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## Research Note

# Traditional matriculation vs an early assurance program: Effect on elected student leadership positions and academic performance

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The objective of this study was to compare leadership and academic performance among students admitted by traditional pathways vs. a dual acceptance program (DAP).

**Methods:** A list of students admitted to the Midwestern University Chicago College of Pharmacy (MWUCCP) DAP was cross-checked with students elected to serve in leadership positions and students on the MWUCCP Dean's List for their first professional year from 2010 to 2015. The proportion of students serving in leadership positions and those on the Dean's List were compared to students that matriculated via the traditional route.

**Results:** In total, 1069 students were analyzed (n = 937 traditional; n = 132 DAP). DAP students were more likely to have an elected leadership role (n = 61, 46.2% vs. n = 314, 33.5%, p < 0.01) and achieve Dean's List for their first professional year (n = 64, 48.5% vs. n = 292, 31.2%, p < 0.01) compared to traditional students.

**Discussion and conclusions:** DAP students were more likely to hold an elected leadership position than traditional students. Further study of DAP student motivation is needed to potentially assist in the success of other students.

## Introduction

Prerequisite requirements for admission to pharmacy school are set in accordance with the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) guidelines.<sup>1</sup> These requirements support the development of proficient healthcare professionals upon graduation; therefore, initial pre-pharmacy school performance, subsequent admission to pharmacy school, and predictors of successful academic performance during pharmacy school remain important research topics.<sup>2,3</sup> In general, there are two distinct pathways by which a candidate may apply for pharmacy school admission. In the traditional pathway candidates completed all prerequisite pharmacy coursework within two to three years, and may have obtained a degree prior to admission. Candidates admitted by the early assurance pathway are admitted to pharmacy school directly after high school, upon successful completion of prerequisite pharmacy coursework at an affiliated undergraduate college or university. These programs offer candidates who are motivated to become

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pharmacists a clear and efficient path to achieving their career goals directly after high school.<sup>4</sup> There are 53 early assurance pathway Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) programs anticipated for 2017–2018 at colleges of pharmacy across the United States including the Dual Acceptance Program (DAP) at Midwestern University Chicago College of Pharmacy (MWUCCP); a private institution in suburban Chicago, IL.<sup>5</sup>

While there have been many studies to address variables that may predict the success of pharmacy students during their first professional year such as the Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT), there are multiple programs across the United States (US) that have early assurance programs that may or may not fit these models, such as those of the Mt. Sinai Icahn School of Medicine, which has some similarity to the program at MWUCCP.<sup>6–9</sup> Predictors of academic success between pharmacy students admitted by traditional pathways and early assurance pathways have been analyzed; however, literature is sparse analyzing success within specific pharmacy programs with respect to elected student leadership involvement and academic achievement of early assurance students.<sup>2,3,10</sup> These students were often excluded from pharmacy education related studies, as well as similar education related studies in other healthcare professions, as the number of early assurance students is usually smaller in number and may have been interpreted as an analysis bias.<sup>11</sup> It is also imperative to analyze pathway specific admissions criteria for a pharmacy program in order to implement changes as needed, based upon conclusions reached from the analysis.<sup>12,13</sup> Therefore, we compared students that matriculated traditionally versus the DAP to identify possible relationships between matriculation pathway, assumption of elected student leadership roles, and academic performance.

## Methods

### Context

The Dual Acceptance Program (DAP) at MWUCCP is an early assurance program for select high school seniors.<sup>4</sup> Eligibility criteria for the DAP consisted of multiple requirements, including a minimum high school GPA of 3.20, an American College Testing (ACT) score of 25 or higher or a Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) score of 1700 or higher, and admittance to an affiliate college or university. Students admitted by the DAP pathway completed their prerequisite requirements during the first two years of enrollment at one of eleven affiliated colleges or universities, then matriculated into MWUCCP to begin a four-year Doctor of Pharmacy program. During the completion of the prerequisite coursework, students maintained at least a 3.20 undergraduate cumulative grade point average (GPA), maintained at least a 2.50 science GPA, and earned a grade of C or higher in all courses, without repeating a course for a higher grade. Progress checks were completed after every year by instructing the student to send their undergraduate transcripts to MWUCCP by a pre-specified deadline for verification of advancement and standing by staff. Students were also encouraged, but not required, to participate in extracurricular and leadership activities at the affiliated school. This integration of student leadership development was initiated in compliance with the Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) 2013 Outcomes.<sup>14,15</sup> Requirements for completing the PCAT were waived for successful DAP matriculates. If a student failed to meet or maintain the DAP requirements, he or she was encouraged to apply for admission via the traditional pathway, where the student would be required to complete the PCAT. Over the past five years, approximately one third of students entering the DAP program have matriculated in the Doctor of Pharmacy program at MWUCCP. Requirements for admission in the traditional pathway included completion of the PCAT and all prerequisite coursework with a GPA of 2.50 or higher in science coursework and an overall GPA of 2.50 or higher.

### Study design

The following lists were examined and cross checked for the number of DAP students who were elected by their peers to serve in executive leadership roles in student associations and student governance from 2011 to 2015 and the numbers of DAP students whose names were included on the MWUCCP Dean's List from 2011 to 2015 for their first professional year: lists of students admitted to the MWUCCP DAP program for the years, 2010–2015; lists of students elected to serve in leadership positions during the years 2011–2015 and lists of students included on the MWUCCP Dean's List for their first professional year. The following variables were analyzed: age, gender, ethnicity, in- or out-of-state residence (Illinois), pharmacy school graduation year, whether or not a previous degree was earned, overall undergraduate GPA, total science undergraduate GPA, PCAT composite score (for traditional pathway applicants), number of elected student leadership positions held, first professional year GPA, and graduation honors. This work was granted exempt status by the MWU Institutional Review Board.

### Definitions

Leadership involvement was defined as one or more peer-elected executive board office roles in university-sanctioned student associations or student governance (e.g. Student Council, Student National Pharmacists Association). Students are eligible to hold executive board office roles or student governance roles in their second through fourth professional years. Academic achievement was identified by the inclusion of a student on the MWUCCP Dean's List by the end of their first professional year, as well as by the type of graduation honor bestowed. Criteria for inclusion on the Dean's List each quarter included a) full-time enrollment status, b) achievement of a GPA of 3.50 or better, and c) not being enrolled in an extended degree program. Graduation honors were defined as: Cum Laude (didactic GPA 3.50–3.74), Magna Cum Laude (didactic GPA 3.75–3.89) and Summa Cum Laude (didactic GPA of 3.90–4.00).

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