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Research Article

## Evaluation of criteria utilized in the recognition of teaching excellence awards

Mary E. Kiersma, PharmD, PhD<sup>a</sup>, Aleda M.H. Chen, PharmD, PhD<sup>b,\*</sup>,  
Erika L. Kleppinger, PharmD, BCPS, CDE<sup>c</sup>, Elizabeth W. Blake, PharmD, BCPS<sup>d</sup>,  
Nicholas M. Fusco, PharmD, BCPS<sup>e</sup>, Vicky Mody, PhD<sup>f</sup>, Marc E. Gillespie, PhD<sup>g</sup>,  
Maureen Knell, PharmD, BCACP<sup>h</sup>, Robin M. Zavod, PhD<sup>i</sup>, AACP Council of Faculties  
Scholarly Teaching Taskforce Committee Members

<sup>a</sup> Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), Chicago, IL

<sup>b</sup> Department of Pharmacy Practice, Cedarville University School of Pharmacy, Cedarville, OH

<sup>c</sup> Department of Pharmacy Practice, Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy, Auburn, AL

<sup>d</sup> Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Outcomes Sciences, South Carolina College of Pharmacy—USC Campus, Columbia, SC

<sup>e</sup> Department of Pharmacy Practice, University at Buffalo School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Buffalo, NY

<sup>f</sup> Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine School of Pharmacy, Suwanee, GA

<sup>g</sup> Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Queens, NY

<sup>h</sup> Division of Pharmacy Practice and Administration, University of Missouri Kansas City School of Pharmacy, Kansas City, MO

<sup>i</sup> Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Midwestern University Chicago College of Pharmacy, Downers Grove, IL

### Abstract

**Objective:** To (1) identify and evaluate the evidence, process, and criteria used to select recipients of teaching awards and (2) report perceptions of best practices in selecting recipients of teaching awards.

**Methods:** A specific sample of AACP members and pharmacy students were invited to complete an online survey regarding the process for nominating and selecting teaching award recipients as well as perceptions on best practices.

**Results:** Most institutions (84.5%,  $n = 49$ ) recognized teaching excellence. Evidence currently used to support a nomination included: nomination letters (31%) and student evaluations (31%). The most important criteria for students ( $N = 575$ ) included effective communication skills ( $n = 371$ ), enthusiasm ( $n = 345$ ), and knowledge ( $n = 325$ ).

**Conclusions:** Demonstration of teaching excellence has focused on student evaluations of teaching and nomination letters; however, respondents believed other aspects (e.g., educational scholarship) should be included. By expanding current criteria, schools could better inform the selection process, as well as promote evidence-based teaching practices, scholarship, and innovations in education.

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**Keywords:** Teaching excellence; Teaching recognition; Teaching awards; Pharmacy education

### Introduction

Teaching awards have become a standard reward method at most higher education institutions to acknowledge the institution's support of teaching, recognize the

\* Corresponding author: Aleda M.H. Chen, PharmD, PhD,  
Department of Pharmacy Practice, Cedarville University School  
of Pharmacy, 251 N. Main St, Cedarville, OH 45314.

E-mail: [amchen@cedarville.edu](mailto:amchen@cedarville.edu)

accomplishments of excellent teachers, and encourage other faculty to achieve similar levels of teaching performance.<sup>1–4</sup> Among a variety of awards to recognize excellence in teaching in pharmacy programs, one of the most common methods of recognizing teaching excellence is the “Teacher of the Year” designation. A number of surveys, that span several decades, have been conducted in colleges and schools of pharmacy in an attempt to characterize the number and type of awards that recognize teaching excellence. A 1991 survey reported that 85% of colleges and schools of pharmacy had at least one teaching award (47 out of the 75 institutions responded at the time).<sup>5</sup> In 2001, this number increased to 89% (79 out of the 82 institutions responded at the time).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Draugalis<sup>6</sup> reported 22 different criteria that schools and colleges used in the selection of award recipients with student perception of instruction being the most common criterion. However, half of the institutions surveyed at that time did not use explicitly-stated criteria in the selection process.<sup>6</sup> The most recent data comes from a 2006 survey that reported 92% of colleges and schools of pharmacy (64 out of the 89 institutions responded at the time) offered an award to acknowledge teaching excellence with the two most common methods for selecting the recipient being (1) student votes and (2) committee vote following nominations.<sup>7</sup>

Within pharmacy education, the concept of teaching excellence and the criteria used to define excellence in teaching are well described.<sup>8</sup> The 2008–2009 American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Council of Faculties TaskForce for the Recognition of Teaching Excellence developed a set of six recommendations for establishing a teaching recognition program, including the number and type of awards and what type of criteria should be used in the selection process.<sup>9</sup> One of these recommendations states that the selection process should include broad representation, which likely would include pharmacy students. Previous reports indicate a potential discrepancy between overall teaching effectiveness and feedback provided by students, thereby questioning the reliability of student evaluations when incorporated into assessment and award activities.<sup>6,10</sup> Faculty members have debated the reliability of student ratings for decades, since students may not understand the long-term benefits of a course and may prefer an “entertainer” over an instructor who communicates effectively.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, student input plays a large role in the recognition of teaching excellence at schools and colleges of pharmacy,<sup>6,10</sup> and yet little is known about how students determine excellence in teaching.

As student input plays a large role in the recognition of teaching excellence through awards such as Teacher of the Year, it is important that student pharmacists gain an appreciation for how excellence in teaching is and should be measured. The AACP Council of Faculties Scholarly Teaching Taskforce was charged in 2013 to evaluate the process and criteria schools/colleges of pharmacy use to select Teacher of the Year. Two surveys were conducted, one of pharmacy faculty and one of current pharmacy

students. The objectives of each survey were to (1) identify and evaluate the evidence, process, and criteria used to select recipients of teaching awards and (2) report the perceptions of best practices in selecting recipients of teaching awards.

## Methods

Institutional Review Board (IRB) exempt status approval through Manchester and Cedarville University was obtained.

### *Pharmacy faculty survey*

A cross-sectional survey was conducted using a sample of AACP members obtained from AACP staff members. Academic representatives from each college/school of pharmacy were selected by AACP staff to receive the survey based on knowledge of the internal process for selecting teaching award recipients.

An instrument was created from an in-depth review of the literature and underwent committee review for content and face validity. The final instrument consisted of 14 categorical questions. The survey items were in a multiple choice format with nominal answers. Participants could select multiple answers for specific items. Opportunities also were provided for participants to choose “other” and then provide specific information.

First, participants were asked to provide demographic information (title, public or private designation of the school/college) in addition to whether the school/college recognized excellence in teaching with an award. If the school/college did not recognize excellence in teaching, then the survey ended.

If the school/college did recognize excellence in teaching, then questions were asked regarding: (1) differences between campuses in award criteria (for multi-campus institutions); (2) number of annual awards; (3) name of each award, method of nomination, and method of recipient selection; (4) method to inform faculty of criteria and selection process; (5) prize awarded for teaching award; (6) utilization of a rubric in the award process; (7) description of established criteria for teaching awards; and (8) the types of evidence required for teaching award nominations. If schools/colleges utilized committees to decide teaching award recipients, the composition of the committee was sought. Finally, participants were asked what evidence should be used to support teaching award nominations.

The final instrument was distributed electronically through Qualtrics<sup>®</sup>. An initial mailing was sent in January 2014, with three reminders.

### *Student survey*

A convenience sample of pharmacy schools ( $N = 12$ , which included public, research-intensive institutions, smaller

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