

Thoughts about potential **Next Steps** for RLA

Part I. What we have identified and discussed and What we have heard.

As the new RLA dean, I began thinking about the process for future planning for RLA by gathering feedback from faculty about the current (June 2020) status of the academy :

- ✓ awareness of the academy,
- ✓ student recruitment and attrition,
- ✓ faculty communication and discussion of teaching strategies,
- ✓ learning opportunities for students and training strategies,
- ✓ annual review of the courses of study, and
- ✓ planning for the future and improvement of the academy program.

Then, we began implementing our preparations for this year. Between June 1 and August 30, several new activities were initiated:

- proactive recruiting by current and incoming governors,
- phone interviews with faculty regarding the status of the academy,
- revisions and updates of the RLA website,
- 30-minute phone interviews in new students,
- Establishing monthly faculty meetings (60 minute)
- New student orientation via Zoom (90 minute)
- Formed five small cohort groups based on student interests (Membership, TRF, Fiduciary Responsibilities and Youth Protection, Communication and Leadership Development. Groups were made up of Rotarians from both districts.
- These self-directed groups were intended to provide opportunities for students to discuss their courses and Rotary topics of interest, and a source of individual student support during the academy experience. We have discovered that they also provide cross-district collegial connections.

As we moved into the year, we began faculty discussions about RLA and key topics identified during the initial interviews (summarized June 15, 2020), monitored the progress of students, shared course updates, attended some cohort group meetings and course Zoom sessions. These activities, in the context of our faculty meeting, stimulated thinking and reflecting about the future of RLA and our program, 2021-22.

What we, as faculty, have identified and discussed about RLA

From our faculty discussions, the following ideas and suggestions were shared about strategies for updating the RLA program. (October 13 thru January 11)

Academy awareness, recruiting and attrition issues:

- *We want to advertise the academy as the next step after the Rotary Leadership Institute's level 3. We will share the RLA brochure with RLI chairs in Districts: 5500 and 5495 and request that it be distributed to those completing Level 3.*
- *We will begin to publicize the Academy, 21-22 in late February/early March 2021.*
- *We may want to focus recruiting on those who have been/are club presidents and RLI Level 3 graduates.*
- *We should survey our students perceptions about the academy (1st and 2nd semester)*

- *It is important that we continue to provide opportunities for students to interact with one another, e.g. Zoom meetings.*

Faculty communication and sharing teaching strategies

- *Faculty should share with one another what they teach and how they teach, e.g. teaching strategies.*
- *Provide face to face opportunities for faculty to meet several times per year to discuss progress and share observations.*
- *Discuss adult learning and assure that our teaching is aligned with what we know about learning styles. Provide this information in a handout to RLA students in September.*

Enhancing and improving RLA learning opportunities.

- *In the history course (5500 portion), we should discuss “issues” that have created problems in various services and operations of the district (e.g. youth protection, management of funds, overspending, discussing of politics and religion, Rotary International’s gun policy).*
- *There is a need to review the history course (5495 portion) and update.*
- *Ask students to identify their area of Rotary leadership interest(s) and provide opportunities for linking to district leaders in that area.*
- *We may want include short review of how to access MyRotary and explore the Learning Center for interested students. During pre- entry interview (July/August), all students were linked to MyRotary and knew how to access the LC.*
- *Use strategies for peer support. Link students in pairs, trios, small groups (topics of interest, location, proximity) as resource support for one another in courses where feasible.*
- *Provide opportunities for students to have face to face Zoom discussions about key Rotary topics during the year.*
- *Students should have opportunity to learn how the district is structured, its leadership roles, and opportunities to meet with current leaders and discuss roles firsthand. Ask students to get a copy of their district’s organizational handbook.*
- *Provide students with an information document about “learning styles” for use in Rotary leadership work in September.*

Training strategies

- *We should be clear that the academy is a “guided independent study” experience as well as online based.*
- *We need to develop strategies that will enable as many as possible to complete the academy. coursework. The dean currently contacts students if they are lagging behind.*
- *Encourage students to use RI website, MyRotary and the Learning Center to access their rich learning resources.*
- *Provide opportunities (Zoom) for students and faculty so we can discuss Rotary topics and issues.*

Reviewing and revising the RLA curriculum.

- *Align our RLA curriculum with the evolving changes in Rotary International, The Rotary Foundation and Rotary leadership.*
- *Discuss with current governors, governor elects and governor nominees area of leadership training for RLA students.*

Annual course review

- *All courses should be reviewed each year and update by faculty.*
- *We need to review our course content and assure that it is updated each year.*
- *Improve the use of technology with courses.*
- *Review courses to be sure their topics are current and meet the learning needs of developing leaders.*

Planning for improvement

- *Get feedback from past participants and use improving the academy program and operations.*
- *Develop a strategic plan, clarifying our mission and goal(s), and align courses to these refined goals.*
- *Embed updated course of study (curriculum and other learning opportunities) and process for evaluating the academy's effectiveness into strategy planning.*
- *Include strategies for improving recruiting and reducing attrition in the strategic plan*

Strategic thinking and planning for the future and strategies for rethinking and revising our course formats and outcomes to meet Rotary goals and future challenges

- *If strategic planning in RLI 3 do we need it in RLA?*
- *We should emphasis continuity and consistency of leadership.*

These topics will be discussed as we continue to plan for the RLA program, 2021-22 and beyond.

As part of our preplanning for 2021-22, we discussed the above issues and gathered feedback from District 5495 and 5500 Rotary leaders and members of the Academy's Leadership Development cohort about RLA's role in :

- ✓ *Providing powerful and authentic information to and training for developing district leaders.*
- ✓ *Providing an aligned leadership (RLI to RLA) training model for our districts as they move to the future.*
- ✓ *Providing valuable and practical learning opportunities, course of study and instructional practices.*

As the academy team, we can apply what has been learned and what has been suggested as we identify RLA's path forward.

- *How can RLA be a valuable, facilitative, experienced and wise guide for Rotary leadership development?*
- *What courses and learning experience will provide an authentic, practical, timely and invaluable learning resource for Rotarians?*
- *What adjustments and revisions in our course of study, learning opportunities and instructional practices can help prepare Rotarians for leadership?*

What we have heard.

Below is the overall feedback from conversations with Governors, Governor Elects, Governor Nominees, RLI Chairs, RLA Leadership Development cohort and Membership course feedback conversation.

1. The high value of talking with one another about Rotary issues and building productive and collaborative relationships to learn together.
2. The academy should be the “graduate program” for the Rotary Leadership Institute (RLI) in districts. Provide leadership training for a wide array of leadership opportunities.
3. Having small cohort groups has been a very beneficial component of our program. They provide opportunities to discuss our courses, provide support for one another and gain new learning (ideas/suggestions).
4. Expanding the Branding course and creating a “course” with branding, marketing, social media, and the like. The experience of creating a brand document is very useful.
5. Continue to use Zoom/video conference as a gathering place for face-to-face sharing and learning, e.g. cohort groups and courses.
6. The Rotary Learning Center can be a valuable resource to students.
7. It would be beneficial for students to be linked with mentors in their area of interest.
8. Continue the pre-academy interview (July) with candidates. Asking about key Rotary topics of interests, leadership skills they want to grow and expand.
9. Think about adding learning opportunities in the area of “strategic thinking, visioning and planning.
10. It is important to know the history of clubs. Where can it fit? May not be a whole course.
11. Opportunities for RLA students to volunteer to be resource support for district leadership activities during the year.
12. Continue to be sensitive to the busy schedules of students, particularly those who are not retired.

Part II. What we know about adult learning

Below are some thoughts from teaching and learning experiences and what we have come to know about adult learning. Below that have been aligned with

A **blend** of reading, research, writing feedback, reflective writing, talking with one another (cohorts, pairs), and other collaborative activities.

Collaborative learning is very powerful (Joyce and Flowers, 1995 and WSLA 2009). We know the power of collaborative support in learning, Learners whose learning experiences evolve from introducing new idea/skills through seeing/modeling/practicing (guided and independent) to coaching, giving/receiving feedback and reflecting will apply and implement new learning (60-95% level).

The basic design of our courses should reflect what we know about adult learning:

- Focus on and learn about a new idea and/or new skill
- Discuss it and Observe it (if possible)
- Apply it to our experiences or Practice it (if possible)
- Discuss your observations with others (share feedback): What was seen, learned or other thoughts?
- Reflect and refine thinking about idea or skills. Explain how it can be applied.
- Summarize what has been learned?
- Link to new idea or skill

Retain the cohort groups (5 or 6 depending upon the attendance at the academy). Possibly provide opportunities for cohort groups to work on “real problem issue.

Use of the **Rotary Learning Center**. We could have list of Rotary LC courses and align them with our courses. Should be a valuable resource for individual study.

We know there are different learning styles. Our online, self-directed model works for some learning styles but if modified could be responsive to more students by providing opportunities for student interaction, group sharing, reflective problem solving and opportunities to apply learning.

Simultaneously, it is important to remember that our online learning model works for students with “limited time” and limited flexibility in their busy work/life schedules.

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Part III

A Distillation of Thinking- Creating the Future

Integrating and applying what we have discussed, what we have heard and what we know about adult learning.

During these past several months we have discussed and gathered feedback about the leadership training role of RLA. What follow is a distillation of this information in the form of suggested actions as we move forward into our 2021-22 RLA year.

The following suggestions are doable as we prepare for the 2021-22 Academy year.

1. Clarify and affirm the alignment between RLI and RLA with RLA being a “graduate” type leadership development follow-up. Be sure all RLI level 3 graduates are aware of RLA and the process for application (being nominated).
2. Continue the post nomination (July, August) interviews and expand the conversation about Rotary topics of interest of candidates.
3. Continue the small cohort topic groups which provide opportunities for face-to-face student discussions about their courses, Rotary topics, their experiences and challenges.
4. Align the RI Learning Center offerings by topic with our courses via information sheet.
5. Reflect the benefits of and desire for Zoom meetings which enable shared (face to face) learning and idea sharing. These options learning opportunities reinforce the likelihood of “stimulating capacity building” and creativity thinking.
6. Work to assure that our instructional formats are designed consistent what we know about adult learning.
7. Provide opportunities and assistance for students interest (voluntary) in having a mentor in their area of interest.
8. A few refinements for our courses in the future (21-22):
 - 8.1. Retain current course of study and instructional model as is and have each course include one Summary Zoom (60 mins) at the end to share what was learned and ask questions.
 - 8.2. Review each course to assure that reading/writing assignments call for reflective thinking and synthesis of thinking, not busy work.
 - 8.3. Assure that courses are current with Rotary information et al.
 - 8.4. Refer students to the RI Learning Center courses that align with the RLA course.
 - 8.5. Offer a mid-course Zoom for those interested (not required).

9. Voluntary options for students:

- ✓ Joining and attending a cohort group.
- ✓ Linking to a mentor in their area of interest.
- ✓ Attending single topic Zoom workshops. (See #5 below)

Thoughts about restructuring of our course of study

Below are a range of thoughts about restructuring our course of study and ideas about providing single topic learning opportunities via Zoom. Any major change in our course of study format will take time to plan

1. **Retain current course of study** and reorder if needed: Branding, The Rotary Foundation, Collaborating and Funding Needs, District Leadership and History, Membership, Fiduciary Responsibilities.

This suggestion would require basic course preparation and minor modification work (#8 above. It would enable us to continue to offer the current course of study with adjustments to learning activities, e.g a few Zooms, working in cohort groups, add a few 60 min workshops and create opportunities for mentorships were possible (in #9 above).

2. **Significant restructuring.** Connecting topics and creating our themes). It would reorganize course times from 4 to 6 weeks per theme).

Each course would be a **maximum of 15 to 18 hours** (from current 10-12 hrs).

This hours would represent the instructors projection of cumulative time for reading, researching, writing and engaging in Zoom meetings.

-Communication: Marketing, Branding and Social media.

-Pathways to Rotary: Attracting, Inducting, and Retaining Members. This would include our know our club/district culture the dimensions of diversity, equity and inclusion

-Creating the Future: Strategic thinking, Visioning, Action planning and Collaborating/Partnering.

-Doing the work of Rotary: The Rotary Foundation, Funding Needs, Fiduciary Responsibilities and Structure of the District.

This suggestion will call for a transition to the new format and would call for time for faculty to work together to design and plan the online and interactive themes-based program. It could call for two faculty to plan and team teach (two faculty teaching the course/theme). It would most likely take next year (2021-22) to design and plan then implement in 2022-23.

3. Other course of study formats could be designed that represent a blend of the ideas from #1 and #2 above. Any significant changes will call for transition time.

4. Irrespective of course of study modifications, the course of study should be supportive of and responsive those students who prefer “online/self-direct only” program. If we transition to a Theme or other format, we could offer the current online only (read materials, research

and complete assignments which would call for the same amount of time and not include the face-to-face Zooms). This could enable students who prefer online only courses to continue in the academy. When we found that students preferred the thematic format or other new format, we could discontinue this model.

Single topic workshops

5. For shorter topics which would not call for a course, we could offer (one or two) session workshops via Zoom for those who would like to attend. Each session would be one hour. These would be voluntary workshops and facilitated by an interested faculty member or guest Rotary Leader.

- **District leadership history.**
- **Mediating** in problem situations.
- **Youth protection.**
- **The 7th Area of Focus: Environment**
- How **access club members talents and skills** that can be shared with the club.
- What does “**Being the 4 Way Test**” mean?
- How to create “**Group Agreements**” for how members behavior and how the club operates.
- How do we find out **What We Want** as a club/district.
- The challenges of “**Immunity to Change**”.
- How to facilitate **crucial and authentic conversations.**
- **Building capacity** in a club or district.
- **Leadership is interdependent.** What does that mean and what does it look like?
- **Three plateaus of mental/social development:** Socialized mind, self-authoring mind and self-transforming mind.
- **Rules of Thumb for change.**
- Creating **dynamic tension** for growth as a club/district.

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