

Career Commitment of Pharmacy Students

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ABSTRACT. This study was undertaken to assess and compare levels of career commitment to pharmacy practice experience, professional pharmacy degree obtained, most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and career plans of pharmacy students. Specific objectives of the study included assessment of: 1. pharmacy practice experience, professional pharmacy degree obtained (B.S. or Pharm.D.), demographics, highest level or position wish to attain in career, choice of practice setting, anticipated work patterns in terms of number of hours worked per week, most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and 2. the relationships between those variables and pharmacy students' level of career commitment. Data were collected via a pretested questionnaire utilizing Rascati's adaptation of Blau's Career Commitment Scale. The questionnaire was administered to second-professional-year pharmacy students at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy in April, 1995. A total of 114 students completed the

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survey. Certain variables within the study were tested against a total career commitment score using the general linear model, with multiple comparisons tests (Tukey-Kramer), where appropriate. Results indicated that most students have pharmacy practice experience (69.7%) and that many students anticipate working in chain pharmacies upon graduation (42.1%). The mean commitment score was 28.29, with possible scores ranging from a minimum of 8 to a maximum of 40. Results yielded no significant association between career commitment and age, gender, marital status, professional pharmacy degree obtained, pharmacy practice experience, highest level or position wish to attain in career, most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and anticipated work patterns in terms of number of work hours per week ($p > 0.05$). Although pharmacy students have varying backgrounds and diverse career plans, they possess similar levels of career commitment. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com]

KEYWORDS. Commitment, pharmacy students, career

INTRODUCTION

A profession is as strong as the commitment of individuals within that profession. Therefore, career commitment, as defined as the strength of one's motivation, should be an important factor to everyone (1). Several older studies have suggested that between 45 and 60 percent of pharmacists would prefer another occupation rather than pharmacy if they had to make the choice over again (2,3). Furthermore, Johnson and colleagues found that pharmacists were less committed to their jobs than many other hospital health-care professionals (4). In order for the profession to survive and flourish, it is essential to have committed pharmacists in the profession. Since pharmacy students represent future practicing pharmacists, it is important to identify significant factors which influence students' career commitment in hopes of elevating their level of commitment.

Career commitment and career choice have been identified as major components in the development of one's career and have been a focus of study for many health-care professions (5,6). In 1985, Blau studied the career commitment of registered nurses, from which he developed and validated an instrument to measure commitment (7). There are few published studies examining the career commitment of pharmacy students to the profession of pharmacy (5,8-11). By modifying Blau's Career Commitment Scale, Rascati validated an instrument that measured pharmacy students' career commitment and reported the significance of eight variables in association to pharmacy stu-

dents' commitment to the profession (8). Of the eight variables—age, gender, marital status, plans upon graduation, presence of a previous degree, membership in professional organizations, the primary aspects of the profession that influenced the student to pursue a career in pharmacy, and the occupational status of the students' parents—the only one that yielded a significant association with commitment scores was the primary aspect of the profession that influenced students to pursue a career in pharmacy. McGhan and colleagues found that the number of organizations joined was the leading variable to predict pharmacy students' career commitment (9). In 1991, Ortmeier and associates identified marital status and students' desire to work full- or part-time as significant factors associated with commitment scores (5). Later, Fjortoft and Lee revealed that student-faculty interactions were significantly associated with the commitment of pharmacy students, suggesting that programmatic and curricular changes that increase student-faculty interactions enhance students' level of commitment (10) (see Table 1).

In 1994, a model was developed that suggested that a student's level of career commitment is affected by three factors: 1. background characteristics, 2. employment, and 3. academic and social integration (10). Factors describing background characteristics include age, gender, ethnicity, grade-point average, and family socioeconomic scale. Factors within students' academic and social integration include peer group interactions and faculty interactions (10). Based on this commitment model, the increasing number of pharmacy students obtaining the Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree, and the increased emphasis of students having pharmacy practice experience, the effects of professional pharmacy degree obtained and pharmacy practice experience on career commitment should be investigated (12).

Although many variables have been examined to test their association with career commitment of pharmacy students, a literature search was conducted and yielded limited information describing the association of pharmacy practice experience or the association of professional degree pursued or obtained (B.S. or Pharm.D.) with career commitment of pharmacy students. In fact, only one article was found that addressed the association of students' work experience with career commitment; no articles were found describing terminal professional degree obtained with commitment (10). In comparison with the B.S. degree, there is an increased investment of time, effort, and expense associated with obtaining the Pharm.D. degree and this investment may be a reflection of one's commitment to the profession. The experiential knowledge gained through actual exposure to the profession, and the lack of information regarding the association between degree status, pharmacy practice experience, and career commitment led to the formation of two hypotheses. These two hypotheses were: 1. students pursuing, and actually obtaining, their Pharm.D. degree have greater commitment scores than B.S. students,

TABLE 1. Published Studies of Career Commitment of Pharmacy Students.

School	<i>n</i>	Factors Evaluated	Total Career Commitment Score
University of Texas (8) at Austin (1989)	168	Gender, age, marital status, primary aspect of the profession that influenced them to enroll in pharmacy school, ^{*a} plans upon graduation, presence or absence of previous degree, membership in professional organizations, and occupational status of the students' parents	31.7 ± 4.9
University of Georgia (5) (1991)	99	Age, gender, marital status, ^{*b} preferred practice setting upon graduation, highest administrative aspiration, perception of job stress, involvement in professional organizations, preference for full-time or part-time pharmacy practice, ^{*c} career choice (setting)	29.90 ± 5.42
University of Illinois (10) at Chicago, University of Colorado, and University of Southern California (1994)	280	Gender, ethnicity, age, student's socioeconomic status (SES), ^{*d} GPA, parent's occupation, employment status, peer group, faculty interaction, ^{*e} academic development, ^{*e} and faculty concern	NA ^f

*Significant at the 0.05 level.

^a Those who chose "desire to help people," "desire career in health field," or "respected occupation" as the aspect that most influenced them to select pharmacy had a higher career commitment score than those who choose "opportunity to earn a high salary."

^b Separated or divorced students total commitment score was lower than those who were either single or married.

^c Students who were anticipating only working part-time following marriage reported the lowest level of career commitment.

^d Students with lower family SES were more committed than students with higher family SES.

^e Students with higher levels of satisfaction with their academic development, faculty interaction, and peer group interaction indicated higher levels of professional (career) commitment.

^f NA = Not Available.

and 2. students with pharmacy practice experience have significantly different commitment scores (either higher or lower depending on the students' experience) than students without experience.

This study was conducted to assess and compare levels of career commitment to pharmacy practice experience, professional pharmacy degree pursued and obtained, demographics (age, gender, and marital status), the most

important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and career plans (highest level or position wish to attain in career, choice of practice setting, and anticipated work patterns in terms of number of hours worked per week) of pharmacy students. Specific objectives of the study included assessment of: 1. professional pharmacy degree obtained (B.S. or Pharm.D.), pharmacy practice experience, demographics (age, gender, and marital status), highest level or position wish to attain in career, choice of practice setting, anticipated work patterns in terms of number of hours worked per week, the most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and 2. the relationship between those variables as compared to the career commitment of pharmacy students.

METHODS

In November 1994, a focus group was organized for the purpose of identifying possible factors that influenced students' commitment to the profession of pharmacy. The group consisted of three University of Georgia College of Pharmacy faculty and three practicing pharmacists. After carefully reviewing the literature and for the reasons stated above, the group decided that students' pharmacy practice experience, professional pharmacy degree obtained (B.S. or Pharm.D.), demographics (age, gender, and marital status), highest level or position wish to attain in career, choice of practice setting, anticipated work patterns in terms of number of hours worked per week, and the most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist should be examined in relationship to students' career commitment. The group decided to use Rascati's adaptation of Blau's Career Commitment Scale (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84) instead of developing and validating a career commitment scale (8).

In December 1995, the focus group developed a questionnaire. The first eight questions of the survey comprise Rascati's adaption of Blau's Career Commitment Scale; other areas addressed by the questionnaire were career plans, the presence or absence of pharmacy practice experience prior to completing the survey (pharmacy practice experience gained prior to entering pharmacy school and after admission to pharmacy school), most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, professional pharmacy degree obtained, gender, marital status, and age of each student participant.

In January 1995, the questionnaire was administered to 25 undergraduate pharmacy students to test for item clarity. Based on students suggestions, two revisions were made: 1. the addition of boxes so that the students can simply check a response instead of circling numbers, and 2. defining work experience on the questionnaire as any pharmacy work experience that the student has had. No alterations were made to Rascati's adaption of Blau's Career

Commitment Scale. Item responses to the survey items from the 25 students were not recorded.

In April 1995, the questionnaire (see Appendix A) was administered to a pharmacy class consisting of 117 students during their second year of pharmacy school (100% of the class). Second-year pharmacy students were selected to be involved in the study because spring quarter of the second professional year is when pharmacy students at the University of Georgia decide which professional terminal degree in pharmacy they want to pursue and it is the last quarter that the students meet together as an entire class. Participating students were asked to complete the questionnaire on a voluntary basis and investigators of the study were blinded to the identity of the student respondents. For tracking purposes only, students were asked to put their first initial, last initial, and the last four digits of their social security number on the questionnaire. In order to confirm which students actually completed the terminal professional degree objective indicated on the questionnaire, a list of each student's social security number, first initial, and last initial was recorded for students who graduated with a B.S. degree in June 1996 or a Pharm.D. degree in March 1997 was made and later compared to the questionnaires. Based on this data, appropriate adjustments were made for degree objective on the questionnaires.

Data obtained from the questionnaires were coded and entered in Paradox© and analyses were performed using SAS©. Analysis of variance using the general linear model (GLM) was used with multiple-comparisons tests (Tukey-Kramer), where appropriate. An alpha level of 0.05 was established for all data analyses.

RESULTS

A total of 114 second-year students completed and returned the questionnaire (97.4% of the class). The study group consisted of 42 males and 72 females; 99 students were single, 14 were married, and 1 was separated or divorced; their mean age was 25.1 (SD = 7.6). Ability to work part time while raising a family, opportunity to earn a high salary, and opportunity for a career in a health-related field were selected by 49% of the students as the most important factors in deciding to enter the profession of pharmacy (see Table 2). One-half (50%) of the students ($n = 57$) anticipated practicing in a community chain or independent pharmacy (see Table 3). The responses for the highest level that students would like to attain in their careers are indicated in Table 4. Approximately half of the pharmacy students indicated that they anticipate working full-time until typical retirement age (see Table 5); 76 (66.7%) of the students indicated that they have pharmacy experience. A total of 34 (29.8%) students obtained the Pharm.D. degree at the University of

TABLE 2. Most Important Factor in Deciding to Become a Pharmacist.

Factor	<i>n</i>	(%)
Ability to work part-time while raising a family	16	(16.7)
Opportunity to earn a high salary	16	(16.7)
Opportunity for a career in a health-related field	15	(15.6)
Job security	12	(12.5)
Wide variety of job opportunities	11	(11.5)
Family members/friends who are pharmacists	7	(7.3)
Opportunity to help people	7	(7.3)
Academic interest in chemistry and biology courses	6	(6.2)
Respected occupation	4	(4.2)
Other ^a	2	(2.1)
Total ^b	96	(100.0)

^a Other response included pressure from parents (students' parents).

^b Only 96 students responded.

There was no statistical difference in commitment scores based on most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist.

TABLE 3. Intended Practice Settings Upon Graduation.

Setting	<i>n</i>	(%)
Retail (Chain)	48	(42.1)
Hospital (Staff)	18	(15.8)
Clinical	11	(9.6)
Retail (Independent)	9	(7.9)
Home-Health Care	5	(4.4)
Academia	2	(1.8)
Other ^a	8	(7.0)
Undecided	13	(11.4)
Total	114	(100.0)

^a Other response included entering another profession, geriatric pharmacy, nuclear pharmacy, and research.

^b Percentages are rounded off.

Georgia, whereas 80 (70.2%) students obtained their B.S. in pharmacy (see Table 6).

Scores on the career commitment scale had a possible range of 8 to 40, with higher scores indicating greater career commitment. The mean total commitment score was 28.29 (SD = 4.60). Refer to Table 7 for mean scores for each question item. Analysis of variance using the GLM with multiple comparisons tests yielded no significant difference in levels of career com-

TABLE 4. Highest Level Students Would Like to Attain in Career.

Level	<i>n</i>	(%)
Clinical Pharmacist	20	(17.9)
Staff Pharmacist	19	(17.0)
Manager	17	(15.2)
Owner	14	(12.5)
Clinical Manager/Clinical Coordinator	13	(11.6)
Director	9	(8.0)
Assistant Manager	5	(4.5)
Assistant Director	1	(0.90)
Other ^a	14	(12.5)
Total ^b	112	(100.0)

^a Other responses included another profession, hospital administration, professor, pharmaceutical company CEO, district supervisor, and consultant.

^b Only 112 responses.

There was no statistical difference in commitment scores based on the highest level students would like to attain in career.

TABLE 5. Long-Term Career Plans of Pharmacy Students.

Career Plans	<i>n</i>	(%)
Full-time career until typical retirement age.	53	(46.5)
Full-time career until I have children, work part-time until children enter school, then return to work full time.	27	(23.7)
Full-time career until I have children, then work part time.	9	(7.9)
Full-time career until marriage, then work part time.	6	(5.3)
Full-time career until I have children, then go back to work when children enter school.	6	(5.3)
Full-time career until I have children, then stop working.	3	(2.6)
Other ^a	10	(8.8)
Total	114	(100.0)

^a Other responses included practicing in another profession or retiring as soon as financially able. There was no statistical difference in commitment scores based on long term career plans of pharmacy students.

mitment with age, gender, marital status, factors influencing students to choose a career in pharmacy, professional pharmacy degree obtained, pharmacy practice experience, highest level or position wish to attain in career, and anticipated work patterns in terms of number of work hours per week at an alpha level of 0.05. Table 6 displays means and standard deviations of total

TABLE 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Total Career Commitment Scores by Gender, Marital Status, Pharmacy Practice Experience, and Terminal Professional Pharmacy Degree Pursued.

Population subset	<i>n</i>	Mean ± SD
Gender		
Females	72	28.86 ± 4.72
Males	42	27.31 ± 4.26
Marital Status		
Single	99	28.23 ± 4.72
Married	14	28.36 ± 4.72
Pharmacy Practice Experience		
Yes	76	28.05 ± 4.82
No	38	28.27 ± 4.16
Pharmacy Degree Obtained		
B.S.	80	28.35 ± 4.80
Pharm.D.	34	28.15 ± 4.22

There was no statistical difference in commitment scores based on gender, marital status, pharmacy practice experience, and pharmacy degree obtained by pharmacy students.

TABLE 7. Commitment Survey.

Question	Mean Score ± SD
If I could pick a different occupation which paid the same amount, I would probably change majors. ^a	2.31 ± 1.05
I definitely want a career in pharmacy.	3.96 ± 0.87
If I could do it all over again, I would choose the same profession.	3.79 ± 0.86
If I had all the money I needed without working, I would continue with my pharmacy education.	3.61 ± 1.16
I like the profession of pharmacy too well to give it up.	3.32 ± 0.86
This is the ideal profession for a life work.	3.64 ± 0.87
I am disappointed that I ever entered pharmacy school. ^a	1.82 ± 0.92
I spend a significant amount of my personal time reading professional journals not assigned in class.	2.16 ± 0.99

1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree.

^a Questions were reversed scored to calculate the total career commitment score.

commitment scores by gender, marital status (single, married), pharmacy practice experience, and terminal professional pharmacy degree pursued.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify objective significant factors that influence students' career commitment. The most important factor that distinguishes this study from previous published studies was examination of professional pharmacy degree obtained on students career commitment.

The mean total career commitment score obtained for the entire study population was 28.29 (SD = 4.60; $n = 114$). Our commitment score of 28.29 is similar to the commitment scores from two previous studies which used Rascati's adaption of Blau's Career Commitment Scale, 29.90 (SD = 5.42) and 31.7 (SD = 4.90) (5,8). Although 39 students indicated on the survey in April 1995 that they were interested in pursuing their Pharm.D. degree, only 34 students completed the Pharm.D. program. Therefore, the results generated from this study were based on the actual students who completed each program of study, 34 Pharm.D. students and 80 B.S. students. Similar to pharmacy practice experience, no significant difference was found in commitment scores between students pursuing the B.S. degree (28.35, SD = 4.80) and the Pharm.D. degree (28.15, SD = 4.22). This finding supports that it was not career commitment that led these students to pursue the Pharm.D. degree, but perhaps some other influences such as a perceived increase quality of work life, the desire to work in a particular pharmacy setting, perceived increase in job opportunities, or to gain a competitive edge (13). Another factor that may have played a significant role in leading students to pursue the Pharm.D. degree is the mandate of one entry-level degree in pharmacy. Many students may have decided to pursue the Pharm.D. degree only because of the mandate and for future job security and not because of their commitment to the profession.

The second factor examined in this study was pharmacy practice experience. The total career commitment score of students without pharmacy practice experience was similar to students with pharmacy practice experience. This finding supports data from Fjortoft's and Lee's study which demonstrated that employment status has no effect on students' level of commitment. Fjortoft and Lee offered two explanations for this occurrence: 1. students may be receiving conflicting messages about pharmacy practice from their employers and instructors, and 2. the benefits from work experience may dissipate with length of employment (10). Since we did not ask our population to indicate their length of employment, we were unable to investigate students' career commitment in terms of employment duration.

In our study, 16.7 percent ($n = 16$) indicated that their most important

factor in deciding to become a pharmacist was the opportunity to earn a high salary. Although analysis of variance revealed no significant difference, the mean career commitment score of 26.94 (SD = 4.68) for students selecting “opportunity to earn a high salary” was lower than the overall population’s mean career commitment score of 28.29 (SD = 4.60). In fact, students who selected opportunity to earn a high salary represented the lowest mean career commitment score for any of the subgroups within this study. This data may support Rascati’s finding that students who chose a career in pharmacy because it “offers a high salary” have lower career commitment scores than students who chose a career in pharmacy because of the “desire to help people,” “desire a career in health field,” or “respected occupation” (8).

The results from our population indicate no significant association between age, gender, marital status, most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, career plans, and level of career commitment. Furthermore, there were no significant associations between professional pharmacy degree obtained, pharmacy practice experience, and students’ career commitment. One major limitation of the study is that students were not asked details about their pharmacy work experience (*i.e.*, setting, the length of the experience, involvement of direct patient contact, etc.) on the questionnaire. Therefore, based on this study, future studies should be conducted to investigate the significance of the actual amount of pharmacy and nonpharmacy work experience, social and academic integration variables (*i.e.*, organizational membership), and professional degree objective (Pharm.D. and B.S.) on pharmacy students’ career commitment. Future studies examining programs that instructors can implement in hopes of increasing students’ career commitment should also be explored. The investigators of this study are exploring the use of actual patients in the classroom to facilitate and encourage positive pharmaceutical caring attitudes and to increase career commitment among pharmacy students.

CONCLUSION

This study attempted to investigate the influence of career plans, pharmacy practice experience, the most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, professional pharmacy degree obtained, age, gender, and marital status on career commitment of pharmacy students. Results yielded no significant association between career commitment and age, gender, marital status, professional pharmacy degree obtained, pharmacy practice experience, highest level or position wish to attain in career, most important factor in deciding to become a pharmacist, and anticipated work patterns in terms of number of work hours per week. Although pharmacy students in this study population

have varying backgrounds and diverse career plans, they possess similar career commitment.

It is important to note that the results generated from these analyses are only applicable to the study population. Future studies investigating pharmacy education programs and their effects on career commitment are also warranted. Pharmacy educators and practitioners need to nourish students to be committed to the profession of pharmacy—after all, the future of our profession depends on it.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

1. Listed below are several items that concern your feeling about pharmacy as a career. For each statement below, indicate by means of a check mark [✓] the extent to which you agree or disagree, on a scale from STRONGLY AGREE to STRONGLY DISAGREE.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
If I could pick a different occupation which paid the same amount, I would probably change majors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I definitely want a career in pharmacy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I could do it all over again, I would choose the same profession.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If I had all the money I needed without working, I would continue with my pharmacy education.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I like the profession of pharmacy too well to give it up.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This is the ideal profession for a life work.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am disappointed that I ever entered pharmacy school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I spend a significant amount of my personal time reading professional journals not assigned in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. Which one of the following best describes your career plans?

- Full-time career until typical retirement age.
 Full-time career until marriage, then work part-time.
 Full-time career until marriage, then stop working.
 Full-time career until I have children, then work part-time.
 Full-time career until I have children, then stop working.
 Full-time career until I have children, then go back to work when children enter school.
 Full-time career until I have children, work part-time until children enter school, then return to work full-time.
 Other, please explain: _____

3. Upon graduation, what field or practice do you plan on entering? (Please indicate one field)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community-Chain | <input type="checkbox"/> Home-Health Care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital | <input type="checkbox"/> Academia |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community-Independent | <input type="checkbox"/> Undecided |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Managed Care | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical Pharmacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please explain: _____ | |

APPENDIX A (continued)

4. Currently, do you have any pharmacy work experience?
 Yes No
5. What is the highest level which you would like to attain in your pharmacy career?
 Staff Pharmacist
 Assistant Manager
 Manager
 Owner
 Assistant Director
 Director
 Clinical Pharmacist
 Clinical Manager/Clinical Coordinator
 Other, please explain: _____
6. From the list below, check those factors which were influential in your decision to become a pharmacist. Please check as many factors as you desire, but please CIRCLE THE ONE FACTOR WHICH WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL IN YOUR DECISION TO BECOME A PHARMACIST.
 Opportunity for a career in a health-related field
 Opportunity to help people
 Ability to work part-time while raising a family
 Academic interest in chemistry and biology courses
 Wide variety of job opportunities available for pharmacists
 Opportunity to earn a high salary
 Good job security for pharmacists
 Pharmacy is a respected occupation
 Family members/friends who are pharmacists
 Other, please explain: _____

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE PRIMARILY DEMOGRAPHIC IN NATURE. PLEASE ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS WITH A CHECK MARK [✓] OR OTHER APPROPRIATE INFORMATION.

7. Are you . . . ? Female Male
8. In what year were you born? 19____
9. What is your marital status? Married Widowed
 Single (never married)
 Separated or divorced
10. What year did you enter pharmacy school? 19____
11. Do you plan on tracking into the Doctor of Pharmacy Program?
 Yes No

THANK YOU!!!