

VIEWPOINTS

Student Participants in Faculty Educational Research

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Research to improve pharmacy education requires the active participation of students to achieve results that are valid and generalizable; however, engaging students as subjects in educational research that is not a required part of a course or campus activity is difficult. Because of tightly packed curriculums and active student involvement in extracurricular activities, research requiring student participation outside of class is likely to yield a low participation rate. More complete results can be obtained when student data is collected in class or from existing databases of test scores or performance evaluations and from voluntary participation during class. Of note, students may not perceive participation in a study during class time as truly voluntary since they may feel their grades could be affected if they do not participate.

I recently completed a research project that demonstrated the challenges in recruiting students to participate. The project, titled "Exploring the Impact of Training Preceptors in Assessing and Evaluating Student Communication Skills on Students' Counseling Attitudes and Behaviors," was ambitious as it involved multiple individuals, multiple data collection efforts, and a variety of schedules. Students were asked to come to campus to be videotaped during interactions with a standardized patient (actor) to measure baseline communication skills at the beginning of an advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) in community pharmacy. Then they were asked to return to campus at the end of the APPE for a similar videotaping session to assess skills acquired during the APPE.

During the course of this project, I made several efforts to recruit students including going to required meetings before and during the APPE year, inviting students to participate in the project and sending personal e-mails inviting students to participate. In all e-mail and face-to-face communications, I reminded the students of the importance of the research. Students were given the opportunity to participate in the project immediately following required on-campus meetings as a way to eliminate the need for an additional trip to campus and the recruit-

ment period was extended. I asked the Dean of Pharmacy to send a note to the students encouraging them to participate. Students received a \$5 Dunkin' Donut gift card for participation (later raised to a \$10 Dunkin' Donut gift card), and I offered students a coupon allowing them to park free when they came to campus for the research. A student researcher assisted in recruitment.

Despite all of these efforts, student participation was poor. There were several possible reasons for the low participation: (1) students may have been uncomfortable with having the assessment of their skills videotaped; (2) students had to return to campus for follow-up evaluations, and although most had APPEs near campus, they may have been discouraged from participating by traffic or other commitments after hours; and (3) the incentive (the Dunkin' Donut card) may not have been great enough to motivate students to come to campus twice to complete the brief survey instruments. If these deterrents could have been resolved, perhaps the previous recruitment efforts would have been more successful.

While the project design may have been unique with regard to the above challenges, my experience still raises a number of questions and concerns about student motivation in general to participate in faculty research. What does it take to motivate students to participate in research that requires their time outside of class or their typical academic schedule? Should faculty researchers make student provision of research data a requirement of students' learning experiences and not have it be voluntary? If we pursue making student data provision mandatory, would it be perceived as faculty members using coercive means to meet their research objectives? Would this be acceptable to investigational review boards? We need to explore strategies that could help to improve student participation without being coercive such as: (1) engaging student leaders to promote research projects, (2) employing methodologies to allow students to participate offsite, and/or (3) linking participation to something else valued such as extra-credit points, gift certificates, etc. We clearly need to improve student participation in research outside of classroom time or a scheduled campus activity. The lack of adequate student participation in educational research may limit opportunities to answer important and interesting educational questions that could help improve both pharmacy education and practice.

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