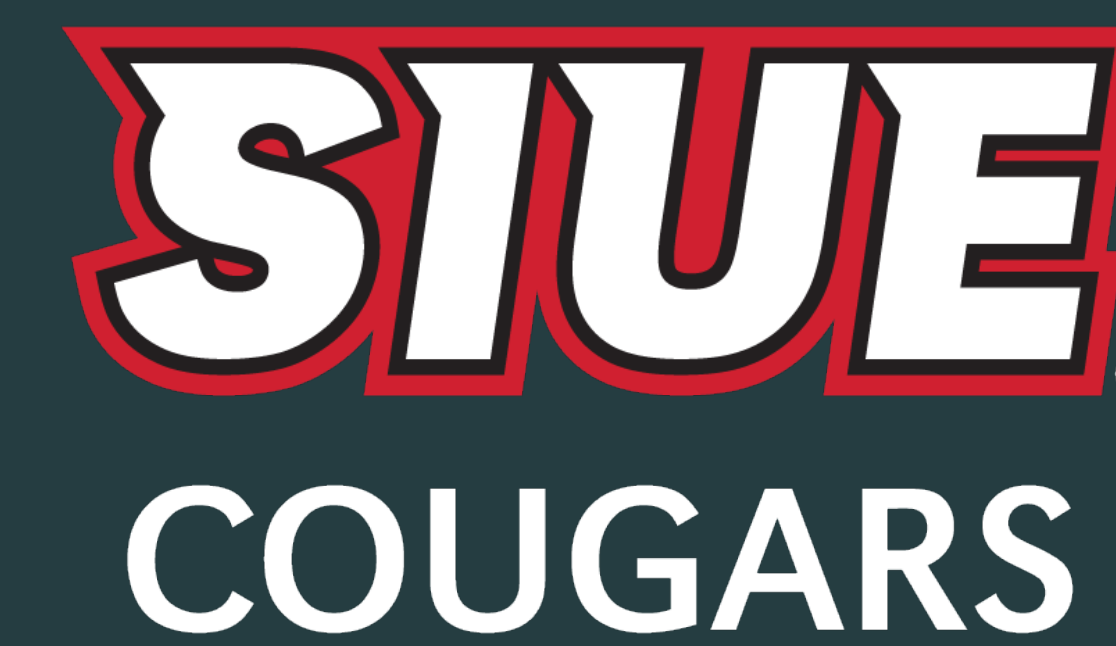




Behind Closed Doors: Understanding Barriers to Student Access to Faculty Office Hours



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Background

- Faculty office hours are an important academic support resource that helps students clarify course content and engage with instructors.
- In pharmacy education, office hours are crucial due to the complex, high-stakes content related to patient safety and clinical competence.
- Despite these benefits, student use of office hours remains limited.²
- Common barriers include fear of judgment, low confidence, scheduling conflicts, and uncertainty about how to use them properly.³
- These barriers may be even greater for first-generation and underrepresented students unfamiliar with academic norms.^{4,5}
- At the SIUE School of Pharmacy, additional structural factors could affect access, including multiple instructors per course and inconsistent on-campus availability.
- Little research has explored how pharmacy students perceive and experience these approaches.

Methods

Study Design: Mixed-methods study (quantitative and qualitative). IRB approval obtained in December 2025.

Study Population: P1-P4 pharmacy students at SIUE School of Pharmacy, recruited via email.

Data Collection: 13-item anonymous Qualtrics survey, containing both closed- and open-ended questions.

- Statistical Analysis:**
- Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages.
 - Qualitative responses were analyzed via thematic analysis to identify commonalities among students' experiences.

Results

Quantitative Data

Appendix Table 1. Survey Response (N = 39)

Survey Question	Response	n	%
Class Year (n = 39)	P1	5	12.8
	P2	2	5.1
	P3	6	15.4
	P4	23	58.9
Previous Attendance (n = 46)	In-person	16	34.8
	Virtual	9	19.6
	Never attended	21	45.7
Frequency of Attendance (n = 3)	Once	0	0
	Occasional	1	33.3
	Often	1	33.3
	Regularly	1	33.3
Comfort Approaching Faculty (n = 25)	Very uncomfortable	4	16
	Somewhat uncomfortable	8	32
	Somewhat comfortable	9	36
	Very comfortable	4	16
Confusion Regarding Attendance (n = 25)	Yes	11	44
	No	14	56
Student Satisfaction (n = 21)	Strongly disagree	0	0
	Disagree	2	9.5
	Agree	13	61.9
	Strongly agree	6	25.6
Future Attendance (n = 21)	In-person	12	57.1
	Virtual	1	4.8
	Group	6	25.6
	Not likely to attend	0	0
	No preference	2	9.5

Qualitative Data

- Key Themes Identified:**
- Faculty approachability influences attendance.
 - Fear of embarrassment and low confidence limited engagement.
 - Scheduling conflicts and limited availability are existing barriers.
 - Office hour communication is primarily through syllabi.
 - Students prefer in-person and group formats for faculty office hours.

Limitations

- Small sample size (N = 39)
- The majority of respondents were P4 students (58.9%).
- The study was done at a single institution, which limits generalizability.
- Only student perspectives were included (no faculty).
- Some survey questions had low response rates.

Conclusion

- Improving utilization will require intentional changes to how office hours are structured and communicated.
- Strategies such as flexible scheduling, structured group sessions, and clearer guidance on expectations may help reduce barriers and encourage participation.
- Enhancing accessibility of office hours has the potential to strengthen student learning, confidence, and overall academic success.
- Future efforts should focus on elevating alternative formats and incorporating faculty perspectives to optimize student-faculty engagement.

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