



## Research Article

# Student perception of academic and professional development during an introductory service-learning experience



Debora Weiss, PharmD, MS, RPh, BCACP<sup>a,\*</sup>,  
 Emily R. Hajjar, PharmD, BCPS, BCACP, CGP<sup>a</sup>, Carolyn Giordano, PhD, FASAHP<sup>b</sup>,  
 Andrea S. Joseph, MS, RPh<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Jefferson College of Pharmacy, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5233

<sup>b</sup> Office of Institutional Research, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, PA

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## ABSTRACT

*Objectives:* To document students' perceptions of academic and professional growth in a P1 service-learning introductory pharmacy practice experience (SL IPPE) in a College of Pharmacy in Philadelphia, PA.

*Methods:* Student perceptions of academic and professional growth in a service-learning course completed at two selected sites were retrospectively assessed through the Survey Monkey platform. The retrospective survey included 24 questions, including 5-point Likert-type scale format answers, and an open ended question concerning the overall perceived educational impact of this SL IPPE. Percentages, means, medians, and standard deviations were calculated to describe results. The paired sample *t* test, Wilcoxon signed-rank analysis and chi-square test were used to compare ranked data and nominal data, respectively.

*Results:* Response rate was 86% (25/29). Over 80% reported improved knowledge of cultural sensitivity, health literacy, health awareness, disease prevention, lifestyle modification, and written and verbal communication skills. Students' perceptions of their ability to improve care, organization, or education increased from 56% initially to 92% upon completion ( $p < 0.001$ ). Overall, 92% of the students perceived themselves as likely to extremely likely to apply learned lessons to future experiences.

*Conclusions:* Findings suggest a confirmed benefit of this service-learning course in perceived strengthening of students' academic and professional growth. The authors concluded that while the course design, assignments, and activities could remain unchanged, the survey could be implemented for each and every SL IPPE site at this College of Pharmacy, in order to compare results and impact of students' perception of development separately and overall.

## Introduction

Many schools of pharmacy and other health care professions in the United States (nursing and medical), offer service-learning experience, either as a required or elective course.<sup>1–8</sup> The incorporation of service-learning (SL) experiential education in health care education have been discussed as an important component of student exposure to “real-life and less than ideal circumstances.”<sup>1</sup> The outcomes related to service-learning are well described by the Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE).<sup>9</sup>

\* Corresponding author: Debora Weiss, PharmD, MS, RPh, BCACP. Current address: Global Medical Affairs, Global Medical Information, Merck & Co., Inc., 351N. Sumneytown Pike, Mail stop: UG1B-10, North Wales, PA 19454.

E-mail address: [debora.weiss@merck.com](mailto:debora.weiss@merck.com) (D. Weiss).

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Students in service-learning settings can learn to “demonstrate empathy when interacting with others,” through encounters with “... population-based care, in which the needs of a specific population are assessed in the context of the culture, and health status.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, students can participate in “... design prevention, intervention, and educational strategies for individuals and communities to manage chronic diseases and improve health and wellness.” With the growing interest and availability of these service-learning experiences, educators involved in such courses commonly revisit questions such as “How much do students learn from service-learning?”<sup>10</sup>; “When do students have more positive attitudes about service-learning?”<sup>8</sup>; “Are these courses better received early or later in the curriculum?”<sup>4</sup>; Are these courses better received in a condensed week (40 hours in one week) or spread out through the semester (three hours per week for 14 weeks = 42 hours)?; or, “Should they be mandatory or elective?”<sup>3,11</sup>

The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Guidelines recommend that service-learning activities “... help foster civic and professional responsibility and the development of a sense of caring for others.”<sup>12</sup> The Jefferson College of Pharmacy (JCP) was established at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 2008. The JCP vision and mission statements include developing in its students a sense of social, personal, and professional responsibility, and a commitment to maintain a culture that fosters integrity, respect, social responsibility, diversity, and compassion.<sup>13</sup> The JCP Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experiences (IPPEs) are offered longitudinally over the course of the first three professional years. These introductory practice experiences include direct interaction with diverse patient populations in a variety of practice settings and involve collaboration with other health care professionals. The pharmacy practice experiences were designed to integrate, apply, reinforce, and advance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, which are simultaneously taught and developed in the didactic coursework at JCP.

The required healthcare-related service-learning introductory pharmacy practice experience (SL IPPE) meets the JCP mission and vision, and at the same time follows the guiding documents for pharmacy education, the CAPE educational outcomes<sup>9</sup> and the ACPE guidelines related to service-learning.<sup>12,14</sup> In accordance with the ACPE guidelines, this SL IPPE “meets a community need,” serves to “foster civic and professional responsibility and the development of a sense of caring for others,” is “integrated into the required academic curriculum,” and overall “balances the service that is provided” with the learning that occurs.<sup>12,14</sup> This SL IPPE “explicitly reinforces classroom-based learning.”<sup>14</sup>

Domains 3 and 4 of the CAPE Educational Outcomes 2013 emphasize strengthening approaches to practice and care and the ability of pharmacy students to develop both personally and professionally.<sup>9</sup> Through participation in the SL IPPE, students are presented with the opportunity to explore their roles as a problem solver, educator, interprofessional collaborator, and communicator. Participation in this required course can serve to increase self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, leadership development, and professionalism.<sup>9</sup>

The SL IPPE at JCP is a required 14-week, one-credit, three-hour weekly, pass/fail experience taken during the fall or spring semester for P1 students. The purpose of this course is to foster a sense of community involvement and instill a basic understanding of pharmaceutical care through health care-related service. Students identify and address human and community needs and practice basic skills required to provide pharmaceutical care. These activities also offer an opportunity to integrate knowledge and skills gained from didactic coursework including health care communications and patient counseling, preventive health care and self-care issues, physical assessment and clinical skills, pharmacy practice and health care delivery systems, and pathophysiology I and II. The SL IPPE course is conducted at a variety of sites throughout Philadelphia including: homeless shelters, a center for the blind and visually impaired, a charter school, a center for troubled youth, and several senior centers. Under the supervision of a pharmacist preceptor, a group of three to four students per semester contribute to each site’s mission and complement the services already provided through a variety of health care-related activities. Examples of the activities completed during the semester at these sites include: creating informational pamphlets and bulletin boards on healthcare-related topics such as diet and nutrition, high blood pressure, diabetes, birth control, medication use (OTC and Rx), or other applicable topics. Additionally, students are engaged in preparing and delivering presentations on health care-related topics such as medication compliance, medication storage, proper hand washing techniques, how to read a prescription label, and important questions to ask their pharmacist. Depending upon the identified needs of the population served, students also conduct medication adherence counseling, brown bag interviews, and create healthcare-related games, such as Bingo and Jeopardy, to engage and educate the clients at various sites.

A fundamental precept of service-learning is that reflection can serve as a bridge to connect the conceptual and experiential aspects of learning.<sup>15</sup> In this course, students are required to submit two written reflections about their experiences; and one paper on the Principle VII of the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists: “A Pharmacist serves individual, community and societal needs.”<sup>16</sup> In keeping with ACPE guidelines, time is devoted for “... focused reflection for learners to make meaning of their experiences.”<sup>14</sup> Twice during the semester (weeks 6 and 13), the students participate in small group discussions and exchange general impressions and personal observations from their experiences. During these sessions, students share notable information regarding the mission of their site, descriptions of the services they rendered, highlights from their personal reflections, and specific lessons learned about both themselves and the patient population they served. The purpose of this study was to document students’ perceptions of the impact of perceived academic and professional growth as a result of participation in this P1 SL IPPE.

## Methods

A retrospective self-assessment survey was conducted in January 2014, to evaluate the perceived impact of the academic and professional growth of students at two of the Jefferson College of Pharmacy service-learning sites.

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