College of Health and Pharmacy

Physical Therapy **Abstract No. PT-5**

THE IMPACT OF A PHYSICAL THERAPY EDUCATION PROGRAM ON IMPLICIT BIAS AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY

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Purpose: Cultural competency is essential for physical therapists in providing equitable care to diverse populations. Extensive research has demonstrated that implicit biases adversely affect healthcare delivery across various disciplines such as nursing and medicine; however, limited attention has been given to understanding the impact of physical therapy education on bias. This study aimed to determine whether the Husson University Doctor of Physical Therapy (HUDPT) program reduces bias and improves cultural humility in its students, and whether the didactic courses or clinical experiences have a greater influence on these changes.

Methods: Participants included the classes of 2024-2027 in the HUDPT program. Students completed two assessments at three time points: (1) the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist (CCSAC) and (2) the Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT). Data were collected at the following times: 1) during year one of the DPT program (DPT1), before exposure to clinical rotations, 2) during year two of the program (DPT2), before two 12-week clinical rotations, and 3) during year 3 (DPT3), after all clinical rotations. Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to analyze differences among time points, followed by Tukey's post hoc test.

Results: A statistically significant difference was found in implicit bias scores between DPT1 and DPT3 ($p<.05$), with a trend toward a difference between DPT2 and DPT3 ($p=.06$). However, there were no significant differences among the tests of cultural competence for the three groups.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that the combination of didactic education and clinical experiences may contribute to decreases in implicit bias; however, these experiences did not appear to influence students' explicit self-assessment of cultural competence. Further research must be done to assess whether increased exposure to greater diversity in patient populations or coursework would further impact scores.