

How Important Is Diversity to Students When Choosing a Physician Assistant Program?

Cynthia X. Yuen, MA

Physician Assistant Education Association



Introduction

- Myriad studies have documented the benefits of a diverse healthcare workforce for patient outcomes¹
- The number of PAs has grown rapidly but growth in workforce diversity has been slow²
- PA programs are the gatekeepers to the profession so **recruiting diverse PA students is key to building diversity in the profession**
- PA program choice is influenced by a constellation of factors³ but students who differ in demographics may also differ in what factors they value
- Programs' **existing diversity** may be especially important to minority students
- With a focus on student **gender** and **racial group**, the current study investigated:

Question 1: Does the likelihood of PA students **considering program diversity** differ based on student demographic characteristics?

Question 2: Among students who **considered program diversity**, are their demographic characteristics associated with their ratings of the **importance of program diversity**?

References

1. Laveist TA, Nuru-Jeter A. Is doctor-patient race concordance associated with greater satisfaction with care? *J Health Soc Behav.* 2002 Sep;43(3):296-306.
2. National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, Inc. *2017 Statistical profile of certified physician assistants.* Published May 2018.
3. Sierra T, Forbes J, Mirly A, Domenech Rodríguez MM. *Key factors leading to program selection: a survey of physician assistant program interviewees.* https://journals.lww.com/jpae/Abstract/2018/03000/Key_Factors_Leading_to_Program_Selection___A.8.aspx. *J Physician Assist Educ.* 2018 Mar;29(1):43-48.

Methods

Participants

- 3,882 recently matriculated PA students from 162 PA programs

Measures

- **Key demographics**
 - Gender
 - Race, ethnicity → **3 racial groups**
 - White: Non-Hispanic, single-race white
 - Asian: Non-Hispanic Asian (alone or in combination with white)
 - UR: Underrepresented minority in medicine
- **Consideration of diversity attributes**
 - Did students consider (1) diverse student body and/or (2) diverse faculty when selecting PA programs (0 = No, 1 = Yes)
- **Importance of diversity attributes**
 - Among students who considered (1) diverse student body and/or (2) diverse faculty when selecting PA program, how important was it that programs had each attribute (1 = Not important, 4 = Essential)
- **Covariates:**
 - Age at matriculation
 - Family financial help: Percentage of pre-PA education paid for by their families

Analytic Plan

- Reports of consideration of each diversity attribute were combined to create a measure of **consideration of program diversity** (0 = Did not consider either attribute, 1 = Considered at least 1 attribute)
- Reports of importance of each diversity attribute were loaded onto a latent factor representing the **importance of program diversity**
- **Question 1:** Multinomial logistic regression
- **Question 2:** Structural equation model

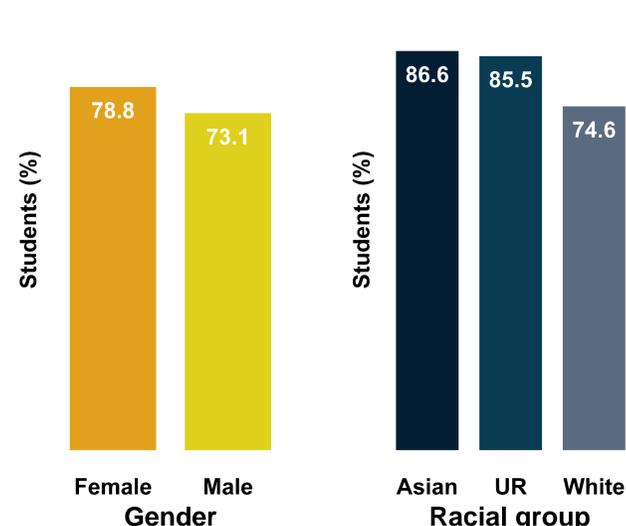
PAEA would like to thank our PA student participants and the PA programs who facilitated data collection.

Results

Cohort characteristics

- **Key demographics**
 - 75.1% female
 - 76.7% White
 - 12.5% UR
 - 10.8% Asian
- **Consideration of program diversity**
 - 77.4% students considered
 - 95.6% students who considered one attribute considered both
- **Importance of program diversity**
 - $M = 2.4$, $SD = 0.9$, $Mdn = 2.0$
 - Ratings of each attribute's importance were highly correlated ($r = .88$, $P < .001$)

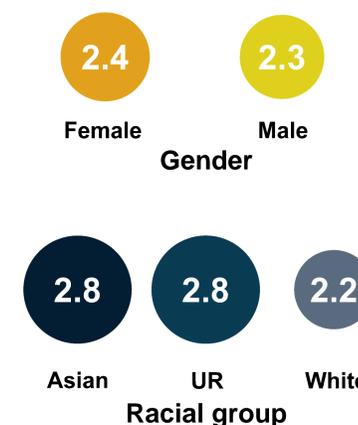
Question 1: Does the likelihood of PA students **considering program diversity** differ based on student demographic characteristics?



- **Gender**
 - Odds of **female vs. male** students considering program diversity were 28.2% higher (OR = 0.72, [0.60, 0.86], $P < .001$)
- **Racial group**
 - Odds of **Asian vs. white** students consider program diversity were 132.0% higher (OR = 2.32 [1.71, 3.20], $P < .001$)
 - Odds of **UR vs. white students** considering program diversity were 100.0% higher (OR = 2.00 [1.53, 2.66], $P < .001$)
 - Odds of **Asian vs. UR** students considering program diversity were not significantly different (OR = 0.86 [0.58, 1.28], $P = .467$)

Question 2: Among students who **considered program diversity**, are their demographic characteristics associated with their ratings of the **importance of program diversity**?

- **Gender**
 - **Female vs. male** students rated program diversity as more important ($\beta = .05$, $P = .010$)
- **Racial group**
 - **Asian vs. white** students rated program diversity as more important ($\beta = .19$, $P < .001$)
 - **UR vs. white** students rated program diversity as more important ($\beta = .21$, $P < .001$)
 - **Asian and UR** students did not significantly differ in their ratings of program diversity importance ($\beta = .02$, $P < .544$)



Summary

- Female, Asian, and UR students reported caring about program diversity more frequently than their male and white counterparts
- When these students did care about program diversity, they also cared more, rating program diversity as being more important
- More diverse PA programs may be particularly attractive to minority prospective PA students
- Less diverse programs could emphasize resources that foster feelings of belongingness among minority recruits and prioritize hiring minority faculty