

ALFP Debate: Online Certificates and Digital Badges Will Positively Disrupt Pharmacy Education

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Introduction and Objective

- Numerous factors impact traditional models of higher education design and delivery.
- Online certificates and digital badges are increasingly being explored as a strategy to transform higher education.
- The objective of this project was to:

Describe potential positive and negative effects of online certificates and digital badges on Doctor of Pharmacy education

Methods

- The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) coordinates an annual Academic Leadership Fellows Program (ALFP) designed to contribute to leadership development in pharmacy education.
- ALFP fellows participate in a debate on current topics in academic pharmacy; key points from this project are presented in this poster.
- For this debate topic, the following methodology was used:

Database search for relevant publications

Abstracts reviewed by two authors independently for inclusion

Discrepancies discussed to reach consensus

Included studies summarized to identify themes

Pros and cons debated at the 2023 AACP Interim Meeting

Additional methodology details

- Databases included CINAHL, Embase, ERIC, Ovid MEDLINE, and Scopus
- Publication search focused on microcredentials, online certificates, and digital badges related to their use in health education programs
- Included publication types were randomized controlled trials, controlled trials, observational studies, systematic reviews and meta-analyses

Online certificates and digital badges are flexible tools with the potential to advance pharmacy education.

Questions remain about what unmet need is addressed, what value is provided to stakeholder groups, and what effects lack of standardization would have.

Results

- Of 681 articles identified, 77 were included in the full review.
- Each team of ALFP fellows identified themes from the literature:

Comparison of Debate Team Arguments

Pro Team – Key Positives	Con Team – Key Negatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Admissions and enrollment enhancementApplication to student-centered learningJob preparation through alignment with competency-based education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited data to support benefitsAdministrative, technological, and regulatory barriersUnclear incentives for altering current pharmacy education model

Discussion and Conclusion

- Potential benefits of online certificates and digital badges emphasize admissions support by exposing potential students to the profession, improved student engagement through a more individualized learning experience, improved career readiness, and provision of a credentialing mechanism to verify student competence.
- Evidence for benefits is limited to smaller studies focusing on learner perceptions.
- A standardized framework for this type of credential is not available, and application to health profession education requires additional considerations such as licensure and conformance with accreditation standards.
- Ultimately, innovative credentials have potential application to pharmacy education, but further consideration and research are necessary to address concerns.

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