

Growing into Leadership



Nicole Bates

NICOLE BATES SEEMS TO BE MOVING QUICKLY UP THE PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERSHIP LADDER. THE CURRENT DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS FOR THE GLOBAL HEALTH COUNCIL IS A

self-described strategic thinker and likes to plan two, three and even four steps ahead while playing with different future scenarios. So you'd think her career trajectory was carefully plotted. There's only one problem. You'd be wrong.

Bates never set out to be a leader. In fact, she originally found her calling as a policy analyst with the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta shortly after getting her master's in public health from UNC in health behavior and education. Reserved by nature, Bates originally felt more comfortable listening carefully to others in group settings than speaking up. She was, after all, often the youngest person in the meetings.

But then something started happening. When she did speak, people listened, especially since her comments were insightful, thoughtful and precise. Eventually, her colleagues started coming to her for advice and counsel. In other words, Bates found herself growing into a leadership role, and she enjoyed it.

Bates is one of nine members of the first cohort in the School's distance learning

Executive Doctoral Program in Health Leadership. She and her classmates have just completed two years of coursework and are now completing dissertations that will culminate this year with DrPH degrees.

"These are highly accomplished individuals with proven leadership capacity and incredible passion for what they do," says Dr. Suzanne Havala Hobbs, director of the program. "Once they leave our executive DrPH program, look for them in top positions of

tions in organizations working to improve the public's health. Generous funding for technical support and student financial aid for the program is provided by The Constella Group. Don Holzworth, senior vice president and director of strategy for SRA International, Inc., and founder and former chairman and CEO of Constella Group, has been instrumental in helping fund the DrPH program (see pages 6 and 30). For more information on the program, see www.sph.unc.edu/hpaa/executive_drph.

In describing Bates' leadership style, Dr. Nils Daulaire, president and CEO of the Global Health Council says: "In Washington,

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leadership in the U.S. and around the world working to improve the health of all people."

The program is the nation's first doctorate in health leadership (DrPH) degree that students can earn while taking all of their classes online from their homes or offices (see page 6). It is designed for working professionals in mid-career who have the capacity and drive to assume top posi-

there are generally two sets of characters: the operatives and the strategists. The former know who's who and what it takes to move from point A to point B in the messy world of politics. The latter have the big picture in mind, a clear sense of what ultimately needs to be accomplished and a deep understanding of the substantive issues. Nicole is highly unusual and extraordinarily valuable in that

she combines both attributes, and does so in a low-key, self-effacing style that leaves everyone feeling that they have been heard and that their own interests have been served. She not only holds promise for a remarkable future, she is already a key player in moving the global health agenda forward in ways that serve our entire community.”

Bates leads a four-person team at the Washington, D.C.-based Global Health Council. Responsible for developing and implementing a strategy to convince policymakers and opinion leaders to put more resources towards global health initiatives, Bates applies newly learned leadership les-

sons to the many ongoing challenges she and her team face. One of her biggest challenges? Finding enough common ground to move the global health agenda forward.

“My team and I spend our days working to convince an incredibly diverse set of stakeholders that our priority is their priority,” she says. “It’s not easy. In a single issue, for example, we have to identify elements that resonate with different audiences, yet preserve the issue’s overall integrity.”

Bates says this policy tension has brought out what she considers one of her signature leadership traits—the ability to focus and synthesize differences into a shared plat-

form, especially when others are all over the map with their specific agendas.

“When I step back, I realize that facilitating dialogue and translating stakeholder buy-in into action is something that strong leaders do well,” she says. “Given my work, I have the opportunity to refine that skill almost daily.”

Somehow boundaries don’t seem to fit into any description of Nicole Bates, not when she’s still learning, improving—and, most importantly of all, growing into her leadership role. You’d think she had planned it that way, but of course you’d be wrong. ■

— BY GENE PINDER