health Association, and the recipient of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Scholar Award have been members of the American Academy of Health Behavior. The membership of the Academy truly personifies what a premier research association should be all about.

4. "The Academy should play a significant role in promoting scientific research and articulating the significance of research"¹ Similar to previous Academy conferences, presenters at this conference and at our workshops are true examples of what the Academy should be doing toward this challenge. We attract world-renowned scholars to attend the conference and make presentations. We may have to, within the next 5 to 10 years, have a midyear conference so we better inform the membership and practitioners about cutting edge research in health behavior. Additionally, the Journal of the

Academy continues to make an impact toward this goal and has become a premier research journal in the field.

5. "We need to partner and strengthen our link and collaboration with other nations in promoting research in health behavior."¹ Although we are making some progress, this is an ongoing challenge as the Academy matures as a major player at the international level.

6. "We need to increase our membership."¹ Last year I challenged all of our members to at least nominate 2 members to join the Academy. Although the membership has expanded, I do not believe we are where we ought to be. We should continue our effort in recruiting potential and accomplished researchers into the Academy. We have added 13 new members this year, 5 Affiliate Members, and 1 AAHB Fellow to our roster.

7. "We should mentor, motivate, encourage, support, and recognize our new generation of researchers..."¹ Again, this is an initiative that we need to be mindful of and requires financial means in the form of scholarships and awards to potential researchers so we can recruit them into the life of the Academy.

8. "We need to continue to promote attendance at our annual conferences."¹ I believe we need to continue our strategies to invite the best researchers and scholars to give presentations at our national conferences. We need to think about adding concurrent competitive research presentation sessions to future conference programs. We should continue scheduling our conferences in attractive places where we can draw attendees to the conferences.

Now I would like to talk about my dreams for the future of the Academy. In an article entitled "Paths for Successful Health Education Scholars," the researchers' overall recommendations for those who wish to follow their paths was think big, dare to fail, work hard, etc.² As a lifetime student whose vocation and avocation have become a passion for research and scholarly work, I dare to share with you my thoughts, dreams, and imagination for the future of our beloved Academy. I have a picture frame in my home office with a message (unknown source) that says, "Imagine a day when you stopped editing your dreams. When a world of unlimited possibilities lies before you with every sunrise.... Before we can make it

happen, we must see it in our imagination."

I dream of the Academy with a membership of at least 1000 elitists – but down-to-earth committed researchers – as well as rising scholars with expertise in both cutting edge methodology related to health behavior research as well as health content areas. This community of well-known scholars should work as a team for the advancement of research in health behavior. These are implicitly elitist researchers, yet are highly respected, caring, compassionate, and inclusive individuals. Glover's vision for the Academy was "looking for a sense of community with fellow health researchers. When you associate with researchers, you think and act like researchers."³

I dream of the *American Journal of Health Behavior* becoming an internationally known premier journal publishing results of breakthrough work in health behavior and education with a circulation of at least 25,000. Then, it will become a major revenue-generating means for both the owner of the journal as well as for the Academy. This can be a win-win situation for the profession and the Editor-in-Chief, as well as for the Academy.

I dream of the Academy members as leaders, with a powerful voice advocating for research and invited to testify before legislative bodies for expansion of federal, state, and private support for research. The American Academy of Health Behavior and its members could serve as the ultimate reference for any health behavior issues for national and local media. The Academy could be called upon for clarification of any issues related to health behavior and research. McDermott's vision was for the Academy to serve as a "think-tank" forum.⁴

I dream of the Academy being a voice for the voiceless and indigenous for providing research funding targeting the poor, disadvantaged people in the United States and poorest nations in the world.

I imagine a day that the Academy becomes financially prosperous and transparent with its own Academy Foundation serving as a fund-raising arm of the Academy so we can

- a. fund scholarships for PhD students with strong research interests;
- b. provide full or partial support for young investigators;
- c. sponsor international scholars from

developing countries to attend our national conferences;

d. hire a full-time executive director and support staff with national headquarters housed in a major research institution near the US Capitol;

e. use the Academy membership and our national office to respond to major research funded proposals (RFP) and involve the Academy members in conducting research and evaluation related to health behavior and education.

f. support and conduct research and evaluation including quantitative, qualitative, theory driven, action oriented, longitudinal, cross-sectional, experimental, quasi-experimental, and last but not least, translation of research into practice. As Larry Green stated, "If researchers lose sight of what is needed for the practical purpose of improving people's health, they can get lost in trying to justify a theory, model, and ideology, or an approach for its own sake."⁵

I dream of a day that we draw attendees from other disciplines, from local, national, and international communities, so we do not have to just preach to the choir.

At the end, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the membership of the Academy that provided me with the opportunity to serve as its President during this past year. It has been a joyous professional ride with challenging opportunities. Let me close my remarks with my childhood observation one dark night as I spent the night in the western part of Iran. For the first time in my life, I saw a lightning worm. These worms usually come out at night, and they shed a glowing light. I was astonished how this little worm lit its surrounding area on that dark night. I realized that little creature made a difference that night for me. I could see where I was going. So the

lesson I learned was if that little creature could make a difference, so can I. So the moral of this childhood experience is that if everyone on the face of the earth provides a little light, there will be no darkness in the world.

If these dreams are worthy for the future of the Academy, let's debate them and possibly incorporate them in future strategic and tactical plans within the next few years. A poster in a local pediatrician's office in southern Indiana drew my attention. The message was "Set a goal. When you want what you've never had, you must do what you've never done." So, let's think outside the box. Let's think big, dream big, and allow our imagination to take over for the future of this Academy. Our membership is passionate about and committed to the mission of this Academy. The plane has taken off, and the sky is the limit for what this dynamite group of scholars can do for the advancement of research in health behavior and, ultimately, for improving the health and well-being of our fellow mankind. ■

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