This study was conducted during Spring Semester 2015 at the College of Pharmacy at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Admissions committees are now looking at measures beyond academic merit to assess potential for success within a PharmD program and the profession. Factors such as motivation to become a pharmacist and attitudes regarding patient-centered care are being evaluated in application reviews and interviews of candidates. Applicants to PharmD programs are expected to exhibit commitment to the profession before entering pharmacy school. Little research has been done to analyze how students develop this commitment.

This study is designed to provide a narrative relating to the formulation of professional commitment among undergraduate pre-pharmacy students enrolled in an introductory professional course. It is expected that the results of this study will expand our understanding of how student aspirations are influenced by their enrollment in a course designed to immerse students in the study of pharmacy and the profession. Important contemporary issues and developments in the field, interactions with innovative professional role models, and experiences in a patient-centered practice center will influence students' conceptualization of, and commitment to, their intended career in pharmacy.

### INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

With admissions to PharmD programs becoming increasingly competitive, sophisticated pre-pharmacy preparation is becoming increasingly important. Admissions committees are now looking at measures beyond academic merit to assess potential for success within a PharmD program and the profession. Factors such as motivation to become a pharmacist and attitudes regarding patient-centered care are being evaluated in application reviews and interviews of candidates. Applicants to PharmD programs are expected to exhibit commitment to the profession before entering pharmacy school. Little research has been done to analyze how students develop this commitment.

This study is designed to provide a narrative relating to the formulation of professional commitment among undergraduate pre-pharmacy students enrolled in an introductory professional course. It is expected that the results of this study will expand our understanding of how student aspirations are influenced by their enrollment in a course designed to immerse students in the study of pharmacy and the profession. Important contemporary issues and developments in the field, interactions with innovative professional role models, and experiences in a patient-centered practice center will influence students' conceptualization of, and commitment to, their intended career in pharmacy.

### METHODS

This study was conducted during Spring Semester 2015 at the College of Pharmacy at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

**Participants**
- N = 17 participants (4 male, 13 female)
- Participants were recruited from students enrolled in Pharmacy 4511H – Honors Introduction to Pharmacy.
- Ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old.

**Measurement/Instrumentation**
- Semi-structured personal interviews were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the semester (selected questions shown as List I to the right)
- Individual interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were shared with each individual as an initial means of member checking.
- To ensure credibility, the following methods were followed:
  - Prolonged engagement and persistent observation
  - Negative case analyses
  - Triangulation
  - Progressive subjectivity
  - Member checks
  - Dependability audit

**Data Analysis**
- Analytic induction was used to categorize data, determine intercategorical relationships, develop working hypotheses, and refine these hypotheses
- Coding was used to categorize data and clustered data was reviewed to reveal major themes, trends, commonalities, and discrepancies.

**List I. Selected Questions for Example**
- What is pharmacy and what do pharmacists do?
- What is pharmacy and what do pharmacists do in terms of your future career in pharmacy?
- What are some of the important contemporary developments in pharmacy?
- How would you describe your level of passion about the pharmacy profession?
- What do you see yourself doing as a future pharmacy practitioner?

### RESULTS & DISCUSSION

**Vocabulary**

Students’ vocabulary when discussing their interest in pharmacy was much more sophisticated during the second interviews (conducted at the conclusion of the course). Not only did they use pharmacy-related terms more accurately, but the range of their vocabulary expanded dramatically. For example, “talking to patients” became “counseling patients” and there were frequent references to “MTM,” “provider status,” “personalized medicine,” “collaborative practice,” “telepharmacy,” etc., which suggests a better understanding of pertinent terms and a degree of mastery when using these words in conversation.

**Conceptualization**

Students’ expanded conceptualization of pharmacy’s scope of practice included both practice settings (locations) and practice functions (pharmacists’ responsibilities). Definitions of pharmacy evolved to include functions beyond community practice, and students exhibited a better understanding of the evolution of the pharmacist’s professional responsibilities. Students began to define the role of the pharmacist in ways that included functions such as providing care and counseling patients in addition to dispensing medications.

**Passion**

In general, students developed a more focused passion for the profession and were prepared to make more informed decisions regarding career aspirations than they were at the beginning of the course. An increased passion for the profession seemed to correspond with the more accurate conceptualization of the profession that was observed. The more students discovered the depth and breadth and the patient-centered focus of the profession, they easier these students could visualize themselves as pharmacists.

### CONCLUSION & FUTURE APPLICATIONS

These narratives suggest that an introductory pre-professional course can positively influence students’ conceptualization of, and commitment to, their intended career in pharmacy. In the interest of developing more informed pre-professional students and competitive professional school applicants, other health professional schools could benefit from offering such an introductory undergraduate course. More research is required before extrapolating these results to other institutions and/or other courses.

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