

# Comparison of Pharmacy Recruiters' and Students' Views Toward Job Interviews

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This study examined views of 107 pharmacy recruiters and 141 senior pharmacy students toward job interviews. Data were collected at two pharmacy schools during their placement conferences. Three follow-up mailings were also used to obtain data from pharmacy recruiters after the conferences. Results showed that the three most common responses that students gave for a successful interview were: self-confidence, good communication skills, and good appearance; while recruiters responded with good communication skills, self-confidence, and being well-prepared. Conversely, the three most common responses that students gave for an unsuccessful interview were: nervousness, lack of good communication skills, and not being well-prepared compared with the recruiters' responses of lack of good communication skills, having a negative attitude, and lack of good appearance.

## INTRODUCTION

Every year, most pharmacy schools hold a placement conference for their prospective graduates. They invite recruiters from various organizations such as the pharmaceutical industry, managed care, chain store, independent, and hospital pharmacies to attend their conferences. Although this has been a common practice by many colleges of pharmacy, factors affecting pharmacy recruiters' decision to accept or reject a pharmacy student candidate have not been adequately researched in the pharmacy literature. So far, we do not have information on these pharmacy recruiters, whether they are pharmacists or nonpharmacists. What are the criteria or factors that they consider when selecting a candidate for the job being offered? For pharmacy students,

what are the important factors that would attract them to accept the job offer? What are the effective techniques that would help them make a positive impression during the job interview? What are the factors that they believe would contribute to their success and failure of a job interview? Are there any differences between recruiters' and pharmacy students' expectations and value systems of a job interview? If there are, what are these differences?

This type of knowledge should be provided to our pharmacy students for two reasons. First, the interviews offer the best opportunity for pharmacy students to impress the recruiters, to show that they are qualified for the position and will be a valuable asset to the firm. Second, the pharmacy curriculum has been focused in training pharmacy

students about drug knowledge and counseling skills with little or no emphasis on job-interviewing skills. Research on college students showed that when facing a job search, these students developed some sources of anxiety(1). Highly anxious students also received a higher negative score during the job interview than did less anxious students(2) and those who responded more favorably to their interviews felt somewhat more positive about taking a job in that recruiting company(3). Currently, not all of the pharmacy schools have developed a skill-building course or training session that is designed to enhance the job-interviewing skills for their pharmacy students. Possible training programs could include teaching pharmacy students how to write a good resume and communicate effectively, developing a career development program focusing on self-exploration of personal values, career exploration through academic research, and career implementation and continuation of an effective job hunting campaign.

In the business and psychology literature, several aspects of the job interview have been researched and some of the findings related to this study will be reported. A survey of 200 top executives revealed that 38.0 percent named verbal communication as the most important quality that impressed the interviewers(4). In two other studies, communication skills were identified as one of the applicants' characteristics that the interviewers were looking for(5) and would contribute to a favorable employment decision(6). Other studies have indicated that there are differences in personality and value systems between interviewers and interviewees. Interviewers are more favorably disposed to people that they like, and their attitudes affect the judgments they make(7). In some cases, the halo effect tended to overshadow all other characteristics of the applicants(8). In a study of 200 business students at a university, it was found that the five most important attributes to students were: (i) job satisfaction; (ii) job fit with student goals; (iii) recruiter morale during interviews; (iv) financial stability of the company; and (v) the company reputation(9).

Although employment laws that regulate the recruitment and hiring of employees prohibit employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, handicap, and national origin, some of the demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, and race have been found to affect job interviews. One study found that male recruiters showed a significant level of sex bias, especially for the positions that were sexually-oriented(10). Another study found that recruiters perceived women as those who had a more short-term look at their career goals and plans and did not ask about advancement compared to men(11). Women were found to make a favorable impression when applying for female-dominated jobs rather than male-dominated jobs(12). In the pharmacy profession, women were found to be underrepresented in administrative positions but overrepresented in staff jobs and it was recommended that women should assert themselves during the job interview(13). In terms of age, one study found that female recruiters rated the older applicants more positively than male recruiters. However, regardless of age, people who were hired were rated more positively than those who were not(14). In another study, the age of the interviewer was found to make a significant difference in perceptions of the importance of an applicant's support for arguments and social attributes(15). As related to race, a study showed that color

influenced not only feeling and emotion, but also perception of the interviewers(16). A study with 185 firms showed that negative preconceptions and strained race relations have hampered inner-city Black workers in the labor market(17). In the same study, employers were found to direct their recruitment to White neighborhoods and Catholic or magnet schools. A study determining the effect of marital status on job interviews found that married women in the MBA program tended to remove their wedding bands before going to job interviews(18). Female applicants who knew that the male interviewers held a traditional view of women would present themselves in a more traditionally feminine manner(19). In another study, employers perceived single women as being more mobile and less limited than married women(11).

Other factors that have been found to affect job interviews are dress, appearance, and nonstandard dialect. When dressed in the most appropriate level (compared to moderately appropriate and inappropriate), female applicants were rated significantly higher by recruiters on six statements of management potential(20). In another study of dress and appearance, form-fitting outfits were rated more favorably than loose outfits, and the layered look more favorably than the nonlayered look(12). High necklines were seen as more appropriate than moderate or low necklines, except when seeking a low-status, male dominated job(12). Finally, a study of specific social dialect found that recruiters gave negative ratings to 58.0 percent of Appalachian English speakers and 93.0 percent of Black English speakers(21).

Predictors of employment decisions have been studied with 170 job applicants and 17 recruiting agencies at a college placement center. The three most important predictors found in that study were undergraduate grade point average, membership in fraternity or sorority, and membership in professional organizations(22). In another study of verbal, articulative, and nonverbal communication, appropriateness of content, fluency of speech, and composure were identified as the three important factors that contributed to a favorable employment decisions(6).

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

1. to report a profile of pharmacy recruiters in the study;
2. to determine the three most important factors that pharmacy recruiters and students believe would attract a candidate to accept the job offer;
3. to determine the three most important factors that pharmacy recruiters and students believe would contribute to a candidate's success and failure of the job interview;
4. to determine the three most important techniques that pharmacy recruiters and students believe would make a positive impression during the job interview;
5. to determine the starting salary that pharmacy recruiters would like to offer and the starting salary that pharmacy students are looking for; and
6. to compare pharmacy recruiters' and students' responses.

## HYPOTHESES

Based on the study objectives, four hypotheses were tested:  
H1: There are no significant differences in pharmacy recruiters' and students' ratings of factors that would attract a candidate to accept the job offer

H2: There are no significant differences in pharmacy recruiters' and students' ratings of factors that would contribute to a candidate's success of the job interview.

H3: There are no significant differences in pharmacy recruiters' and students' ratings of techniques that would make a positive impression during the job interview.

H4: There are no significant differences in pharmacy recruiters' and students' responses of the starting salary.

## METHODS

### Data Collection

This study used a convenience sample of senior pharmacy students (third professional year) at two pharmacy schools in one state. Both schools have a "placement conference" where graduating seniors make appointments to meet with prospective employers. Surveys were distributed to students during the placement conferences. Pharmacy recruiters were asked to complete and return the questionnaires while they visited the two pharmacy schools for the placement conferences. For pharmacy recruiters who did not return the questionnaires, three mailings were used to follow-up the respondents. Each questionnaire was given a computer identification number and when the recruiters returned their questionnaires, their numbers were checked off the list. For all follow-ups, a replacement questionnaire was mailed to non-respondents with a new cover letter. A total of 107 pharmacy recruiters and 141 senior pharmacy students participated in this study. A response rate of 88.4 percent was achieved for pharmacy recruiters and 90.4 percent for pharmacy students.

### Study Instrument

Both pharmacy recruiters and senior pharmacy students were asked to complete a similar questionnaire. There are three parts in the questionnaire. Part one addressed questions pertaining to demographic information. Pharmacy students were asked about their gender, ethnicity, age, cumulative pharmacy grade point average (GPA), marital status, number of dependent(s), family income, and pharmacy related work experience; while pharmacy recruiters were asked about their gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, number of dependent(s), current position, highest degree earned, company name (optional), type of company, and whether or not they were pharmacists.

In part two, six questions (three open-ended and three close-ended questions) were used to examine pharmacy recruiters' and senior pharmacy students' views toward job interviews. The three open-ended questions asked for the starting salary, the three most important factors for the success and the failure of a job interview. The three close-ended questions asked each respondent to rate the importance of 13 factors that would attract the candidates to accept the job offer, 12 factors that would contribute to the candidates' success in the job interview process, and 12 techniques that would make a positive impression during the job interview(23) using a continuous seven-point scale ranging from 1 (the least important) to 7 (the most important). To prevent biases, these 37 items were listed in the questionnaire in alphabetical order. Finally, only pharmacy students were asked to complete part three of the questionnaire. In this section, two questions were used to examine pharmacy students' career plans. They asked for the field of practice that pharmacy students planned to enter upon

**Table I. A breakdown of recruiters' selected demographic variables by gender**

Demographics	Percent		
	Male	Female	Total
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White	55 (61.8)	34 (38.2)	89 (100.0)
Black	0 (0.0)	4 (100.0)	4 (100.0)
Asian	0 (0.0)	3 (100.0)	3 (100.0)
Hispanic	4 (40.0)	6 (60.0)	10(100.0)
<b>Marital status</b>			
Single	6 (27.3)	16 (72.7)	22 (100.0)
Married	47 (65.3)	25 (34.7)	72 (100.0)
Engaged	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	4 (100.0)
Divorced/Separated	5 (62.5)	3 (37.5)	8 (100.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	1 (100.0)
<b>Age (Years)</b>			
24-30	10 (45.4)	12 (54.6)	22 (100.0)
31-40	17 (45.9)	20 (54.1)	37 (100.0)
41-50	23 (62.2)	14 (37.8)	37 (100.0)
51-62	10 (90.9)	1 (9.1)	11 (100.0)
<b>Highest Degree</b>			
BS	48 (58.5)	34 (41.5)	82 (100.0)
MS	11 (52.4)	10 (47.6)	21 (100.0)
PhD	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)
PharmD	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)	1 (100.0)
Other	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	2 (100.0)
<b>Pharmacist</b>			
Yes	54 (62.1)	33 (37.9)	87 (100.0)
No	6 (30.0)	14 (70.0)	20 (100.0)
<b>Practice setting</b>			
Chain	24 (57.1)	18 (42.9)	42 (100.0)
Independent	1 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (100.0)
Hospital	26 (54.2)	22 (45.8)	48 (100.0)
Industry	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)
Managed care	3 (50.0)	3 (50.0)	6 (100.0)
Government	2 (66.7)	1 (33.3)	3 (100.0)
Other	2 (40.0)	3 (60.0)	5 (100.0)

graduation and the highest administrative level that they would like to attain.

### Data Analysis

Data analyses were performed using PC SAS-Personal Computer Statistical Analysis Software(24). Owing to multiple tests, Bonferroni was used to adjust the *P* value and an alpha level of 0.0014 (0.05/37) was chosen as the level of significance for the study. Frequency, means, and standard deviations were computed for all continuous variables. *T*-tests were used to compare the means between the two groups (recruiters versus pharmacy students).

## RESULTS

### Sample Description

Of the 107 pharmacy recruiters, most of them were White (83.2 percent), male (56.1 percent), and married (67.3 percent). The mean age was  $38.93 \pm 9.16$  years old and 58.6 percent reported having between one and three dependents. When asked for their highest degree, a majority (78.1 percent) had a bachelor degree and 81.3 percent were pharmacists. Overall, 39 companies were represented. Table

**Table II. The top ten responses given as important factors that will contribute to a successful job interview**

Rank and response	Frequency	Percent <sup>a</sup>
By Recruiter		
1 Have good communication skills	73	70.2
2 Have self-confidence	38	36.5
3 Be well-prepared	28	26.9
4 Have strong academic background	27	26.0
5 Have prior work experience	25	24.0
6 Have good personality	22	21.2
6 Have good appearance	22	21.2
8 Have positive attitude	17	16.3
9 Be well-rounded	13	12.5
10 Have job commitment	9	8.7
By Student		
1 Have self-confidence	60	46.9
2 Have good communication skills	56	43.8
3 Have good appearance	37	28.9
4 Have good personality	35	27.3
5 Have strong academic background	133	25.8
6 Have positive attitude	27	21.1
7 Be well-prepared	24	18.8
8 Have prior work experience	21	16.4
9 Have job commitment	13	10.2
10 Be yourself	9	7.0

<sup>a</sup>Respondents were asked to list three factors. Therefore, the total is more than 100 percent.

It shows a breakdown of recruiters' selected demographic variables by gender.

Of the 141 pharmacy students, most of them were White (59.6 percent), female (69.5 percent), single (60.0 percent), and had no dependents (92.1 percent). On average, they were  $25.95 \pm 5.00$  years old and reported a cumulative pharmacy GPA of  $3.11 \pm 0.42$  on a 4.00 scale. Almost half of them (49.6 percent) reported a family income of \$30,000 or less and 70.9 percent of them had previous pharmacy related work experience.

### The Three Most Important Factors for the Success and Failure of a Job Interview

Two open-ended questions asked both pharmacy recruiters and students for the three most important factors that contributed to the success and failure of a job interview. The three most common responses that pharmacy students gave for a successful interview were: (i) self-confidence (46.9 percent); (ii) good communication skills (43.8 percent); and (iii) good appearance (28.9 percent). Pharmacy recruiters responded with: (i) good communication skills (70.2 percent); (ii) self-confidence (36.5 percent); and (iii) being well-prepared (26.9 percent). Conversely, the three most common responses that pharmacy students gave for an unsuccessful interview were: (i) nervousness (38.9 percent); (ii) lack of good communication skills (26.2 percent); and (iii) not being well-prepared (22.2 percent) compared with pharmacy recruiters' responses of: (i) lack of good communication skills (61.2 percent); (ii) having a negative attitude (36.9 percent); and (iii) lack of good appearance (31.1 percent). Tables II and III show the top ten responses that pharmacy recruiters and students gave for a successful and an unsuccessful interview.

**Table III. The top ten responses given as important factors that will contribute to an unsuccessful job interview**

Rank and response	Frequency	Percent <sup>a</sup>
By Recruiter		
1 Lack of good communication skills	63	61.2
2 Have negative attitude	38	36.9
3 Lack of good appearance	32	31.1
4 Not being well-prepared	30	29.1
5 No self-confidence	22	21.4
6 Weak academic background	19	18.4
7 Arrogant and no respect	12	11.7
8 No prior work experience	11	10.7
9 Have poor resume	9	8.7
9 No enthusiasm	9	8.7
By Student		
1 Nervousness	49	38.9
2 Lack of good communication skills	33	26.2
3 Not being well-prepared	28	22.2
4 No self-confidence	20	15.9
4 Have negative attitude	20	15.9
6 Lack of good appearance	19	15.1
7 Have bad and biased interviewer	16	12.7
8 Weak academic background	14	11.1
8 Fatigue due to too many interviews	14	11.1
10 Lack of good personality	13	10.3

<sup>a</sup> Respondents were asked to list three factors. Therefore, the total is more than 100 percent.

### Factors Attracting Pharmacy Students to Accept the Job Offer

Each respondent was asked to rate the importance of 13 factors that would attract the candidates to accept the job offer. Table IV shows the mean ratings and standard deviations of the 13 factors that would attract the candidates to accept the job offer by pharmacy recruiters and students. Based on Table IV, the three highest ratings by pharmacy recruiters were: (i) job satisfaction; (ii) opportunities for growth and challenge; and (iii) company reputation. On the other hand, the three highest ratings by pharmacy students were: (i) job satisfaction; (ii) type of work; and (iii) job fit with their career goals. However, pharmacy students gave a significantly higher rating to the following factors than pharmacy recruiters: job satisfaction, type of work, job security, financial stability of the company, working schedule, management philosophy, and company location.

### Factors Contributing to the Success of Pharmacy Students' Job Interview

Twelve items were used to examine pharmacy recruiters' and students' views on factors that would contribute to the success of the job interview. Table V shows the mean ratings and standard deviations of the 12 factors that were stated to contribute to the candidates' success in the job interview by pharmacy recruiters and students. As shown in Table V, the three highest ratings by pharmacy recruiters and students were: (i) verbal communication; (ii) ability to handle questions; and (iii) appearance and personality. It should be noted that both groups gave similar responses for the three highest ratings. However, pharmacy students gave a significantly higher rating to the following factors than pharmacy recruiters: well-written resume, knowledge of employer organization, interviewee's marital status,

**Table IV. Ratings of 13 factors that would attract the candidates to accept the job offer by recruiters and pharmacy students**

Rank	Factor	Mean±SD <sup>a</sup>		
		Recruiter	Student	P<
1	Job satisfaction	5.93±0.91	6.49±0.70	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
2	Opportunities for growth & challenge	5.72±1.06	5.91±0.97	0.1427
3	Company reputation	5.71±1.05	5.67±1.00	0.7348
4	Job fit with their career goals	5.70±0.99	6.09±0.89	0.0018
5	Salary and fringe benefits	5.65±1.18	5.73±1.07	0.5741
6	Type of work	5.55±0.96	6.11±0.93	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
7	Job security	5.41±1.14	6.06±0.99	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
8	Recruiter morale during the interview	5.25±1.23	4.88±1.43	0.0295
9	Financial stability of the company	5.18±1.36	5.76±1.05	0.0002 <sup>b</sup>
10	Working schedule	5.13±1.11	6.05±1.06	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
11	Management philosophy	5.03±1.27	5.58±0.99	0.0002 <sup>b</sup>
12	Company location	4.98±1.42	5.61±1.23	0.0003 <sup>b</sup>
13	Interviewer	4.71±1.41	4.39±1.40	0.0807

<sup>a</sup>When 1 represents the least Importance to 7 represents the most importance.

<sup>b</sup>P<0.0014.

**Table V. Ratings of 12 factors that would contribute to the candidates' success in the job interview by recruiters and pharmacy students**

Rank	Factor	Mean±SD <sup>a</sup>		
		Recruiter	Student	P<
1	Verbal communication	6.83±0.40	6.42±0.86	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
2	Ability to handle questions	5.96±0.79	6.14±0.93	0.1162
3	Appearance and personality	5.93±0.86	5.97±0.86	0.7367
4	Attitude toward employer	5.80±0.98	5.85±0.94	0.6960
5	Knowledge of pharmacy profession	5.70±1.11	5.73±1.01	0.7936
6	Knowledge of the job	5.21±1.32	5.51±1.04	0.0513
7	Well-written resume	4.57±1.31	5.26±1.08	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
8	Grade point average	3.97±1.08	3.58±1.41	0.0160
9	Knowledge of employer organization	3.82±1.66	4.71±1.30	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
10	Interviewee's marital status	1.63±1.15	2.44±1.51	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
11	Interviewee's age	1.53±0.90	2.46±1.58	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>
12	Interviewee's gender	1.41±0.88	2.35±1.60	0.0001 <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>When 1 represents the least importance to 7 represents the most importance.

<sup>b</sup>P<0.0014.

interviewee's age, and interviewee's gender. Conversely, verbal communication was the only factor that pharmacy recruiters gave a significantly higher rating than pharmacy students.

**Techniques Used by Pharmacy Students to Make a Positive Impression During the Job Interview**

In this section, both pharmacy recruiters and students were asked to rate the importance of 13 techniques that would make a positive impression during the job interview. Table VI shows the mean ratings and standard deviations of the 12 techniques that would make a positive impression during the job interview by pharmacy recruiters and students. The three highest ratings by pharmacy recruiters were: (i) answer questions in a confident, honest, and straightforward manner; (ii) project the right attitude by being positive and confident; and (iii) communicate strengths and goals or ask questions to elicit vital information about the job and to demonstrate energy and active participation in the interview process. On the other hand, the three highest ratings by pharmacy students were similar to pharmacy recruiters' except that the third factor was end the interview

on a positive note. When comparing mean ratings for each response between the two groups, follow up the interview with a letter was the only factor that pharmacy students gave a significantly higher rating than pharmacy recruiters.

**Starting Salary and Pharmacy Students' Career Plans**

When asking about the starting salary, 100 recruiters gave a range between \$28,000 and \$70,700 of salary (mean=\$44,704.30 ± 6,905.56) that they would offer for the position currently interviewed; whereas 131 pharmacy students were looking for a starting salary between \$35,000 and \$55,000 (mean=\$44,763.36 ± 4,170.10). There was no significant difference in the mean salary given between pharmacy-recruiters and students (t=0.08; P=0.9398). In terms of career plan, the top three fields of practice that pharmacy students planned to enter upon graduation were: (i) chain pharmacy (56.3 percent); (ii) hospital pharmacy (29.6 percent); and (iii) independent pharmacy (8.9 percent). The top three highest administrative levels that pharmacy students would like to attain were: (i) manager (24.1 percent); (ii) owner (13.1 percent); and (iii) district manager (12.4 percent).

**Table VI. Ratings of 12 techniques that would make a positive impression during the job interview by recruiters and pharmacy students**

Rank	Factor	Mean±SD <sup>a</sup>		P<
		Recruiter	Student	
1	Answer questions in a confident, honest, and straightforward manner	6.41±0.72	6.14±0.87	0.0094
2	Project the right attitude by being positive and confident	6.27±0.70	6.13±0.90	0.1619
3	Ask questions to elicit vital information about the job and to demonstrate energy and active participation in the interview process	5.92±0.99	5.65±1.02	0.0384
4	Communicate strengths and goals	5.92±0.94	5.65±1.03	0.0360
5	Dress appropriately for the interview	5.74±1.04	5.70±1.13	0.7954
6	Prepare for the interview with an honest self-evaluation of goals, work style, and financial needs	5.59±1.08	5.56±1.12	0.8213
7	End the interview on a positive note	5.50±1.31	5.88±1.05	0.0132
8	Relaxed, but remain sharp	5.39±1.15	5.68±0.94	0.0340
9	Understand the market and keep up with the competition through thought and preparation	5.07±1.22	5.14±1.19	0.6367
10	Follow up the interview with a letter	4.83±1.44	5.42±1.26	0.0011 <sup>b</sup>
11	Answer all questions that are posed, remembering the tough questions, even ones that are discriminatory, offer additional opportunities to reinforce competence and desire for the job	4.61±1.61	5.00±1.44	0.0514
12	Research the firm or corporation	4.50±1.62	4.95±1.25	0.0150

<sup>a</sup>When 1 represents the least importance to 7 represents the most importance.

<sup>b</sup>P<0.0014.

## DISCUSSION

The first three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3) were rejected because there were significant differences in the mean ratings of factors that would attract the candidates to accept the job offer (H1), factors that would contribute to the success of the job interview (H2), and techniques that would make a positive impression during a job interview (H3) between pharmacy recruiters and students. The fourth hypothesis (H4) was accepted because there was no significant difference between the mean salary given by pharmacy recruiters and students. The results of this study were similar to those reported in the business and psychology literature. First, there were differences in expectations and value systems between interviewers and interviewees. Second, verbal communication was identified as one of the most important factors by the interviewers and job satisfaction was identified as one of the most important factors by the students.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are differences between pharmacy recruiters' and students' expectations and value systems of the job interviews. Nonetheless, both pharmacy recruiters and students gave the highest rating on job satisfaction as a factor that would attract a candidate to accept the job offer, verbal communication as a factor that would contribute to a candidate's success in the job interview, and answering questions in a confident, honest, and straightforward manner as a factor that would make a positive impression during the job interview. As a result of the differences found between pharmacy recruiters and students, pharmacy students should be aware and informed of these factors that

would help them to better prepare for their job interviews. To assist the senior pharmacy students, pharmacy schools and educators may want to design and implement a program that will help their students to be successful in the job market. In terms of research, future studies may want to investigate how the differences in pharmacy recruiters' views affect their employment decisions. Finally, the results of this study can also be used by pharmacy students to prepare themselves for the job interviews.

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