



Opinion

## Motivations for pharmacy students to join professional organizations

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### Abstract

Student membership and leadership within professional organizations are key components to advancing the profession of pharmacy. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Draft Standards 2016 state in Guideline 9c that colleges or schools of pharmacy should support, "...student, faculty, administrators, preceptors and staff participation in, as appropriate, local, state, and national pharmacy, scientific, and other professional organizations." At the present, no data exist regarding what motivates students to join professional pharmacy organizations. In this article, we describe a survey that was distributed to PharmD candidates across the United States to identify what motivates them to join professional pharmacy organizations while in school. We learned that several factors had an effect on student motivation to join a professional organization. To encourage student involvement in organizations, pharmacy schools and professional pharmacy organizations should promote the types of pharmacists they serve, provide opportunities for networking, and offer valuable student programming at meetings. It is the school/college of pharmacy and the organization's challenge to identify these interests and seek to accommodate them, while accomplishing their independent mission and goals.

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### Introduction

The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards, effective January 23, 2011, state in Guideline 23.3 that colleges or schools of pharmacy should support, "...student, faculty, administrators, preceptors and staff participation in, as appropriate, local, state, and national pharmacy, scientific, and other professional organizations."<sup>1</sup> Professional organization membership continues to be emphasized in Standard 9 of the 2016 ACPE Standards (draft): Guidance for organizational culture. It clearly

states that faculty and administrators should support student membership in addition to modeling professionalism through their own active engagement in professional organizations.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) Educational Outcomes 2013, specifically Domain 4: Personal and professional development, emphasizes the need to enhance the sense of professionalism in pharmacy practice and the active engagement in the continual improvement for the profession.<sup>3</sup>

The development of professional attitudes and behaviors is just as critical to delivering high-quality patient care as is the acquisition of knowledge during school.<sup>4</sup> This process of professionalization, or professional socialization, which is the process of inculcating a profession's attitudes, values, and behaviors in an individual, cannot be learned from a textbook, but rather it must be actively acquired.<sup>5</sup> In line with this, professional organizations such as the American Pharmacists

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Association (APhA) and American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) suggest that an expanded sense of professionalism is critical to execution of pharmaceutical care, because of its patient-centered focus.<sup>5</sup> Students have been encouraged to participate in activities focused on the advancement of the profession of pharmacy and develop their own plan for post-graduate professional development by engaging with local, state, and national professional organizations.<sup>4,7</sup> Engaging students early on in professional pharmacy organizations is not only recommended but has also been associated with an increase in student self-reported professionalism.<sup>1,4,6–8</sup> However, no data exist regarding what motivates students to join professional pharmacy organizations.

We conducted a survey of PharmD candidates enrolled in pharmacy schools and colleges across the United States with the primary objective of identifying what motivates them to join professional pharmacy organizations. By investigating the rationale behind why students join professional pharmacy organizations, pharmacy educators and leaders within these organizations can gain an understanding of how to better promote professional organizational membership to its student body and how to address students' educational and professional interests, with the goal of increasing organization membership and active participation, therefore encouraging professional growth.

### Survey of pharmacy student professional organization membership

An on-line, 23 question instrument was e-mailed via SurveyMonkey<sup>®</sup> (Melo Park, CA) to a faculty representative at all 115 ACPE-accredited and candidate status PharmD programs across the United States for distribution to first-year (P1) through fourth-year (P4) professional students. Faculty representatives were identified through manual review of faculty contact information listed on the websites of ACPE-accredited and candidate status PharmD programs. The survey was available to participants for ten weeks starting

January 31, 2010. Information requested through the survey instrument included the following: demographic information, work experience, organization membership, leadership positions within an organization, and reasons for joining an organization. The questions consisted of multiple choice, Likert scale (5-point), and text box responses. Survey logic was integrated to minimize survey fatigue. Data were reported in aggregate using descriptive statistics. This study was approved by the University at Buffalo Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board.

### Survey results

A total of 1362 students from 32 schools and colleges of pharmacy completed the survey instrument. The majority of responding students were enrolled at a public college/university (66%). By year of enrollment, 360 respondents (26.7%) were in the first professional year, 348 respondents (25.8%) were in the second professional year, 316 respondents (23.4%) were in the third professional year, and 325 respondents (24.1%) were in the fourth professional year. The majority of students who responded to the question relating to professional organization membership were currently members in a student professional pharmacy organization ( $n = 1181$ ; 86.7%). Of those students who were currently members of a student professional pharmacy organization, 74.3% ( $n = 878$ ) reported past membership in an organization or club prior to pharmacy school. The professional organizations to which students were most commonly members during pharmacy school included the following: American Pharmacists Association—Academy of Students of Pharmacy (APhA-ASP) ( $n = 935$ ; 79.2%), pharmacy fraternities ( $n = 499$ ; 42.3%), Student Society of Health System Pharmacists (SSHP) /American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP) ( $n = 446$ ; 37.8%), and pharmacy leadership and honors societies (Phi Lambda Sigma and Rho Chi) ( $n = 301$ ; 25.5%).

Factors that influenced students to join a professional pharmacy organization are shown in the [Table](#). Students

Table  
Factors influencing students to join professional organizations

Factor (no. of responses)	Unimportant	Of little importance	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Area of interest ( $n = 1223$ )	35 (2.9%)	19 (1.6%)	127 (10.4%)	434 (35.5%)	608 (49.7%)
Networking ( $n = 1228$ )	42 (3.4%)	42 (3.4%)	181 (14.7%)	522 (42.5%)	441 (35.9%)
Student programming ( $n = 1227$ )	35 (2.9%)	28 (2.3%)	197 (16.1%)	539 (43.9%)	428 (34.8%)
Career development aid ( $n = 1229$ )	95 (7.7%)	112 (9.1%)	331 (26.9%)	434 (35.3%)	257 (20.9%)
Student scholarships ( $n = 1230$ )	180 (14.6%)	287 (23.3%)	330 (26.8%)	275 (22.4%)	158 (12.8%)
Free/discounted continuing education ( $n = 1228$ )	242 (19.7%)	273 (22.2%)	290 (23.6%)	267 (21.7%)	156 (12.7%)
A faculty member I respect is involved ( $n = 1225$ )	177 (14.4%)	190 (15.5%)	355 (29.0%)	371 (30.3%)	132 (10.8%)
Student travel money ( $n = 1229$ )	220 (17.9%)	328 (26.7%)	326 (26.5%)	239 (19.4%)	116 (9.4%)
Free journal subscription ( $n = 1228$ )	240 (19.5%)	287 (23.4%)	360 (29.3%)	227 (18.5%)	114 (9.2%)
Many of my friends are joining ( $n = 1221$ )	177 (14.5%)	237 (19.4%)	355 (29.1%)	341 (27.9%)	111 (9.1%)
Formal presentations/competitions ( $n = 1228$ )	239 (19.5%)	334 (27.2%)	352 (28.7%)	222 (18.1%)	81 (6.6%)
The abbreviation/acronym understood ( $n = 1232$ )	565 (45.9%)	324 (26.3%)	193 (15.7%)	115 (9.3%)	35 (2.8%)

<sup>a</sup>A total of 32 students responded in free-text box, as described in text.

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