

Professional Identity Formation (PIF) for Pharmacy Students

The following policy was proposed by the 2019–2020 Student Affairs Standing Committee and was approved by the 2020 AACP House of Delegates.

AACP encourages colleges and schools of pharmacy to advance education that is aimed at the intentional formation of professional identity (i.e., thinking, feeling, and acting like a pharmacist) and developed and implemented in cooperation with professional pharmacy organizations within the broader pharmacy profession.

As a faculty member, what should I read to learn more?

Reading recommendations from the 2020–2021 AACP Student Affairs Standing Committee:

How did educators move from professionalism to professional identity formation?

Health professions education has a history of using virtue-based, behavior-based, and now, identity-based frameworks to address professionalism through its curriculum, pedagogies and assessment. This article discusses our progression through these frameworks, their constructs, assumptions, strengths, strategies and remediation approaches.

Irby DM, Hamstra SJ. Parting the clouds: Three professionalism frameworks in medical education. *Acad Med.* 2016;91(12):1606-1611. doi: [10.1097/ACM.0000000000001190](https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000001190)

The following review summarizes pharmacy education's work in student professional development, including both professionalism and identity formation. It includes discussion of the importance of professionalization, as well as the value of role models, experiential learning and curriculum alignment with work.

Mylrea MF, Gupta TS, Glass BD. Professionalization in Pharmacy Education as a Matter of Identity. *Am J Pharm Ed.* 2015;79(9):142. doi: [10.5688/ajpe799142](https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe799142)

Is there a “one-stop shop” for learning about professional identity formation (PIF)?

This book chapter consolidates definitions and descriptions of PIF in one place, including helpful graphics. It provides a detailed overview of socialization, describes the roles of communities of practice, and offers strategies for educators. Consider reading it in multiple sittings or with a colleague. It is comprehensive and provides a historical context and grounding for educators engaging in this work.

Cruess SR, Cruess RL. The Development of Professional Identity. In: *Understanding Medical Education.* John Wiley & Sons, Ltd; 2018:239-254. doi: [10.1002/9781119373780.ch17](https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119373780.ch17)

Where does pharmacy education stand with PIF?

In 2020, the AACP House of Delegates approved a policy statement put forward from the 2019–2020 AACP Student Affairs Committee encouraging advancements in education aimed at the intentional formation of professional identity. This report provides a brief introduction to PIF; discusses education to support PIF, faculty development, and assessment; and recommendations for schools and the Association.

Welch BE, Arif SA, Bloom TJ, et al. Report of the 2019-2020 AACP Student Affairs Standing Committee. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2020;84(10):8198. doi: [10.5688/ajpe8198](https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8198)

Faculty Perspectives on PIF

Here are some perspectives on the importance of intentional support of PIF provided by faculty members within colleges and schools of pharmacy in the United States, who served as members of the 2020–2021 AACP Student Affairs Standing Committee.

PIF as Entering a Community

Tim Bloom, Shenandoah University

We all share identities, such as being a parent or a musician or a runner. As we think back on our journey toward that identity, we can likely recall seeing a new community from the outside, taking initial steps to join it and making mistakes. We likely received internal and/or external feedback, based on comparison to the community's norms, and we responded. Then, one day, we realized we felt like that identity was part of us - part of who we were. This general process of becoming a musician or runner or parent can translate to the process of developing a professional identity.

PIF Moves Beyond Behaving Professionally

Jessica L. Johnson, William Carey University

It's easy for students to “act and dress” professionally according to a rubric or checklist as part of an observation-based assessment. However, we have all encountered a student whose performance raises concerns that their demonstrated professionalism will not be maintained in practice. Intentional efforts to support professional identity formation can help students adopt professional norms and values internally in a more permanent and deep way, rather than superficially looking professional for a performance grade. *High-quality experiential education provides students with graduated, progressive access to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that underlie our profession's identity.*

Professional Identity Evolves Through a Career

Eric Boyce, University of the Pacific

Professional identity is a wider view of what it means to be a pharmacist. How does a pharmacist think, act, and feel? This is complex and develops over time. A strong identity enables students and pharmacists to effectively interact with patients, other providers, payers, and the public and have more impact in providing and enhancing patient care. Each pharmacist has developed their own professional identity through their experiences as a student and that identity continues to evolve across their career.

Professional Identity Formation (PIF) for Pharmacy Students (cont'd)

The work on PIF continued with the 2020–2021 Student Affairs Committee. The report describes the challenges of a universal pharmacist identity, the need to distinguish the pharmacist identity from other health care professionals', the link between identity and practice transformation, and the use of implementation science principles to create the sustainable culture shift needed to support PIF in the academy.

Janke KK, Bloom TJ, Boyce EG, Johnson JL, Kopacek K, O'Sullivan TA, Petrelli HMW, Steeb DR, Ross LJ. A Pathway to Professional Identity Formation: Report of the 2020-2021 AACP Student Affairs Standing Committee. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2021;85(6)8714. doi: 10.5688/ajpe8714

What is the educator's role in PIF?

This study suggests that pharmacy educators can intentionally design learning experiences that promote and facilitate PIF in pharmacy students. Specific pedagogical models may include Self-Authorship, Learning Partnerships, as well as Communities of Practice.

Johnson JL, Chauvin S. Professional Identity Formation in an Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience Emphasizing Self-Authorship. *Am J Pharm Ed.* 2016;80(10)172. doi: 10.5688/ajpe8010172

How do we begin defining a universal pharmacist identity?

This commentary argues that pharmacy needs to promote uniform standards of rigor and quality, that the Pharmacist's Patient Care Process (PPCP) is not unique to pharmacy, and that the IESA framework (indication, effectiveness, safety, adherence) represents a unique contribution of the pharmacist. This thought process may provide a component of the universal identity.

Sorenson TD, Hager KD, Schlichte A, Janke KK. A Dentist, Pilot, and Pastry Chef Walk into a Bar...Why Teaching PPCP is Not Enough. *Am J Pharm Ed.* 2020;84(4)7704. doi: 10.5688/ajpe7704

What is the identity of a pharmacist?

This study analyzed pharmacy archives and determined five prominent identity discourses through pharmacy's history in North America. These discourses have not shifted, but have "piled up" over time. As a result, students may be exposed to incompatible identities and experience dissonance. (Paper was the winner of the 2021 AACP Rufus A. Lyman Award.)

Kellar J, Paradis E, van der Vleuten CPM, oude Egbrink MGA, Austin Z. A Historical Discourse Analysis of Pharmacist Identity in Pharmacy Education. *Am J Pharm Ed.* 2020;84(9)7864. doi: 10.5688/ajpe7864

Where can I find additional resources?

The citations in the articles above provide a rich trove of information. In addition, AACP maintains a web page on [Professional Identity Formation](#), which includes webinars.

Co-Curriculum Supports PIF

Karen Kopacek, University of Wisconsin–Madison

Professional identity formation involves socialization within the profession and active engagement in a community of practice. Co-curricular activities allow practice and access to professional communities that strengthen students' identity within the profession and develop confidence in their contributions. Reflecting after each experience encourages students to incorporate their thoughts, actions, and feelings into their developing identity.

Advancing PIF in the Curriculum

Teresa O'Sullivan, University of Washington

Programs and activities designed to guide professional identity formation can assist students in finding and developing a professional identity that is consistent with the current and future direction of the profession. Having intentional conversations throughout the curriculum with students about their emerging professional identity and how the activities they've been doing contribute to formation can help students better see the value of those learning activities. Many curricula are undergoing transformation, which provides an ideal opportunity for faculty to integrate exercises that promote reflection on pharmacists' professional identity in general and the student's developing identity specifically.

Moving Toward a Universal Identity

Heather Petrelli, University of South Florida

It is difficult for pharmacists to have a shared professional identity in light of the many aspects of identity that are shared amongst all healthcare disciplines, the differences within and among different sub-specialties of pharmacy, and the differences in practice regionally. It is essential to begin standardizing PIF so that colleges and schools can incorporate education and assessment of PIF learning outcomes, which will support graduates' readiness to enter the profession with a strong professional identity and lead pharmacy forward.

Professional Identity is Vital to Practice Transformation

Kristin Janke, University of Minnesota

Identity influences our perceptions of self. It defines who we are. Professional identity also influences the work we choose to undertake. It informs our attitudes and beliefs about "this is what a pharmacist does". Do pharmacists stimulate and facilitate change efforts in healthcare? Is being a 'change agent' part of the identity? Identity and our effectiveness in evolving the healthcare system are strongly intertwined.

Professional Identity Formation Can be Uncomfortable

David Steeb, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

We often grow the most when we are least comfortable. This also applies to professional identity formation. It is an iterative process influenced by numerous internal and external factors across the curriculum and co-curriculum. As educators, we play an influential role in setting the stage for our students as to how one may think, act, and feel as a pharmacist. As students transition from the classroom to experiential settings, or from rotations to their first job, they may encounter a disconnect between perception and reality. This dissonance, albeit uncomfortable, is normal and can stimulate deeper reflection and growth as to one's professional identity.