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## Short Communications

### Development of a college-level assessment framework in line with international accreditation standards: A Middle Eastern perspective



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#### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Accreditation of international pharmacy programs by North American and European accrediting bodies is becoming increasingly popular. Practices regarding assessment and evaluation are especially highlighted in accreditation standards and many programs around the world do not currently have coordinated approaches to meet assessment expectations. This article describes the process of developing a comprehensive assessment framework at our institution and provides discussion regarding facilitators and barriers for those attempting to do the same.

**Methods:** A coordinator of Assessment and Accreditation was appointed by the Dean. This person subsequently formed an Assessment Committee consisting of faculty, student, and administrative support membership. This committee developed the assessment framework through a review of published and online literature, in addition to extraction of key assessment points from accreditation standards. These data were then categorized according to major domains informed by the literature review and subcategorized based on components to be assessed using consensus techniques.

**Results:** A comprehensive assessment framework was developed consisting of three domains (programmatic assessment, academics, and engagement/satisfaction). The components relating to programmatic assessment included vision/mission and accreditation standards; academics consisted of program learning outcomes, final cumulative assessment, and course and curriculum assessments; and engagement/satisfaction consisted of students, faculty/staff, and other stakeholders.

**Conclusion:** An assessment framework guided by accreditation standards can coordinate assessment plans and support program quality.

## Introduction

Pharmacy programs worldwide are seeking international accreditation or certification from national organizations in countries such as Canada and the United States of America (USA).<sup>1</sup> By doing so, these programs foster quality educational experiences ensuring they are taught by qualified faculty, they have the resources they need to support the curriculum, and that they meet their mission. Graduates then can be reassured they obtain a recognized degree and may be eligible for licensure in accrediting countries.

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In order to obtain these credentialing, programs must typically provide evidence of achievement of documented standards related to all aspects of program organization, implementation, and evaluation. Standards encompass curricular needs, faculty and student support, as well as administrative and program management expectations.<sup>2</sup> It is a challenging process for international programs, as much effort must be placed to ensure both university and practice considerations meet expected levels by accreditation authorities.

In recent years, policies and procedures relating to assessment practices have emerged as a critical component for program accreditation in all disciplines.<sup>3</sup> Assessment is a broad term that accounts for many different evaluation strategies, such as student assessment practices, program learning outcome assessments, and programmatic assessments among others. It has grown to evaluate other issues besides student learning and particularly focuses on program accountability. Assessment also allows for identification of gaps in program and curriculum design and implementation and enables the determination of improvement actions to support achievement of the program's vision and mission.<sup>4</sup> The broad nature of assessment practices requires comprehensive frameworks that organize and guide assessment-related activities in a systematic and continuous manner.

The College of Pharmacy at Qatar University offers a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy [BSc (Pharm)] degree and a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) degree, which are both accredited by the Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs (CCAPP).<sup>5</sup> A Master of Science in Pharmacy [MSc (Pharm)] degree is also offered. In March 2015, the Dean of the College of Pharmacy appointed a Coordinator of Assessment and Accreditation in recognition of increasing international focus on assessment. This person reports directly to the Dean and manages all assessment-related activities within the college. Other universities have similar positions with differing titles, including at the Assistant and Associate Dean levels.

In September 2015, the Coordinator of Assessment and Accreditation formed an Assessment Committee consisting of the Coordinator as Chair, two faculty members, an Information Technology (IT) support person, and a student representative. The first task of this committee was to design and implement an assessment framework in line with international accreditation standards in a Middle Eastern setting.<sup>2</sup> This article describes this process and provides insight into facilitators and barriers for others attempting to do the same.

## Methods

### *Development of the assessment framework*

The initial draft of the assessment framework was formed over the following two phases: literature review and benchmarking against CCAPP accreditation standards. A literature review of online databases produced few articles describing creation, implementation, or evaluation of assessment frameworks in medical programs and no articles specific to pharmacy programs. Therefore, this search was supplemented with a Google keyword search of institutional websites to identify publically available assessment plans. Identified articles and documents were reviewed with a focus on framework structure, included domains or performance categories, and key performance indicators. Notes were made to determine commonalities between identified frameworks and also on relevance to contextual and cultural considerations in Qatar.

The literature and online search was supplemented by review of accreditation standards and extraction of key points or indicators to build into the assessment framework. Each standard and criterion was reviewed and categorized as programmatic, academic, faculty related, student related, or other. These findings were then matched with the results obtained from the literature search described above. The first version of the assessment framework was drafted by the Coordinator of Assessment and Accreditation and reviewed by the Dean. Subsequently, it was modified based on feedback from Assessment Committee members. Throughout the following two months, the framework was continually evaluated and revised until a final stable version evolved.

## Results

The final assessment framework is given in the [Figure](#). The framework was divided into three domains and eight categories. Detailed descriptions of each domain and associated categories are given below. Specific assessment activities for each of these domains are summarized in [Table 1](#). Contextual and cultural challenges encountered and adopted/proposed solutions are given in [Table 2](#).

### *Programmatic assessment*

Programmatic evaluation analyzes the extent to which the college achieves its overall mission and goals, including research and other scholarly activities, service, and practice. This is complemented by educational assessment, which analyzes outcomes of the college's degree programs, focusing on assessment of student learning and evaluation of curricular effectiveness.

The domain of programmatic assessment is divided into categories of vision and mission and accreditation standards. The vision and mission of the College of Pharmacy at Qatar University both focus on areas of excellence in teaching, research, and service and aim to produce highly competent graduates in each of these three areas. The vision and mission must be assessed, in order to ensure the college is performing in line with its intended aims and to determine appropriate times for revision of these statements. In 2015–2016, the committee is using graduate profiles to perform a gap analysis in terms of overall college performance. Similarly, college performance against accreditation standards must be continually measured, in order to identify gaps and deficiencies requiring improvement before accreditation cycles repeat (maximum six years).<sup>2</sup> The Assessment Committee monitors the tasks relating to programmatic assessment but also engages other faculty members to promote the development of an assessment culture within the

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