Within Doctor of Pharmacy Degree Programs

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Current Practices of Awarding Graduation Honors

Background

- Within the Doctor of Pharmacy degree program landscape, there is no known standard for the awarding of graduation honors or the criteria for doing so.
- Lack of standardization may lead to uncertainty and confusion, internally and externally, when interpreting the equivalency of honors, or lack of honors, of graduates from different Doctor of Pharmacy degree programs.
- New Doctor of Pharmacy degree programs looking to implement a graduation honors policy, or established programs looking to refine their current policies, may also experience difficulty due to the absence of a standard practice.
- To date, there has not been an analysis of the landscape of the current practices of awarding graduation honors within Doctor of Pharmacy degree programs.

Objectives

- To analyze and provide insight into the current practices of awarding honors upon graduation with a Doctor of Pharmacy degree.
- Identify any trends that exist among the Doctor of Pharmacy degree program landscape.

Methods

- In December 2014, 132 college and school of pharmacy websites were systematically searched for program catalogs, student handbooks, and/or academic bulletins in order to identify if and how graduation honors are awarded.
- Out of 132 programs, 114 (86%) were identified as having a website that included graduation policy information.
- The remaining 18 programs lacked adequate website materials to establish their graduation honors practices.
- Programs that offer graduation honors were quantified based upon consideration of cumulative grade point average (GPA), cutoffs, honors enrollment, research project completion, faculty vote, course failure, and/or ethics code violations.
- Programs were also categorized based on the type of honors awarded, such as Latin honors or alternative honors including graduation with "honors/distinction".

Results

- Programs that offer graduation honors were quantified based upon consideration of cumulative grade point average (GPA), cutoffs, honors enrollment, research project completion, faculty vote, course failure, and/or ethics code violations.
- Programs were also categorized based on the type of honors awarded, such as Latin honors or alternative honors including graduation with "honors/distinction".

Conclusions

- Many Doctor of Pharmacy degree programs (49%) do not award graduation honors; therefore, the absence of a graduation honor from a graduate of a Doctor of Pharmacy degree, does not necessarily imply that one did not qualify as the recipient of an honor.
- Programs that utilize Latin honors with GPA cutoffs in addition to “Other” considerations, on average, utilize the same GPA cutoffs as those that don’t utilize “Other” considerations.
- Doctor of Pharmacy degree programs that consider class rank use the same benchmarks for each tier of honors when offered (low tier honors awarded to top 20%, mid tier honors awarded to top 10%, high tier honors awarded to top 5%). One program utilized 4% vs 5% for the highest tier.
- Programs that utilize Alternative honors based on GPA in addition to “Other” considerations, on average have lower GPA cutoffs than those which utilize Alternative honors based on GPA without “Other” considerations. It should be noted, however, that only two programs award GPA based Alternative honors with “Other” considerations as part of their criteria.
- Low and middle tier Alternative honors have nearly identical mean GPA cutoffs as used in Cum Laude and Magna Cum Laude honors (low tier alternative = 3.440, mid tier alternative = 3.684). High tier Alternative honors have a lower mean GPA cutoff than Summa Cum Laude honors (high tier alternative = 3.789).
- Among the 37% of programs that offer graduation honors, there is significant variation with respect to the criteria utilized in considering eligibility. Mean GPA cutoffs are similar, however, there are still programs with significant deviation from the mean.

Limitation

- A potential limitation of the methodology used is with respect to reliance on internet available materials only. IRB approval was not pursued, which prohibited direct survey of those programs without available internet materials. Still, 86% of all programs are accounted for in the analysis, which represents sufficient inclusion for generalizability among the entire Doctor of Pharmacy degree program landscape.

Figure 1. Awarding of Graduation Honors in Doctor of Pharmacy Degree Programs

Figure 2. Type of Graduation Honors Awarded (n=49)

Figure 3. Programs Awarding Latin Honors Only Based on GPA With vs. Without “Other” Considerations

Figure 4. GPA Cutoffs for Programs Awarding Latin Honors Only Without “Other” Considerations (n=24)

Figure 5. Breakdown of Programs Awarding Alternative Honors (n=18)

Figure 6. Frequency of “Other” Graduation Honors Considerations Among Programs that Award Latin and/or Alternative Honors (n=12)