

You Belong Here

A Diverse Student Recruitment Guide



AACP Diversity in Student Recruitment and Retention
Advisory Committee 2023-2024

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About AACP

AACP Mission

Advance pharmacy education, research, scholarship, practice and service, in partnership with members and stakeholders, to improve health for all.

AACP Diversity Statement

AACP affirms its commitment to foster an inclusive community and leverage diversity of thought, background, perspective, and experience to advance pharmacy education and improve health.

AACP Vision

We envision a world of healthy people through the transformation of health professions education.

AACP Core Values



Meet The Authors



Trenika R. Mitchell, PharmD

Committee Chair
Associate Professor and Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer
University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy



Juan J. Bustamante, PhD

Instructional Associate Professor of Pharmaceutical
Sciences and Director of Recruitment
Texas A&M Irma Lerma Rangel School of Pharmacy



Jennifer L. Clutter, MA

Program Coordinator
West Virginia University School of Pharmacy



**Christine Ann (Dimaculangan) Parikh,
PharmD, BCACP**

Clinical Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice
Rutgers University Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy



Patricia Jumbo-Lucioni, MD, PhD

Associate Professor
Samford University McWhorter School of Pharmacy

Meet The Authors



Sean Nebergall, PharmD, RPh

Assistant Professor - Division of Pharmacy Education & Innovation

The Ohio State University College of Pharmacy



Heather Nyman, PharmD, BCPS

Associate Professor (Clinical) and Assistant Dean for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

The University of Utah College of Pharmacy



David J. Sanchez, PhD

Associate Professor, Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Sciences; Director, Diversity Equity and Inclusion

Western University of Health Sciences College of Pharmacy



Tyan F. Thomas, PharmD, MSMEd, BCPS

Clinical Pharmacy Practitioner – Women's Health



Danielle Stubbs, MEd

Associate Director of Student Recruitment and Diversity, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy

Corresponding Author

Contact pharm4me@aacp.org with questions



Committee Charges & Objectives

Charges

The charges of the committee are to counsel and work in congruence with Association staff and selected governance groups in support of Strategic Goal (3.1) of the [AACP 2021–2024 Strategic Plan Priorities, Goals and Objectives](#), which aims to promote a more diverse learner population to foster innovation and improve cultural competence and patient care outcomes for an increasingly diverse patient population.

Objectives

- Address the cross-cutting issues in enrollment management that can adversely affect pharmacy learners from diverse backgrounds.
- Promote the recruitment, admission, retention, and graduation of diverse learners in pharmacy.
- Develop diversity programs, policies, and resources to support pharmacy educators, staff, and learners.



Background

This guide is an initiative of AACP's Diversity in Student Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee (DSRR AC). To support the aforementioned charges, the DSRR AC presented at the Admissions Workshop that preceded the AACP [Pharmacy Education 2023 Annual Meeting](#). The presentation focused on building belonging as a strategy to boost underrepresented minority student recruitment. Specifically, the presentation detailed the importance a sense of belonging plays during the pharmacy school decision making process for underrepresented minority students (URMs). AACP identifies URM individuals in pharmacy as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and/or Pacific Islander students who are US citizens or permanent residents. The presentation was well received, and in order to expand on the ideas presented and disseminate the information to a broader audience, the committee decided to compile the strategies discussed into this comprehensive guide. Not only does this format allow for more members of the Academy to have access to it, but it allows the committee to expand more on each strategy and include more diverse populations.

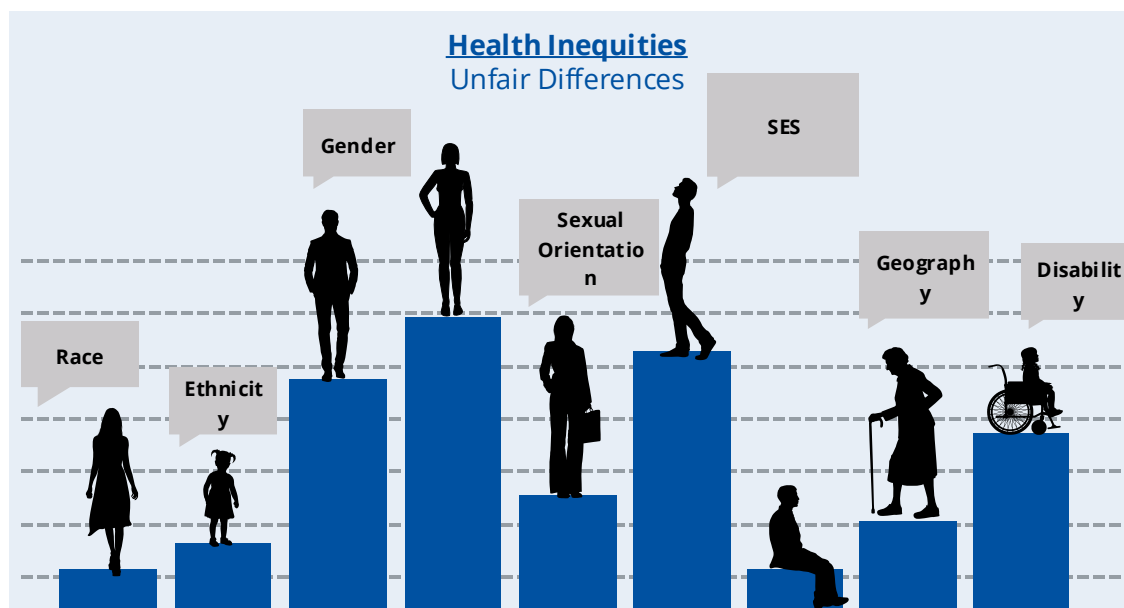
Addressing Healthcare Disparities

The Imperative for a Diverse and Inclusive Healthcare Workforce, With a Focus on Pharmacy Education


Across all health professions, we know that a more diverse healthcare workforce is imperative to achieve health equity. However, the health professions continue to struggle with diversity, particularly in higher-income occupations where Black and Hispanic representation is notably low. The good news is that pharmacy has begun to show an increase in diversity. For instance, the percentage of Black pharmacists has more than doubled from 2.3% to 4.9% between 2014 and 2019.¹ However, there are still disparities present. For instance, although the number of non-Hispanic Black pharmacists doubled to 4.9%, this figure remains significantly lower than the proportion of non-Hispanic Black individuals in the US population, which stands at 13.4%.²

Furthermore, according to the most recent PharmCAS Data Report for the 2022-2023 application year, 43% of applicants identified as White. Comparatively, only 15% of applicants identified as Hispanic, and only 13% as Black or African American.³

The lack of diversity in pharmacy is not an issue isolated to racial and ethnic minorities. The challenge extends to any historically minoritized groups, including but not limited to those who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and those who hold multiple, intersecting identities. Unfortunately, there's a lack of comprehensive data on many of



Adapted from Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Health Administration, Office of Health Equity with permission ¹²



these groups. For instance, while there are statistics on pharmacy school enrollment based on race, age, and gender, information about LGBTQIA+ representation among students and practicing pharmacists is largely absent. This data gap is problematic, especially considering the pharmacy profession's commitment to improving LGBTQIA+ healthcare.⁴ To bridge this gap effectively, it is essential for the pharmacy workforce to mirror the diversity of the populations it serves. For instance, research suggests that positive role models and increased interaction with LGBTQIA+ health care professionals can reduce bias among health care providers.⁵ However, LGBTQIA+ pharmacists often face unique challenges, such as concerns about acceptance and integration of their identity into their professional lives. Addressing these challenges and fostering a more inclusive environment in pharmacy schools is crucial for advancing diversity in the field.⁶

Furthermore, a more diverse student pharmacist population enhances the cultural competence of the entire student body, creating more compassionate and understanding health care professionals. There is also evidence suggesting that students from diverse backgrounds are better prepared to care for patients from diverse communities.⁷ It is crucial that colleges and schools of pharmacy foster diverse and inclusive environments to recruit students who are diverse at all levels, including culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, education, and practice development.

Additionally, diversity shapes the quality of patient care as a more representative health care workforce improves health outcomes. Patients who are able to see health care professionals who look like them or share a similar background feel more comfortable and are better able to communicate their concerns.²

Health professionals who identify as an underrepresented minority, such as Black, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American health professionals, are more likely to serve in underserved and rural communities, where there is usually a shortage of health care workers (16% of the US population resides in rural regions but only 8% of primary care clinicians and 5% of non-primary care clinicians practice there).^{8,9,10} Minority patients typically receive better treatment when attended to by health care professionals who share their racial or ethnic background; this is especially evident in primary care and mental health contexts. Similarly, patients who do not speak English as their primary language generally experience improved interpersonal care, a better understanding of medical information, and are more likely to adhere to follow-up appointments when they consult with a practitioner who speaks their language, particularly in mental health care settings.^{8,11}

It is thus of interest to the Academy and individual pharmacy institutions to give considerable attention to the challenge of recruiting more diverse student pharmacists.


Recruiting Students Through The Lens of *Belonging*

"You can't tell someone they belong. They can only determine that based on the choices of inclusion made for them in their environment."

This guide provides recruitment strategies through the lens of creating belonging. But why belonging, specifically? Belonging plays a huge role in our lives. Our need to belong is what drives us to seek stable, long-lasting relationships with other people. It also motivates us to participate in social activities such as clubs, sports teams, religious groups, and community organizations. In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a sense of belonging is part of one of his major needs that motivate human behavior.¹ In this guide, we define belonging as "the feeling that results from inclusion" (the latter comprising actions taken by the institution to foster belonging). At the AACCP Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Institute 2024, Sally A. Arif, PharmD, BCPS, BCCP, Professor of Pharmacy Practice at Midwestern University College of Pharmacy shared this apt definition of belonging, "Belonging in the DEI space is usually defined as a sentiment or feeling of being connected and accepted in which a person can thrive and is reinforced by the organization's culture. You can't tell someone they belong. They can only determine that based on the choices of inclusion made for them in their environment; the

extent to which individuals feel valued, accepted, and a legitimate/important member of their environment."²

Studies on college students have found a positive link between a sense of belonging and greater happiness and overall well-being, as well as an overall reduction in poor mental health outcomes including anxiety and depression.³ Further, belonging is crucial to the success of college students, with research demonstrating that it impacts academic self-confidence, motivation, perceived value of tasks, engagement in student activities, organizational skills, and feelings of social acceptance.³ Students want to know they matter. There are multiple aspects that influence a student's sense of belonging, including interactions with faculty and peers, campus involvement, and their perceptions of the institution's racial climate. For example, research shows that positive and supportive interactions with peers and faculty correlate with an increased sense of belonging.⁴ Unfortunately, diverse student populations such as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, immigrant, and LGBTQIA+ students are more likely to report a lower sense of Belonging.^{5, 6, 7, 8, 9}



While a sense of belonging has largely been studied in the context of retention, research shows that belonging also plays a crucial role in recruitment, as it is an important factor in the college decision-making process for students. In a study conducted by Winter and Chapleo¹⁰, a participant summed it up powerfully, “I am looking around to see if people are like me...It is a conscious decision to see if I fit in. You need to see how students [at that university] are behaving... whether you see yourself as that kind of person and you want to be around people like that.” It may help to think back to when you were touring colleges. Before deciding to attend your alma mater, what role did feeling as though you belonged there play in your decision to enroll?

This guide focuses on belonging-centered recruitment strategies because it is the responsibility of pharmacy schools to cultivate a feeling of belonging by prioritizing, appreciating, and enhancing the voices, viewpoints, and diverse characteristics of prospective students right from the beginning. In essence, belonging is not the student's duty; rather, it underscores the dynamic relationship between the individual and the institution.^{5,11}

Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that recruiting more diverse students by itself is not enough. There are limitations of relying solely on numeric demographic diversity as a measure of success in promoting inclusivity within organizations. For example, the Rooney rule, originally implemented in the NFL to increase diversity in leadership roles, did not lead to substantial progress due to its focus on numeric targets without addressing underlying biases. There is a need for comprehensive reform efforts and sincere organizational commitment to fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging. While measuring demographic diversity is important, it alone may amount to virtue-signaling rather than meaningful progress without broader cultural changes within organizations. While this guide focuses on recruitment, we want to emphasize that true inclusivity starts with foundational cultural shifts within organizations rather than solely focusing on recruitment practices.¹²

How To Use This Guide

Each contributing author brings their voice on this topic while also bringing a unique set of experiences.

The first step toward effectively using this guide is to accept that not every part of this guide is the best next step in your institution's path to creating a belonging environment. That means this belonging guide will be useful to every institution in different ways. In addition, the landscape of belonging often includes topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion, which are evolving themselves in and of themselves. Keep an open mind to the best way to utilize this guide for you.

Reflecting on where you want to go with this guide, either individually or as a team, is an important next step. Look at ways that your institution is currently creating a belonging environment and identify places or processes that may be causing a gap between your institution and being a place where people feel they belong. You may have existing data that shows the climate of the institution and identifies rifts, or there may be anecdotal accounts. All potential discontinuities are worth considering.

Reading through the different sections will provide insight into different ideas and perspectives on belonging. Each contributing author brings their voice to this topic

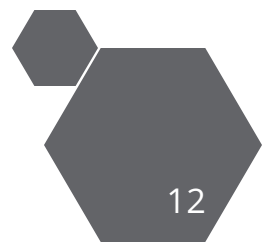
and their unique set of experiences. When assessing each section, it's important to determine whether the proposed approach is viable to address a significant gap or if it's more closely aligned with the programming you already offer and could be expanded to add another dimension to fostering a sense of belonging. Either way, look for experiences that seem doable for you and your institution and you believe can make a strong impact.

In addition, when you look for strategies you want to implement, you should evaluate whether the strategy will do what this guide intended: making your institution a place where students you are recruiting will feel as though they belong. Do not attempt to implement a strategy that feels forced or superficially portrays a single moment of belonging. This guide aims to help bring real change or highlight real belonging. Do what you believe is best to show the real environment at your institution. Recruiting students with strategies that do not give a genuine view of your institution can have the consequence of bringing students into the wrong space. That may ultimately push them into leaving the field when they find out they do not belong there.



RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

While this guide focuses on recruitment, we want to emphasize that true inclusivity starts with foundational cultural shifts within organizations rather than solely focusing on recruitment practices.



UNCOVER THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM



Background


The hidden curriculum refers to unspoken social, behavioral, cultural, and professional expectations in the educational environment. The hidden curriculum is usually the result of institutional culture and values and thus differs between institutions.¹ It is transmitted by those who are part of the institution via implicit behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, often unintentionally and unbeknownst to the transmitter. Another way to put it is, “Every word we speak, every action we perform, every time we choose not to speak or act, every smile, every curse, every sigh, is a lesson in the hidden curriculum.”² Education does not only entail the transfer of knowledge but also the transmission of social norms and values, “or more specifically, definitions of what constitute appropriate and inappropriate attitudes and behaviors.”²

How It Relates to Recruitment

The hidden curriculum, or unspoken social norms, is perceived by prospective students through an institution’s implicit and explicit values, which are embodied by those who represent

it, such as faculty and staff. Thus, it is imperative during recruitment events, such as school tours, information sessions, and workshops, that all faculty and staff are aware of the kind of messaging they convey to prospective students. Interactions with prospective students extend beyond admissions personnel to all individuals who might encounter them. This encompasses both verbal and non-verbal communication, including body language and overall demeanor. Prospective students are inclined to admire, be drawn to, and mirror those who show them respect and caring. Therefore, the attitude and conduct toward students hold significant sway over who will join the pharmacy profession in the future. It is helpful to recognize that the attitudes, beliefs, and values behind our actions, words, inactions, and silences can shape the perspectives of prospective students and influence the decisions of those considering a career in pharmacy.²

Additionally, recruitment materials such as brochures, social media, and websites can send an implicit message



reflective of the hidden curriculum, depending on the students featured or program aspects highlighted. If a program is touted repeatedly as “rigorous” and “selective,” it can give off an air of exclusivity that may turn away prospective students who struggle with imposter syndrome or who otherwise do not see themselves as “good enough.” These signals of the hidden curriculum also become apparent during live recruitment events. Perhaps all of the current students present at the open house are in white coats, and all of the faculty are in suits. Perhaps admissions staff use a variety of acronyms or industry jargon during information sessions. If those components of the hidden curriculum are not explained, then prospective students can become confused and, thus, intimidated. This may be exacerbated if there is a lack of an inclusive environment that does not encourage asking questions (see section “Build an Inclusive Environment”).

Pharmacy schools should provide as much transparency as possible by disclosing not only admissions requirements but preferences, as well (e.g., the characteristics a school prefers “ideal” candidates to have that are not officially required), and accurately representing the school’s culture, mission, and values, “... lest they succumb to gaining applicant trust only to match them into an

environment that does not, in fact, protect them.”¹

Recommendations

- Reflect honestly on the institution’s hidden curriculum and the unintended messages it may convey.⁴ Begin by asking if all of the norms reflected by institution staff, faculty and students are easily understood by outsiders.
- Take a critical look at institutional policies, particularly admissions policies, to identify any biases resulting from the hidden curriculum that impede the recruitment and admission of a diverse student body. Be direct and transparent about unspoken expectations, values, and beliefs with prospective students, letting them know what the institution is looking for in an applicant and future colleague. For instance, Cummins et al³ suggest that institutions offer a pre-visit introduction letter that clarifies the interview structure, includes the names and photos of panel interviewers, and provides other useful details to enhance transparency, such as the interview format and the general topics covered in interview questions.

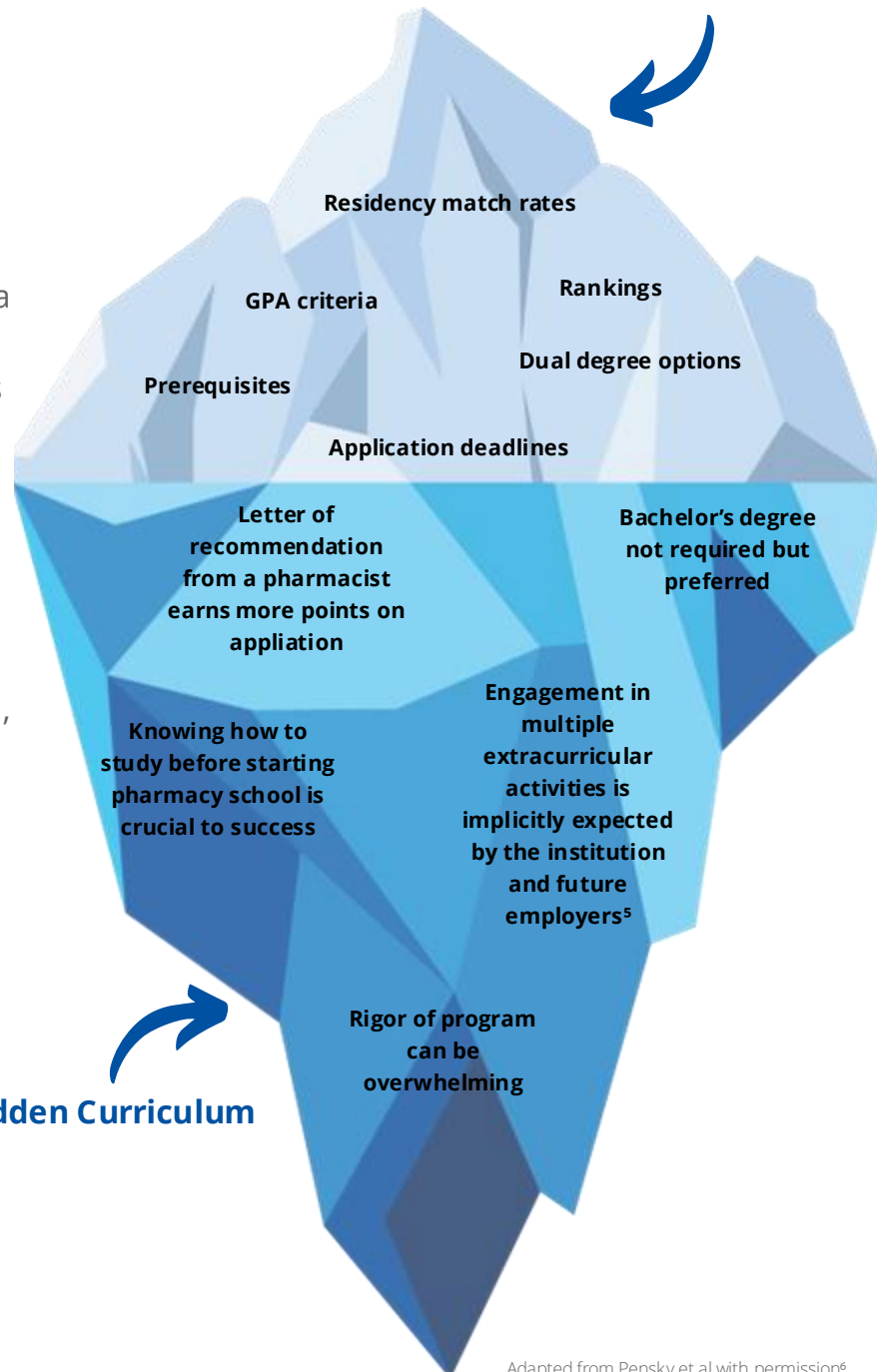
- Institutions should be transparent with faculty and staff about the hidden curriculum and the consequences of the resulting messaging so that faculty and staff can be mindful of the values and attitudes they convey to prospective students.¹

Examples

- Are there admissions criteria that are preferred by the institution that are not explicitly required? Perhaps there is a hidden preference that applicants submit a letter of recommendation from a pharmacist that creates an unconscious bias against students who do not meet that hidden preference.
- How do the institution and the admissions team define professional dress, especially for admissions interviews? Not all students have the same definition, and if applicants are expected to dress a certain way for the admissions interview, that should be disclosed early on during the recruitment process.

Examples of School Features Highlighted During Recruitment

Examples of Hidden Curriculum



Adapted from Pensky et al with permission⁶



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Background

Building relationships between the institution and prospective students is paramount. It is an institution-wide effort that includes not only admissions staff but faculty, current students, and alumni, as well. These relationships provide prospective students with valuable insights into college culture, academic program offerings, research opportunities, potential career paths, and general tips for success, helping them make informed decisions about their educational journey. Secondly, establishing rapport with faculty, in particular, fosters a sense of belonging and connection to the institution, enhancing the likelihood of enrollment and ensuring retention. Additionally, these relationships can serve as a foundation for mentorship and academic support, offering guidance and encouragement to students as they continue navigating their academic pursuits. Moreover, institution-student interactions contribute to a vibrant and inclusive campus community, where diverse perspectives are valued and celebrated. Ultimately, investing in relationships between institutional members and prospective students benefits everyone, as it enriches the prospective students' experience and strengthens the fabric of the institutional community, as a whole.^{1,2}

How It Relates To Recruitment

By leveraging the influence of current students and alumni, institutions can effectively bridge the gap between prospective students and the campus community, ultimately improving recruitment outcomes. For example, the use of personalized communication channels, such as phone calls, texts, or personalized emails from faculty members, current students, and alumni, provide valuable information but also create a sense of community and belonging among prospective students.³ Every touchpoint, no matter how small, can leave a lasting impression on a prospective student and impact their decision-making process.

Recommendations

- Engage Current Students and Alumni: Enlist the help of current students and alumni to connect with and build community among groups of prospective students. Their firsthand experiences and insights can resonate with potential enrollees, positively influencing their decision-making process.

- Create community-building platforms: Use platforms, such as GroupMe, Facebook, etc., where current students can engage with prospective students.
- Facilitate Q&A sessions, meet & greets, and advice-sharing sessions to foster a sense of belonging and connection before students arrive on campus.
- Send regular updates to prospective students via newsletters that are designed to help students prepare for and stay informed of required materials for pharmacy school. The student newsletter may also include current events, pharmacy student activities, and/or blog content from current students detailing campus life.⁴
- A pre-matriculation program, along with peer mentoring, can help students transition to the rigors of the PharmD education and learn about student/life balance as a professional student pharmacist.⁵
- Ensure all institutional members faithfully reflect the institution's values and mission (see the following sections of the guide to learn more about effective and authentic communication strategies).



BUILD AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Background

Although diversity and inclusion are often packaged together, they are two separate concepts, each requiring its own tailored approach. While diversity involves a myriad of differences within a given organization or community, inclusion represents the deliberate and continuous effort to guarantee individuals from diverse backgrounds and identities actively engage in all facets of an organization.¹ Unlike diversity, inclusivity, as a feeling, is not quantifiable. Diversity can be measured through student demographic data, while inclusion is much more qualitative in nature. Inclusion requires the establishment of recruitment, admission, and retention strategies that make students feel welcome, heard, and valued. Thus, building an inclusive environment involves creating an atmosphere that encourages diverse populations to thrive, which promotes a sense of pride and belonging in the college community.² An inclusive institutional environment encourages students to bring their whole identity, both professional and personal, which, in turn, fosters a safe environment to sustain students on their professional identity formation paths.

How It Relates To Recruitment

An inclusive environment fosters a sense of belonging that allows students to feel comfortable asking questions and expressing their thoughts and feelings during recruitment efforts. For example, college representatives should explain industry jargon and abbreviations if they need to be used, and not assume what prospective students know. Often, as members of the Academy, faculty and staff rely on the use of industry jargon to display expertise and knowledge. It is essential to recognize that use of industry jargon to prospective students and their families may create a less-than-welcoming environment, which may adversely impact their decision to pursue education at your institution. An inclusive environment requires cultivating trust and meeting students at their individual points of understanding and comfort.³ Providing a welcoming framework will instill in students this feeling of belonging. When students feel that they are in the place they are meant to be and with people they are meant to be with, engagement, connection, and comfort will ensue. Ultimately, the goal is to create

an environment where all students feel included, accepted, and able to thrive academically and personally.

Recommendations

- Focus on building trust and meeting prospective students where they are in their professional and academic journey.
- Encourage prospective students and their families to ask questions, emphasizing that additional clarification is happily given at any time.
- Facilitate meaningful personal interactions in person or online to accommodate prospective students' needs. Personal interactions have shown to be instrumental in fostering a sense of "university fit".⁴
- Refrain from using industry jargon that may cause confusion or may be intimidating to those new to the field of pharmacy (such as high school students or first-generation students, for example).
- Be honest and transparent about the challenging nature of a pharmacy education but avoid using descriptors such as "rigorous" (alternative terms: "thorough," "comprehensive," "challenging") and/or "weed out" classes that may cause intimidation or imposter syndrome.
- Explain aspects of your program plainly and in multiple ways, if necessary.
- Consider implementing storytelling techniques, using relatable personal narratives so that students can better envision themselves at your institution.⁵
- Ensure consistent messaging across the campus community.
- Refer to the "Highlight Support Resources" section for further recommendations regarding campus and community resources that can aid in fostering a sense of belonging for potential students.



USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Background

Words matter. Language is powerful, and it can be polarizing or uniting. The goal with language should be to create safe, respectful, inclusive, and welcoming environments for the students that we are seeking to educate and teach.¹ The Linguistic Society of America states that inclusive language “acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.”² Using inclusive language is critical in preventing harm or offense toward members of marginalized communities. Something as simple as using the correct pronouns that an individual has identified for themselves or putting in the effort to correctly pronounce a person’s name sends a clear message that their identity, experiences, and uniqueness matter. Not doing so can cause irreparable damage and send the signal that their identity is not being acknowledged or does not matter. This is especially important when we discuss the role inclusive language plays in recruitment and admissions.

How It Relates To Recruitment

In the setting of higher education and recruitment, intentional use of inclusive language is imperative. Outreach and recruitment of prospective students in higher education should strive for diversification. It is shown that students report less discrimination in institutions where they perceive a stronger institutional commitment to diversity.³ Using inclusive language can help diversify an applicant pool by promoting a sense of belonging and a more enriching environment for all students. Something to also keep in mind is that language is fluid and constantly evolving. It is everyone’s individual responsibility to keep an open mind and be willing to learn and adapt.



Recommendations

- How one identifies themselves will vary from one individual to the next and one should not assume. Best practice is to take cues from the individual themselves.
- Avoid statements that perpetuate stereotypes and “norms.”
- Be intentional with examples and choice of terminology.
- Consider person-first vs. identity first-language (see [page 9 of the Inclusive Language Guide](#) for more details).¹
- Avoid microaggressions in conversations, which are subtle, often unintentional, comments or actions that can negatively impact or marginalize individuals from minority groups
- Avoid making assumptions about people.
- Create an environment in which everyone is empowered to speak and feel confident that their voices will be heard.
- Use name badges with pronouns and phonetic spelling of names (PharmCAS applicants have the option to add phonetic spelling of their names on their application).
- Ensure consistent messaging across the campus community.
- Refer to the “Highlight Support Resources” section for further recommendations regarding campus and community resources that can aid in fostering a sense of belonging for potential students.

Examples

- Use pathway instead of pipeline - as the latter is “a term that is considered offensive to Indigenous communities as a result of oil companies transporting crude oil through the sacred lands of Native Americans or Alaska Natives and contaminating their water supply.”¹
- Use *older adults* instead of the *elderly* to “avoid language that promotes stereotypes that ‘other’ older adults. However, please note that, in certain cultures, the term “Elder” is considered an honorific.”¹
- Use *persons with disabilities* rather than *special needs* - “Use person-first or identity-first language as is appropriate for the community or person being discussed.”¹



NORMALIZE DIFFICULTIES

Background


Students of all levels of preparation and backgrounds may face academic challenges and social difficulties when entering college. Students who do not recognize that such burdens are normal tend to think that their struggles are an indicator that they do not belong in college. Due to their low representation among college student ranks and the existence of negative stereotypes they must grapple with, students from backgrounds that are structurally disadvantaged in higher education (e.g., students of color, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, first-generation college students) are more likely to feel that the difficulties they face mean that they do not belong.¹

Normalizing difficulties is the intentional communication to all students that everyone, regardless of background, faces difficulties at some point along their college journeys. Another component is reminding students of available resources and encouraging them to use them when needed. Normalizing difficulties is an important link between recruitment and the broader goal of retention.

Self-awareness and self-efficacy are key non-cognitive factors associated with college persistence and on-time graduation.² Normalizing difficulties, even during the recruitment stage of the student's college experience, is a building block of a foundation that positions students to become self-aware learners and professionals.

How It Relates To Recruitment

The recruitment process is often a student's (and their family's) first introduction to your college's culture. Students from backgrounds underrepresented in higher education and health professions education may come to the recruitment process with a low level of confidence in their ability to successfully complete the program; a less-than-welcoming recruitment process may reassert these doubts. Creating a welcoming environment during the recruitment process can help students feel comfortable identifying difficulties and seeking help to address those difficulties during their matriculation. Conversely, creating an unwelcoming environment



during the recruitment process may make students feel out of place and may result in their not applying to the program.

Recommendations

- Reflect on your institution's culture: ask yourself and your faculty and staff if the culture established in your program aligns with a "struggle is normal" outlook that you intend to portray. Refer to the section titled "Build an Inclusive Environment".
- Provide a welcoming, comfortable, and private environment for students to inquire about potential resource needs.
- When discussing resources available to students, be transparent about the costs to access them. Refer to the section titled "Highlight Support Resources."
- Use story-telling and personal narratives: consider having faculty/instructors/professional staff who have navigated challenges and difficulties during their educational and training programs (and who are comfortable and willing to share their stories) talk to potential students. Include students who have used support services in recruitment events and share their testimonials in recruitment materials.
- Take care not to perpetuate stereotypes when selecting students to give testimonials.
- Look for students of all backgrounds to provide testimonials (e.g., not only students of color).
- During recruitment sessions, discuss the college's approach to fostering wellness and personal well-being.
- Model your commitment to wellness and personal well-being by scheduling breaks during the day to allow students and their families to attend to emotional, physical, and spiritual needs.
- Remind students that you anticipate they will experience "life happens" events that they will need help navigating while completing their studies.
- Communicate that you want them to reach out when these events happen. "Life happens" events include personal relationship break-ups, severe illness or deaths of family members and friends, parental divorce, etc.
- Err on the side of giving too much information (students/families may not know what questions to ask, especially first-generation college students).
- Avoid the use of terms that may be interpreted by students from marginalized groups that you have a "weed-out" program that they cannot successfully complete. Refer to the section titled "Use Inclusive Language".

HIGHLIGHT SUPPORT RESOURCES



Background

For the purposes of this document, the AACP Diversity in Student Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee authors are broadly defining support resources to include any supportive entity, office, individual, or organization, on or off campus, that aids students in addressing challenges or barriers to their success, belonging, and active well-being.

How It Relates To Recruitment


Resources tailored to student needs may signify the institution is understanding, welcoming, and committed to the success of students from a diverse array of backgrounds. For example, if a student previously utilized exam or attendance accommodations for a disability, evaluating the accessibility of similar resources at a new institution may influence their decision on where to attend. Similarly, if a student on a campus visit does not see or hear of students and faculty with whom they identify, they may not expect to find a sense of belonging on that campus. Campus visits, social media postings, websites, and other electronic

recruitment mechanisms should include introduction to affinity groups, student organizations, and both campus and surrounding community resources.^{1,2}

Once recruited, research shows that student retention from underrepresented groups is impacted by student relationships, sense of belonging, and engagement with resources. By communicating about student resources early and often, institutions can proactively address some of these needs.

Recommendations

The first step to implementing a full array of student resources is to survey the availability and suitability of resources currently offered by your institution.^{3,4} Such a survey should examine both successes and failures of the existing support structure. In addition to exploring the views of current students, it's important to review available information regarding student attrition and utilization of resources to determine where additional or improved supports are needed.




Examining success metrics in light of identity-based engagement may also provide insight.⁵ Once the current status is understood, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) model analysis may be valuable in planning for needed changes. When structuring supports, colleges should consider potential student concerns related to scheduling, travel, finances, and emergency needs to ensure programs are truly accessible to all students. Examples of potential resource areas to consider may be found below.

One barrier students may encounter is simple lack of knowledge: the best support programs can do no good if students are unaware of what resources exist. Clear communication regarding standards, expectations, and available support systems to meet these standards is vital to the effectiveness of the support programs and to student success.⁴ Ensuring student awareness of available resources begins prior to admission. Support options relevant to application and admissions must be widely communicated alongside application materials. Notification of acceptance to the program could include communication about assistance with planning, travel, and acceptance fee waivers, along with contact information for the institution's available support professionals.

Once students arrive on campus, an introduction of available resources must be included early – during

orientation or the first weeks of the program. This should include both direct links to services or agencies they may need, and examples of how to contact student affairs professionals who are tasked with assisting students with various processes. For students who do not have family support or experience in higher education, simply providing contact information may not be sufficient. Including concrete examples of who to contact and how such contact can be initiated may remove some of these barriers. Additionally, as some students may not immediately be aware of what difficulties they will face over time, repetition of this information may be needed periodically – for example, if there are points in the curriculum where students tend to struggle, that would be a good time to revisit discussion of both academic and emotional supports. Other reminders of resources should be included in course syllabi, student handbooks, and faculty and staff should also be versed in and consistently communicate the availability of entities that can support students' sense of belonging.

However, knowledge of and access to resources is not sufficient. Institutions must also work to ensure students can utilize those resources without fear of stigma or judgment. Research has shown that students may avoid seeking formal support based on peer, faculty, and general societal



perception that the need for support implies a deficit in the person's ability or character. For example, students with learning disabilities who perceive less stigma in the learning environment are more likely to engage with faculty, which in turn leads to improved learning outcomes.² This is especially salient in areas carrying greater societal stigma such as mental health, learning disability, food or housing insecurity, and substance use disorders.^{6,7,8,9,10,11,12}

One potential strategy to overcome these barriers is to focus on social norming of said resources. For example, one author has found that student uptake of accommodations increased after a class discussion in which they listed examples of various accommodations and how these have previously been applied to specific class activities. Another necessity is to continually educate ourselves regarding the challenges faced by students. An instructor who promotes available mental health resources for students, for example, but uses words such as "crazy" or "insane" to indicate shock or disapproval, may unintentionally be reinforcing the stigma that dissuades students from the use of these resources. A faculty member using the outdated language "special needs" to refer to disabled individuals may perpetuate the view of disability or use of accommodations as an individual deficit, rather than a societal barrier.

Another potential strategy to overcome the perceived stigma of

resource utilization is to partner with local support resources not affiliated with the university. External options may provide an additional measure of privacy for students seeking support around sensitive or stigmatized topics.^{2,6,7,10,11} This also allows for broader coverage of needs, for example, when the type of support sought is not offered at a given institution.

Intersectionality is an often-overlooked aspect of support service utilization. Intersectionality refers to "overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" based on various social identities.¹³ Institutions must take care not to silo needed services, which may perpetuate the exclusion of those holding multiple marginalized identities. "Specific to the work of cultural centers, many function primarily as single identity spaces, including [2SLGBTQIA+ Centers]. As such, more should be done in these spaces not just to acknowledge the fact that students hold multiple converging identities, but to change their practice in relationship to how students navigate life on campus."¹⁴ There are no simple solutions here - intersectionality is a huge topic and one that has, historically, been neglected, and it doesn't have an easy answer. A culture of open dialogue at all levels of administration, intentionally creating space for all voices to be heard, would be a good place to start.



Examples

Types of support offered may include, but are not limited to:

- Academic: tutoring, bridge programs, academic coaching, advising
- Career/employment: on campus, off campus jobs while in school, CV/resume assistance, interview preparation, job placement, career fairs
- Disability accommodations: accessibility services, academic accommodations, adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), ADA advisors, faculty training and supports
- Emergency needs: referral to a variety of emergency services
- Emotional: counseling, wellness programming
- Financial: food banks, financial counseling, scholarships
- Health: available healthcare providers on campus and off, providers reflective of student identities, addiction resources, mental health services, pharmacist recovery networks, rape crisis services, domestic violence centers, health departments, and free clinics
- Identity-based: affinity groups, mentoring, student organizations, community-based organizations, and campus units that specifically serve students from historically underrepresented backgrounds
- Legal: student legal services that may aid with landlord-tenant issues or for other legal referrals
- Logistical: who to contact for help with what issue, advocacy, coursework extensions, concerns or questions about policy
- Military: veterans services, campus resources, policies supportive of active duty/reserve duty students
- Neurotype-related: autism support programs, ADHD support programs, executive functioning education and supports
- Personal safety: Clery Reports, campus security, equitable community policing
- Practical: childcare, lactation rooms, caregiving, commuting/transportation, out-of-state or international student concerns, housing (some institutions offer living and learning communities based on majors or identities), services for multilingual learners (peer learning groups, faculty awareness, English as a second language [ESL] courses)
- Spiritual: houses of worship, student organizations, prayer facilities
- Title IX: office, procedures, supportive services, mandatory reporting

SEND AN AUTHENTIC MESSAGE



Background

“Don’t write a check that you cannot cash.” The translation of this old colloquialism is that you should not say or promise something that you cannot deliver. Authentic is defined as “worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact” or “true to one’s own personality, spirit, or character.”¹ A message is “a communication in writing, speech, or by signals” or “an underlying theme or idea.”² Authentic messaging provides a genuine representation of who you are as an institution and a community and is a critical aspect of promoting a sense of belonging.

How It Relates To Recruitment

Students seek authenticity. In today’s world of instant information, the ability to fact-check the accuracy of the statements we make verbally, via social media, on our brochures and handouts, through texts or emails, or through any other form of communication our institutions may utilize is directly at their fingertips. Students can seamlessly communicate with current and former students, read professor reviews on websites

such as ‘Rate My Professor,’ research the demographics of your state, city, and institution, and receive unfiltered comments concerning your environment on websites like Reddit or replies to your institution’s social media posts.^{3,4}

Therefore, it is critical to be honest. One of the determinants of perceived authenticity is disclosure in personal narratives, experiences, and opinions.⁴ If there has been an incident (especially one that has received national attention), it is better to own it and openly communicate your institution’s well-developed and measurable action plan to create change. The pictures of individuals on your website should accurately reflect the diversity of your institution’s community. If you are not where you desire to be in terms of historically underrepresented groups, make it clear how much you are seeking these students and the steps you are taking to get there. You may even provide a list of local groups that would provide community to these students.

Authentic messaging is mutually beneficial for the student applicants

and the institution. When your institution sincerely expresses its values and represents its environment genuinely, it will attract and excite students who align with those values and thrive in its unique environment.^{5,6} For example, if there is a heavy focus on and commitment to research, residency-bound students versus students who desire to immediately seek the job market upon graduation, community versus institutional pharmacy, etc., the institution should reflect those characteristics in their promotional materials. Each institution should know its strengths, build upon them, and market them.⁷



Recommendations

Authenticity is paramount. Institutions should know who they are (values, priorities and focus areas, strengths, weaknesses) and present their true selves to the public. Students are savvy consumers who can quickly determine if the institution's projected and private personae are in line with one another. Be aware of how you are perceived.

- Review responses to your social media posts or reviews given online.
- Host focus groups to seek advice and opinions from your most important critics – your current and former students (which can include students who left prior to degree completion).
- Obtain feedback from potential students who visit your campus and/or participate in recruitment activities.
- Collaborate with your diversity, equity, and inclusion officers to conduct climate surveys to determine how students, staff, and faculty feel about the environment in your institution. Work together to create actionable solutions when areas of improvement are discovered.
- Ensure everyone involved in recruitment efforts is knowledgeable about your institution and provides the same messaging.



CONCLUSION

(Re)commit to Belonging

Everyone in your school plays a role in creating a belonging environment. It is empowering to recognize that what each person does—what you do—makes a difference.

This guide highlights a number of areas where schools may target efforts to cultivate belonging in recruiting. As stated earlier, not every section in this guide will be the best next step for each school. Our hope is that this guide provides a framework for assessing your institution's recruiting efforts through the lens of belonging. A thoughtful and honest assessment may be as simple as individual or group reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of your institution for the recruitment strategies covered. Anecdotal reports of student experiences in the recruitment process, focus groups, or survey data can be used in this assessment process as well, if available. A commitment (or recommitment) to student belonging includes creating an action plan as well as a plan for ongoing assessment.

Everyone in your school plays a role in creating a belonging environment. While acknowledging this can feel overwhelming for those who would like to see cultural change happen within their institutions, it is also empowering to recognize that what each person does—what you do—makes a difference.

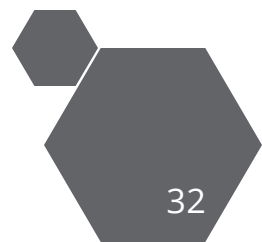
The concept of shared equity leadership as defined by the American Council on Education is where “equity becomes everyone’s responsibility.”¹ Importantly, the first step toward the shared equity leadership model is the individual “journey toward critical consciousness, in which leaders develop or strengthen a commitment to equity through their identity, personal experiences, or relationships and learning.”¹ Hence, the individual journey lays the foundation for institutional work. Your own individual journey and your individual commitment to fostering student belonging is a vital component of the culture of your institution.

While this guide has focused on recruitment, the impact of these practices may have far-reaching implications. Ultimately, we are training a diverse group of healthcare workers to provide care to an increasingly diverse patient population. As we model our commitment to belonging, we may empower our students to take this same commitment into the communities where they work, providing them a necessary tool to advance health equity.



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Thank You

We trust that you will find this guide both insightful and valuable. In our ongoing efforts to enhance future editions, we would greatly appreciate your feedback and suggestions. Kindly submit your comments using the feedback form linked below.

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If you have any questions, please reach out to:

Danielle Stubbs

Associate Director of Student Recruitment and Diversity

AACP Student Affairs

dstubbs@aacp.org

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