



Short communication

# Development and implementation of the multiple mini-interview in pharmacy admissions

Cindy D. Stowe, PharmD, Ashley N. Castleberry, PharmD, MAEd\*,  
Catherine E. O'Brien, PharmD, Schwanda K. Flowers, PharmD,  
T. Scott Warmack, PharmD, Stephanie F. Gardner, PharmD, EdD

University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Pharmacy, Little Rock, AR

## Abstract

**Objectives:** To describe the development and implementation of a pharmacy admissions multiple mini-interview (MMI).

**Methods:** MMI scenario scoring, applicant and interviewer perception surveys, retrospective video scoring, and applicant admission demographics were collected during a pilot phase and full implementation phase to assess the effectiveness of this type of interviewing technique. Inter-rater reliability was assessed during the pilot phase. MMI scores were compared to determine variance between scenarios and to assess scenario performance during full implementation.

**Results:** During the pilot phase, a significant degree of inter-rater reliability was found for all the themes evaluated, except the personal attribute scenario. Performance on three scenarios by 224 applicants during the full implementation phase demonstrated good results (mean  $\pm$  SD): rapport/empathy ( $5.4 \pm 1.4$ ), ethics/professionalism ( $5.9 \pm 1.1$ ), and personal attribute ( $5.6 \pm 1.1$ ). The MMI was feasible and costs were managed with an applicant fee.

**Conclusions:** The MMI was well accepted and assessed non-cognitive skills across applicants in a reliable fashion. It is anticipated that with greater experience with this interview methodology, the value of the interview in the applicant selection process will increase.

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**Keywords:** Admission; Selection; Interview; Multiple mini-interview

## Introduction

The pharmacy admissions process is arguably one of the schools and colleges of pharmacy's most important functions. It is the organization's first opportunity to assess the quality of future pharmacists in an effort to avoid the personal and organizational costs of making a poor choice. However, the process of student selection varies considerably between institutions. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy

Education (ACPE) Standards 2007 state that the admissions criteria should take into account scholastic accomplishments, as well as qualities such as "intellectual curiosity, leadership, emotional maturity, empathy, ethical behavior, motivation, industriousness, and communication capabilities."<sup>1</sup> Although the cognitive abilities of students are largely assessed by grade point average (GPA) and the Pharmacy College Admissions Test (PCAT), non-cognitive variables are often assessed through personal interviews, personal statements, and letters of reference, which can be less than desirable due to potential selection bias and a lack of inter-rater reliability.

The Standards 2007 further state that "in-person standardized interviews of applicants, including evaluation of

\* Corresponding author: Ashley N. Castleberry, PharmD, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Pharmacy, 4301 West Markham St, Slot #522-4, Little Rock, AR 72205.

E-mail: [ancastleberry@uams.edu](mailto:ancastleberry@uams.edu)

verbal communication skills, understanding of the pharmacy profession, and commitment to patient care, must be part of the admission process.”<sup>1</sup> The process is expected to utilize faculty, staff, and students and should offer interviewer training in an effort to foster inter-rater reliability.<sup>1</sup> Joyner et al.<sup>2</sup> found that while most colleges and schools of pharmacy use some components of a structured interview process, training of interviewers was inconsistent.

As early as 2004, the medical education literature described the implementation of the multiple mini-interview (MMI). This interview style consisted of a series of short objective structured clinical examination (OSCE)-style encounters in which applicants were expected to interact with interviewers in response to short scenarios focusing on non-cognitive qualities such as ethical dilemmas, communication skills, critical thinking, and standard interview-type questions.<sup>3</sup> Since its implementation, the method has been shown to be a more reliable and valid method of predicting future performance than the traditional structured interview process in medical schools.<sup>4,5</sup> A study in a pharmacy school even concluded that this method adds value to the admissions process since it measures attributes that are not easily captured by other admissions tools.<sup>6</sup> It has also been shown to provide a more fair and defensible assessment of applicants than the traditional structured interview.<sup>7</sup> Use of these interviews is becoming more commonly used in professional programs such as medical schools.

The primary objective of this article is to outline the development and implementation of the MMI at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) College of Pharmacy. The principles in developing the process and the feasibility and costs associated with its implementation are discussed.

## Methods

The UAMS College of Pharmacy initiated the MMI process by first conducting a pilot phase in 2007 with applicants who had applied through the traditional admissions process. These applicants received a letter that briefly described the pilot study and then volunteered to participate in this new method. These volunteers completed five MMI scenarios in addition to the traditional structured faculty interview. The traditional standard interview consisted of individual, one-on-one interviews with faculty covering topics such as, but not limited to, applicant strengths and weaknesses, decision to enter the pharmacy profession, work experience, and career goals. In 2008, the MMI process was fully implemented and all applicants eligible for interview completed three MMI scenarios. This study was approved by the campus Institutional Review Board. An overview of the MMI process is outlined below including applicant logistics of the event, the scenarios themselves, and a description of standardized interviewers along with their scoring measures.

## MMI overview

### *Applicant logistics*

Each mini-interview began with a two-minute preparatory period followed by an eight-minute interview. During the two-minute preparatory period, applicants were given instructions regarding the content of the eight-minute interview.

The MMI was conducted in a Clinical Skills Center (CSC). The CSC had interview rooms, digital video recording, overhead audio system, and comprehensive clinical skills education and center management system. Applicants were given a 10–15-minute overview of the MMI process before entering the CSC. A proctor was available in the preparatory area for applicant questions on the logistics of the MMI process, but was not allowed to answer questions about interview content.

Applicants proceeded through the MMI by a preprogrammed, timed series of overhead announcements. Upon entering the CSC, subjects heard “Go to the next station.” This announcement started the two-minute preparation period while the applicants reviewed the “Instructions to the Applicant” posted on the door of the interview room. At the end of the two-minute period, an announcement saying, “You may now start the encounter,” signaled the applicant to enter the interview room for up to an eight-minute interview. To help the applicant assess the remaining time, a one-minute warning message occurred after seven minutes had expired saying, “You have one minute remaining.” At the end of each mini-interview, the cycle started again with the first announcement, “Go to the next station.”

### *Mini-interview scenarios*

Interview scenarios were developed by study investigators based on the work by Eva et al.<sup>3</sup> and are briefly described here. The critical-thinking scenario asked the applicant to discuss the pros and cons of synchronous and asynchronous curricular delivery after providing a basic definition of the two methodologies. The rapport/empathy scenario assessed an applicant’s ability to develop rapport and express empathy with the standardized interviewer who was acting distraught and fearful. The ethics/professionalism scenario provided the applicant with an ethical dilemma requiring action. The knowledge of pharmacy scenario asked the applicant to discuss workforce issues in the pharmacy profession. The personal attribute scenario asked the applicant to discuss his/her strengths and weaknesses as they relate to a career as a pharmacist.

The developers of the mini-interview scenarios were familiar with the College’s admissions process and the use of standardized participants for authentic assessment. For the pilot phase, scenarios were developed to fulfill the themes of critical thinking, rapport/empathy, ethics/

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