

# EDITORIAL

## Becoming an Optometric Education Diplomate

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**A**t the recent 2014 American Academy of Optometry (AAO) annual meeting in Denver, I had the pleasure of becoming the first Diplomate in Optometric Education. It was exciting and thrilling to walk across the stage at the banquet and receive the Diplomate certificate. I felt a sense of personal and professional achievement along with the satisfaction that

barriers had been overcome. Becoming a Diplomate represented accomplishments on several levels since I was involved with the original proposal to institute a Diplomate program in 2010.

The Optometric Education (OE) section of the Academy was approved in 1971 and is currently comprised of 846 members.<sup>1</sup> The membership represents a diversity of clinicians, teachers and administrators all sharing a common bond of educating students to become the future of the profession. “The mission of the OE section is to serve the educational needs of its membership by advancing research, promoting innovation in optometric education, encouraging visionary thinking, supporting ethical practices, and affirming provocative concepts in optometric education worldwide.”<sup>2</sup> Although the section represents leadership in the profession of optometric education, prior to 2010 there was no opportunity for members of the section to obtain the status of Diplomate in Optometric Education. Previous efforts to establish a Diplomate program were met with concerns regarding the breadth of optometric education as well as the lack of a clinical component.

In 2011, the Academy revised policies related to criteria for defining sections and special interest groups. These revisions included the need for each section to offer a Diplomate process to remain a section. In 2010, I was Chair

of the OE section and believed that educators, who are the mainstay of the profession, should have an avenue for recognition. This was especially important to those educators who identified the educational process, “The Science of Optometric Education,” as a specialty area. I worked diligently to outline a process and write a proposal for achieving the Diplomate status that would win the approval of the American Academy of Optometry Board of Directors. In May of 2010, after extensive research, writing and revisions, the Board approved the Optometric Education Diplomate Program. “The Granting of Diplomate status in Optometric Education is recognition of a focus and expertise in education beyond the level of teaching responsibilities that are commonly held by most faculty and adjunct faculty. The Diplomate status will recognize advancement in the areas of scholarly activity, educational research, advanced education and the delivery and transfer of knowledge. The Diplomate status will distinguish those individuals who hold a deep commitment and a higher level of training in the educational process.”<sup>2</sup>

A Diplomate committee of distinguished educators was formed to implement and oversee the new program. The committee was tasked with further revision of the process and it set forth the current criteria for obtaining the status of Diplomate, which can be found at the AAO website: <http://www.aao.org/sites/default/files/OEDiplomateProcess.pdf>. The opportunity to become a Diplomate was now a reality. The initial step involves submitting an application including a brief personal statement regarding the reasons for becoming a Diplomate. Personally, I was interested in achieving the Diplomate status because it represented achievement, continual growth/development and my sincere commitment to the profession of optometric education. As part of the application process, the committee reviews evidence of advanced education in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This requirement includes review of

conferences, course work, symposiums, workshops, lectures and other opportunities to advance the candidate's knowledge of the education process. I fulfilled this requirement by attending OE symposiums at the annual AAO meetings and educational conferences such as The Teaching Professor, International Lilly Conference on College Teaching, International Conference on Critical Thinking and The SoTL Commons, A Conference for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. These experiences increased my knowledge in the educational process and were very helpful to me as a teacher.

Once accepted as a candidate, I was required to submit four articles of publishable quality that represented my ongoing interest in teaching and learning. Acceptance of the four articles was followed by an oral presentation and a final examination by the Diplomate committee. At times, the overall process seemed overwhelming, but broken into elements each piece was achievable. More importantly, each criterion represented a new opportunity for growth and development as an optometric educator.

I started the journey in May 2011 and finished three plus years later in November 2014. Along the way, I often reflected on my motivation for seeking this distinction. Ideally, as faculty we should always seek to improve our knowledge, teaching and clinical skills. In the real world, personal and professional obligations often interfere with our goals. In committing to complete the Diplomate program, I was also committing to a structure that enhanced my opportunities for advancement and progress. My motivation was to enhance my professional growth, which will ultimately benefit

my students, and to be a role model for others who are contemplating the program. The criteria are rigorous, but the end goal is achievable and rewarding. I encourage all faculty to consider this opportunity and I would be happy to provide support, guidance and mentorship.

#### References

1. Denial, Aurora. Email correspondence with: Jenny Brown. 2015 January 28.
2. American Academy of Optometry. Optometric Education-Become a Diplomate. Orlando Florida; 2015 [cited 2015 Jan. 28]. Available from: <http://www.aaopt.org/fellows/Sections/OptEd/Diplomate>.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### IPE Theme Issue

The peer-reviewed papers in the next issue of *Optometric Education*, Summer 2015, will center on the theme of Interprofessional Education (IPE).

The Special Report that begins on the next page of this current issue describes the results of an ASCO survey that identified current practices in IPE and interprofessional practice at the nation's schools and colleges of optometry. The report also provides information about the Association's plan to convene an IPE Summit in 2016. The ASCO Board of Directors recently confirmed IPE and Collaborative Practice as one of its core Strategic Objectives, formalizing its recognition of the importance of educating Doctor of Optometry students in multidisciplinary environments and preparing them to be part of collaborative healthcare teams.