

Chapter 7

Navigating Performance– Based Assessments in Unprecedented Times: Adaptations, Challenges, and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the implementation of performance-based assessments (PBAs) at the Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy (AUHSOP) during the COVID-19 pandemic, when shifts were made to a fully remote delivery of the pharmacy curriculum in March 2020 and then altered to a hybrid delivery in the fall semester in which students returned to campus in a limited capacity. In addition to describing adaptations made due to curriculum delivery changes for each professional year, the chapter will provide specific challenges encountered while planning and implementing PBAs with a focus on factors related to students, standardized persons (SPs), and logistics. Student and SP perceptions of remote PBA delivery will be presented as well as strategies for improvement of future PBA events.

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INTRODUCTION

The Auburn University Harrison School of Pharmacy (AUHSOP) is a four-year professional program that prepares students for entry into the profession of pharmacy. Students complete three years of predominantly classroom and lab-based learning experiences prior to completing a final year of clinical clerkships. Prior to COVID-19, the AUHSOP had recently undergone a curriculum redesign, establishing a competency-driven, practice-ready curriculum for the Doctor of Pharmacy program. Using a backwards course design process (Wiggins et al., 2005), the Practice-Ready Curriculum (PRC) was developed to prepare student pharmacists for practice through integrated learning experiences and robust assessment approaches (Hornsby & Wright, 2020; Wright et al., 2018). The didactic curriculum is divided into 12 Integrated Learning Experiences (ILE), six Longitudinal courses, and six one-week Workshop courses across the first three professional years of the curriculum as illustrated in Figure 1. Student pharmacists are assessed on predetermined competencies through a variety of knowledge-based, skills-based, and practice-based assessments that are held throughout and at the conclusion of each academic course. As a component of the curricular assessment strategy, performance-based assessments (PBAs) are held at the end of each ILE for each professional year (PY) and consist of assessments designed to evaluate student pharmacist's knowledge and ability to conduct clinical skills. Assessment scenario examples include patient interviewing and counseling, healthcare provider consultations, development of a comprehensive assessment and plan, and utilization of healthcare technology such as electronic health records (EHR) and prescription dispensing software. Typically, these assessments occur in an environment that simulates a patient care setting or a secure, controlled testing environment with each assessment duration ranging from 10 minutes up to two hours. Assessments that include interpersonal interactions are most often conducted with the use of standardized persons (SPs) who portray the role of a patient, caregiver, or healthcare provider. Most of these interactions are graded in real-time by another trained SP or faculty member. Generally, SPs were hired to serve as both an actor and a grader, alternating between these roles throughout the assessment period. Assessment of student pharmacists for interpersonal interactions involved completion of a unique analytical checklist focused on their ability to meet the objectives of the interaction and a standardized communication rubric focused on communication and interpersonal skills (Ford et al., 2019). Typically, these assessments are delivered as stations which student pharmacists rotate through consecutively. An in-depth overview of the AUHSOP PBA process has been previously published (Ford & Kleppinger, 2020).

In the Spring of 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic led to significant changes in many facets of daily life, particularly in the education system. Universities, colleges, and schools throughout the United States transitioned to remote learning in March 2020, including Auburn University (Auburn University, 2020 March 12). While the AUHSOP has been operating a satellite campus since 2007 with synchronous learning via Zoom (Zoom Video Connections, Inc, 2020), the curriculum and assessments were focused on traditional methods of in-person delivery. With the transition to virtual learning, the program's method of instruction and related assessments required a timely and innovative restructuring. The preliminary adjustments included the transition of teaching lecture-based and active learning activities to a virtual format. This led to significant alterations in the delivery of assessments. While a restructuring of this nature would typically require reporting and approval from the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), temporary substantive changes to the curriculum due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were waived if they were not in violation of ACPE standards (ACPE, 2020 August; ACPE, 2015).

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