



ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES REQUIRED FOR THE STUDY OF PHARMACY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

October 2022

Preamble

The University of Saskatchewan (USask) Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) program has a responsibility to provide enrolled students with a program of study to develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes, and skills) necessary to enter the profession of Pharmacy. Students interested in pursuing a PharmD degree are expected to review the following document which outlines the skills and attributes required to enable them to engage in various learning activities of the program to develop competency in these areas to meet all program learning objectives, and registration as a licensed pharmacist. Where a student cannot exhibit the standards (which refers to their essential skills and attributes) to such an extent that it may impact the safety or well-being of patients, students, or others, the program may modify the participation of a student including, but not limited to, limiting student activities, requiring the student to take a leave of absence, or in serious instances, requiring the student to discontinue from, or not enter, the program.

An offer of admission to the PharmD program should not be interpreted as evidence that the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. These skills and attributes are essential, and must be demonstrated, if students are to be successful in achieving the competency standards and occupational expectations of the profession of pharmacy. Students interested in pursuing a PharmD degree should engage in self-reflection, considering this document and their own skills and abilities before proceeding with an application.

The competency standards for pharmacists are described in the [*Professional Competencies for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians at Entry to Practice in Canada*](#). Students admitted to the PharmD program must possess the skills and abilities described in this document in order to be able to develop the competencies required of an entry-to-practice licensed pharmacist. By the time of graduation and subsequent entry into practice, students must demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and responsible decision making as professionals who are cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws, regulations, professional codes of ethics, and standards of practice.

In addition to obtaining a PharmD degree, an individual must pass the [*Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada*](#) Qualifying Exam (PEBC-QE) in order to apply for registration/licensure as a pharmacist in most jurisdictions in Canada. The PEBC-QE has two components: a written component and a clinical skills component. Prospective candidates should be aware that the clinical skills component requires candidates to demonstrate knowledge, skills and behaviors in communication, information gathering, calculations, technical tasks, analysis, evaluation, care planning and execution, and management in timed simulations of patient or other encounters.



Students with disabilities who anticipate that reasonable accommodation will enable them to meet the required standards, as outlined in this document, are responsible for articulating their requirements and for being proactive in seeking such accommodation. Requests for accommodation for disability or an extension of time to complete the program are considered on a case-by-case basis according to the applicable policies, regulations, and procedures. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the policies, regulations, and procedures regarding [student accommodations](#) at the University of Saskatchewan and the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition. If admitted to the PharmD program, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the University and the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition.

Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in the PharmD Program

Aptitude and attitude

Students looking to enter the PharmD program must have an interest in health and a desire to support the health and wellness of individuals, groups, and populations. They must demonstrate empathy, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand, develop, and apply the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their patients, peers, and healthcare colleagues. Students must have the capacity to develop leadership, management, and supervisory skills. They must be willing to comply with the standards and requirements set by the program and the profession of pharmacy to ensure patient safety (e.g., criminal record checks, immunizations, federal and provincial laws and regulations).

Students must have the capacity and desire to develop the high level of professionalism expected in the PharmD program and the profession of pharmacy. Students must conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the College's [Guiding Principles for professionalism](#) that include respect for others, honesty and integrity, compassion and empathy, and duty and responsibility. This means having a strong work ethic, developing and maintaining a professional image and attitude, appropriate interpersonal skills, and understanding professional boundaries. They must be able to effectively and sensitively relate to people of all genders, ages, races, sexual orientations, political, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Students must be able to creatively problem solve, to manage multiple competing demands, be adaptable, and confident in their decision-making. They must have the ability to reflect on their own performance, receive and provide constructive feedback, and demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and development.

Information gathering/sensory skills

Students must be able to participate in learning situations that require skill in gathering and remembering information about a patient, a client, a group, an organization, a community, or the population in the course of an assessment. This information is normally acquired through observing, listening, talking to others, and by gathering information from charts, reports, the scientific literature, and other written material. The student must be able to observe a patient and acquire visual, auditory, and tactile information.



In all situations, the student must be able to gather information using various assessment tools. They must also be able to assess and distinguish drug dosage forms (e.g., cloudy solution, different coloured tablets) to ensure patient safety. The student must be able to function in an environment that may be crowded or noisy, or that has the potential for exposure to disease and which may contain noxious odours.

Students who have sensory limitations (e.g., in vision, hearing, or touch), or in perceptual integration of information from those senses, need to be able to seek out and use adaptive methods and/or technology to compensate for their limitations.

Communication skills

Students must be able to speak, hear, and observe (aided or unaided) patients, colleagues, healthcare professionals, and others in order to effectively and efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, and perceive non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients, families, clients, colleagues, and other healthcare professionals, in small and large groups, and to maintain confidentiality. Students must be able to recognize and manage emotional states such as sadness, worry, agitation, and lack of comprehension of communication.

In the clinical setting, students must be able to coherently and systematically summarize a patient's condition and care plan, both orally and in text (handwritten or electronic) to comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

In all settings, students must be able to write business letters and emails, reports, proposals, and other print sources (handouts, manuals, posters, displays) in a professional manner with coherence and organization. Accurate and timely response to emails and other communications from other members of the health care team, instructors/preceptors, administrative support, mentors, deans, or educational leaders is required.

Students with less than full fluency in English or with learning disabilities are responsible for achieving the same high level of communication ability that is required for patient safety, informed consent, and fully independent and ethical interaction with patients, clients, colleagues, healthcare professionals, and others. Students should note that the level of [communication fluency required](#), both oral and written, is often higher than is generally assessed in standard tests of language fluency.

Critical thinking and cognitive skills

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to measure, calculate, and reason in order to analyze, synthesize, and integrate/apply information and deal with complexity and ambiguity. They must have the capacity to understand and use complex medical, scientific, and technical information. Students must be able to accurately recognize numbers and perform relevant calculations. These comprehensive problem-solving activities must be done in an acceptable time frame relative to their peers; proficiency in practice is determined both by accuracy and by completion of tasks within



specified time frames. Students also need to be able to demonstrate the ability to accurately assess their performance to further direct their learning by engaging in self-reflection.

Effective problem solving, judgment, and planning abilities are necessary to address patient, client, community, or public needs in a safe and efficient manner. Students must have critical appraisal skills in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in their course work in the classroom and laboratory, at the experiential learning site, and in the work environment.

Psychomotor / physical skills

Students must demonstrate sufficient motor function to safely perform some aspects of physical examination on a patient (e.g., blood pressure measurement). The examination must be done independently and in a timely fashion. A student must be able to execute motor movements reasonably required to prepare and provide medications to patients or to demonstrate appropriate techniques to a patient (e.g., how to use an inhaler, how to inject insulin, how to remove medicines from protective packaging). To do so, a student must be able to perform common dispensing and compounding activities, including the preparation of sterile products. A student must be able to use common compounding equipment such as a balance, mortar and pestle, spatula, ointment slab, syringe, or similar devices.

Students are expected to have the energy to be able to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (e.g., attend classes, complete clinical skills, or laboratory work) and therefore should be able to bend, reach, use their hands, sit and/or stand, or walk for most of the day.

Mental health and wellness

Students must consistently demonstrate the mental health and wellness required for full use of their intellectual abilities, in the context of the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program. Students must demonstrate adaptability to changing environments and the ability to function and respond effectively in situations of high stress and potential conflict. They must be comfortable working in close proximity with colleagues and patients. The development of mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, families, colleagues, and others is also required. Students must consistently demonstrate the resilience and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all work settings.

Originally adapted with permission from Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Physical Therapy at the University of Saskatchewan, October 1, 2010. Originally approved by the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition Faculty November 23, 2011.

Revised October 2022, and approved by the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, Division of Pharmacy on October 27, 2022