

## INTRODUCTION

Research on professional identity (PI) in the PA profession is limited; however, previous studies in other healthcare fields suggest that a strong PI enhances provider confidence and patient outcomes. This study defines PI as “a representation of self, achieved in stages over time during which the characteristics, values, and norms of the PA profession are internalized, resulting in an individual thinking, acting, and feeling like a PA.”<sup>2</sup> By comparing cross-cultural perspectives, this study intends to enhance knowledge around PI formation and the components that may influence development within the PA profession.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this pilot study is to explore the factors influencing the development of PI among Physician Assistant (PA) students in the United States (US), Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. This study aims to examine how cultural, educational, and clinical experiences shape PA students' perceptions of their roles as providers.

## METHODS

A purposive sample of second-year PA students in clinical rotations were recruited; participation was voluntary. This mixed methods study includes a quantitative survey and qualitative focus groups.

**Quantitative Survey:** Second-year PA students from the University of Kentucky (US), Han University (Netherlands), Fliedner University (Germany), and St. George's University (UK) were sent an online survey via Qualtrics. The survey included demographic questions and a modified Professional Identity Five-Factor Scale with 18 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale.

**Qualitative Focus Groups:** Four focus groups, one per university, were conducted via Zoom with 2-8 students each. Sessions were recorded with consent, transcribed via Zoom, and analyzed thematically to explore factors influencing professional identity development.

## REFERENCES



## COLLABORATORS



Fliedner Fachhochschule  
Düsseldorf  
University of Applied Sciences

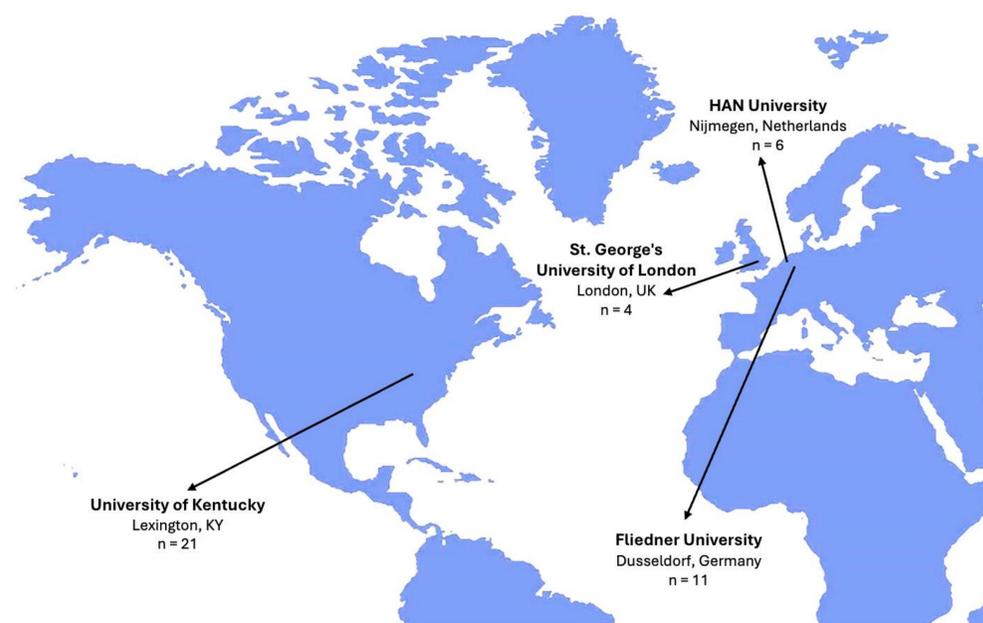


Figure 1: Geographical map featuring collaborating institutions and sample size of survey responses.

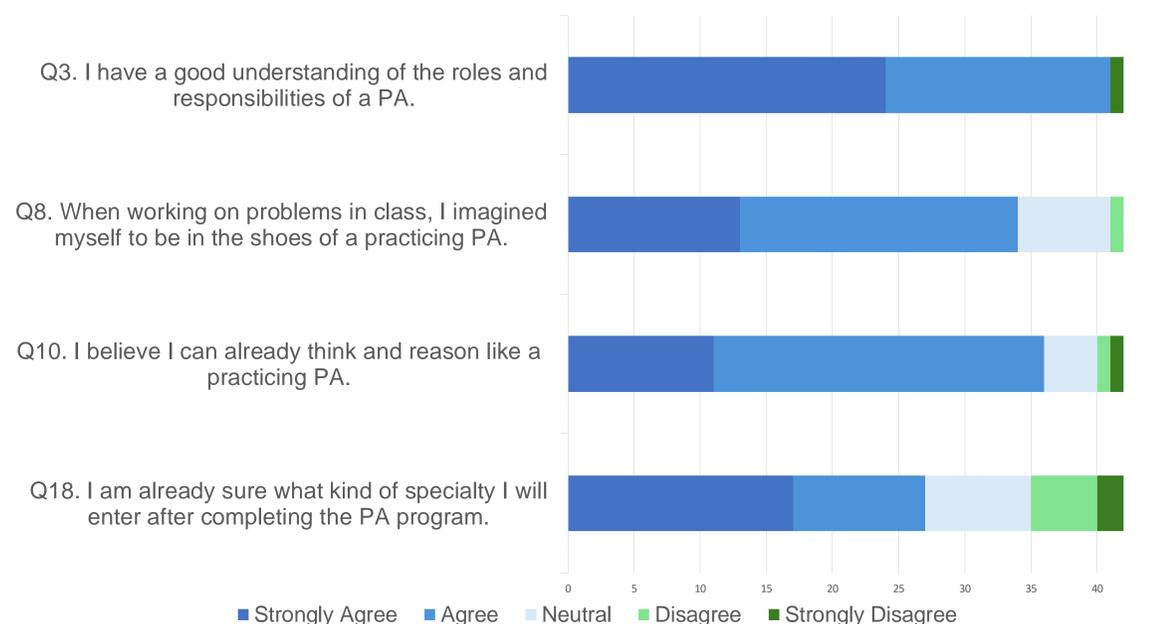
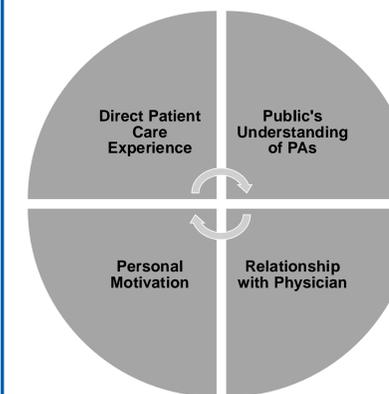


Figure 2: Participant responses from Select Survey Questions displayed in a Likert-scale chart.

## THEMES OF PI DEVELOPMENT



"I think professional identity means upholding a certain standard of the profession"

"You contribute to your professional identity every day and it's up to you"

"To me [professional identity] is the person this patient is going to walk into the room to"

## RESULTS

A total of 16 participants took part in the focus groups: 2 from Han University, 2 from Fliedner University, 4 from St. George's, and 8 from UKPA. Thematic analysis identified four key themes that emerged among participants, which were further supported by quantitative survey results. Our survey participants included 42 total responses with 76% White, 5% Middle Eastern, 7% Black, 2% Asian, and 10% N/A; the gender of our participants included 81% Female, 14% Male, and 5% N/A. The 18-question survey reflected that most students in clinical rotations strongly agree that their PIs have already evolved to the point of thinking and acting like PAs.

**Direct Patient Care Experience** was a recurring theme, indicating that PI was closely linked to participants' early exposure to the healthcare system before attending PA school. Participants noted that **Public Understanding of PAs**, including both individual patient experiences and broader societal views on PAs, influenced their sense of PI. **Personal Motivation** to competently treat patients was a key factor shaping participants' PI. **Relationship with Physicians**, both in patient care and throughout PA training, played a crucial role in shaping participants' PI.

## CONCLUSION

This pilot study provides insight into the development of PI among PA students and the broader PA profession. By highlighting key transformative experiences in PA education, these findings offer a foundation for PA programs in the U.S. and globally to refine their curricula and better support students' professional growth. Limitations include a small sample size, convenience sampling, and potential biases of respondents as participation was voluntary and not randomly selected. As a pilot study, future research should incorporate larger sample sizes and a more demographically diverse student population.