

How do you create, support and nurture a culture of scholarship at your institution?

Optometric Educators Respond

David Heath, OD, EdM
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**State University of New York, State
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**As President of ASCO, Dr. Heath
has concentrated his efforts on the
initiative “Finding ASCO’s Voice.”**

This issue has been in strategic plans and self-studies and on the agendas of faculty and administrations for decades. The answer is not simple, and results are elusive. I will focus my comments on clinical faculty, who are so crucial to the mission of our schools and colleges. They are faculty who are educated as clinical care providers but have chosen an academic career path. For those who have earned PhDs, research, and more broadly scholarship, is a central component of their training and a part of their value system linked to success. It is something they want to do and have chosen to do. For this discussion, I will also assume we are talking about full-time faculty.

Let’s start with a basic premise: The reputation of our educational programs and indeed our profession depends heavily upon the intellectual leadership of our faculty and the expression of that leadership through research and scholarship. With this in mind, every time we hire a new full-time faculty member, we as administrators have high hopes and expecta-

tions that he or she will develop and emerge as a leader for our institution and our profession. Unfortunately, conflicts between institutional expectations and those of prospective clinical faculty members frequently occur at the point of hire due to a lack of clear communication and mixed messages. It is important that the nature of a full-time commitment as an academic clinician is clearly understood during the hiring process. The hiring of clinical faculty is too often expedited to fill gaps in clinical coverage, and as a result the use of a thorough faculty-run search process may be compromised. This may undermine the clear communication of both the short-term and long-term expectations for an academic career path. This leads me to my first point: A successful program should have a strong faculty recruitment and hiring process run by individuals who understand the scholarly expectations so they are clearly defined and communicated to prospective faculty.

The experience and motivation of the candidates are also critical for success. Young clinical faculty, hired directly after completing a residency, have rarely received the training that provides them with a true understanding of the academic culture of scholarship. They may have given a continuing education lecture or presented a poster at a national conference, but this is often done only because their programs required it. For a faculty member to develop as a scholar, a sincere motivation to do so and an enjoyment of the pro-

cess is crucial. It’s important that everyone involved in the hiring process also understand and endorse scholarly expectations. While a member of a search committee may communicate that the pursuit of scholarship is important, another member of the community may be telling candidates not to worry because it’s not that critical.

If we have hired well, new faculty will understand the expectations and embrace the role of scholarship in their careers. However, they may not have the requisite skill for independent scholarship. This leads me to my second point: New faculty need help and sufficient mentorship from supervisors and senior faculty in order to establish reasonable scholarship goals and develop as scholars. Too often, supervision is simply thought of as management of assignments. Faculty success must be important to supervisors, e.g., department chairs and service chiefs, and faculty development should be one of their most important responsibilities. Our academic and clinical programs by their very nature are team-based, and the success or failure of one member of the team impacts the others. At SUNY, we expect faculty to be proactive in their own development and to have periodic meetings with their supervisors that focus on facilitating their success as teachers, scholars and patient care providers.

My third point is that institutions must invest in the formation of an intellectual community. This means investment in facilities, personnel and

support systems. In the current economic climate, the general refrain, rightfully so, is “resources are limited.” While new resources may be limited, we do have the ability to strategically direct or redirect what resources are available to create an environment in which those who have the most interest and motivation can develop. Furthermore, clinical faculty cannot be mentored without mentors who are experienced in clinical research and can help them navigate the bureaucracy of IRBs, grant proposals, clinical trial agreements and contracts. At SUNY, to develop the expertise and infrastructure that will support the development of scholars, we recently established the Center for Clinical Vision Research. Dr. Troilo, our VP for Academic Affairs, directed faculty-led searches that resulted in the hiring of several key faculty and staff. As a consequence, we hired several OD/PhD faculty with clinical research experience when vacancies arose, built out clinical research space in the center of our clinical care facility (the University Eye Center) and hired staff, beginning with a Clinical Studies Manager. All serve as resources for faculty. Without high-quality clinical research occurring on our campuses led by well qualified faculty, it is difficult to provide new faculty coming right out of residency programs with an environment in which they can develop as scholars.

Finally, my fourth point concerns institutional values relative to scholarship. The pursuit of scholarship will always vary among our faculty. However, if our programs are to intellectually lead the profession, a commitment to the value of research and discovery needs to be (or become) universal. An embrace of the value of discovery needs to be consistent and occur at every level of the organization. Notably, while we highly value the scholarly activity of clinical faculty, it is important to emphasize that not all faculty wish to do clinical research or pursue scholarship even in a more general sense. But the presence of a strong and mature clinical research program will allow faculty and staff to participate and contribute at several different levels,

which match their level of interest and skills, while taking part in the creation of new knowledge.

While I would like to say we have it all figured out at SUNY, in reality it is a work in progress. However, I do think the four principles highlighted above are key to making progress toward creating the necessary culture of scholarship.

David S. Loshin, OD, PhD
Dean

Nova Southeastern University
College of Optometry

The following are some of the initiatives Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry has put into place to foster a culture of scholarship:

- Every faculty member receives a development/travel fund for travel to professional meetings.
- We support the university grant process with matching funds up to \$5,000.
- Our process for contract continuation and promotion includes faculty-driven criteria for scholarship/research.
- We provide 10%-20% workload to every member of the full-time faculty for scholarship.
- Faculty members can apply for an “assignment modification” for time beyond 20% for pursuing a research project or scholarship. The request is reviewed and decided upon by the department chairs and deans as a group rather than one individual.
- We acknowledge faculty members who pursue scholarship by nominating them for awards.
- We provide a full tuition waiver to all full-time faculty members who pursue an MS degree in Clinical Vision Research. (The university also provides tuition reduction for faculty members pursuing graduate degrees in other colleges within the university.)
- We have a clinical research coordinator on staff.

- We provide discretionary time and financial support to allow faculty members to attend the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry’s Summer Institute for Faculty Development.
- We provide space (clinic or lab) for research.

Elizabeth Hoppe, OD, MPH, DrPH
Dean

Western University of Health
Sciences College of Optometry

As a new institution, Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry has had the opportunity to engage in many discussions regarding the support of scholarly activity. Members of the college administration and faculty body have learned from past experiences, other schools and colleges of optometry, and interprofessional colleagues engaged in health professions education on the university campus. While we are still in the early days of developing our culture of scholarship, here is a brief description of the activities to date.

Mission and goals: In establishing its vision statement, mission statement and core values, the college included words such as “innovation,” “research” and “collaboration.” The goals that have been derived from the mission articulate three specific areas related to scholarship: 1) research aligned with the program emphases; 2) developing, implementing, evaluating and disseminating aspects of healthcare education, research and patient care; and 3) conducting interprofessional, collaborative and community-based projects in healthcare education, research and patient care. Including these specific elements of scholarly activity within the context of the mission and goals supports the college’s decision-making processes and priorities.

Tracking outcomes: The goals described above are translated into objectives and outcomes related to scholarly activity. The college is committed to a regular cycle of review to assess its progress toward attaining benchmarks and targets, both short- and long-term.

Providing resources: The college and the university strive to provide faculty members with resources to support scholarly activity, including time, funds and access to technical support. Beginning in this academic year, each faculty member has been allocated 0.10 FTE for scholarly activity. Some members of the faculty body also receive FTE allocation for research, and some members of the faculty are able to gain additional research time through external grant funding. All members of the faculty body receive designated funds in each academic year for their professional development, and if a faculty member chooses to utilize the funds for support in the area of research and scholarly activity, those expenditures are made on an individual basis. Some faculty members also receive start-up funds to establish a research agenda and to secure research infrastructure needed for their areas of emphasis. The university also established an incentive program whereby a portion of external funding indirect costs can be reallocated in support of research programs and can be used for financial support directly to the faculty principal investigator. Through the university's Center for Academic and Professional Excellence (CAPE), training programs and seminars are offered throughout the year and frequently include topics related to research and scholarship.

Recognizing accomplishments: The college recognizes that the attainment of its goals for scholarship and research activities are only realized through the efforts of its faculty members. Administrators and faculty supervisors seek to acknowledge successful efforts through public announcements, acknowledgment in newsletters and small celebrations, which recently included signing a bottle of champagne and then popping the cork!

Linda Casser, OD, FAAO
Dean

**Pennsylvania College of Optometry
at Salus University**

I view this as a very important question because it is central to our roles as administrators at the schools and colleges of optometry. In addition, it is an aspect of our roles that brings inherent and long-lasting rewards by virtue of its positive impact on individual faculty members, including their perceptions about their assignments and responsibilities, as well as its positive impact on the program/institution. Creation of a culture of scholarship includes:

- clearly stating the goals and importance of scholarship for faculty members, including the impact on development, promotion, tenure (or equivalent/alternative), granting opportunities, contribution to the body of knowledge and credibility of the institution
- providing appropriate resources and support via internal and/or facilitated external funding sources, such as quality time, space and equipment
- facilitating mentoring opportunities, both internal and external
- supporting appropriate development opportunities, such as grant-writing workshops, both on and off campus
- establishing reasonable and well-articulated expectations
- announcing and celebrating successes
- creating a perpetuation of the culture of scholarship.

While this formula is relatively simple to articulate, it can carry with it challenges with regard to resources, ongoing commitment and consistent implementation. That is one of many reasons why creation of an embedded and sustained culture of scholarship is such an important goal to which we must commit as a profession and as individual institutions.

Joseph Bonanno, OD, PhD, FAAO
Dean

**Indiana University School of
Optometry**

For our tenure-track faculty, promotion and tenure, i.e., continued employment, is contingent on excellence in either research, teaching or service and at least satisfactory performance in the other two areas. Typically, research is the chosen area of focus. We provide research space, start-up funds and, sometimes, research personnel. We also appoint a mentor for each assistant professor. The university provides the research infrastructure support and grant programs for junior faculty.

For clinical ranks, we encourage scholarly activities. We recently made available additional development time for clinical rank faculty to write case reports, collaborate on larger research projects, contribute to Academy special interest groups and continuing education, etc. Promotion to associate or full clinical professor is typically based on teaching excellence; however, these scholarly activities enhance that mission. Individuals who do not take advantage of the development time lose it.

Kent M. Daum, OD, PhD
Professor of Optometry
Dean

**Massachusetts College of Pharmacy
and Health Sciences School of
Optometry**

The School of Optometry at MCPHS accepted its first class of students this fall. As a new program, we are in-process establishing our culture of scholarship as well as many other facets of our community. In all areas of our program, we strive to reflect these values:

A sense of excellence: Our standard response to a challenge is to complete it with the highest level of ability, care and responsibility.

A sense of humanity: Our shared identity reminds us that being human includes lots of varying and sometimes conflicting responsibilities, and our wish is to do our best to identify the

best path for individuals as well as our community.

A sense of privilege: Our approach includes recognition that we have a special gift of scholarship that allows us to use our whole self in the creative process in our service to our fellow humans.

Our mutual commitment is to call each other along, reminding each other of these senses. We have instituted brown bag sessions for faculty. These noontime meetings provide a space for discussing the issues of the day and the challenges of scholarship and for helping us to build a sense of collegiality. We are in the process of completing space that will support our faculty in their research and scholarship activities. We are equipping these spaces to support faculty needs in research and scholarship.

In addition, we have reviewed our faculty manual with each of the faculty and discussed the significance of scholarship in the promotion and tenure process. We are working on creating dual degree opportunities for our students with faculty support. We have instituted a course, Learning, Information and Independent Study, designed to teach students about the scholarly process and to assist faculty in their scholarly work.

Outside of our institution, we are visiting scholars across the state and region and taking the opportunity to discuss mutually beneficial scholarly pursuits. The challenge of creating, supporting and nurturing a culture of scholarship is worthy of our time and effort. Our success in this endeavor is a significant aspect of building a program of excellence and one that we are approaching with great vigor!

Barry Fisch, OD
Dean of Academic Affairs
Professor of Biomedical Sciences and Disease

New England College of Optometry

One of our goals is to establish the college as a leader in important selected areas of research and scholarship, particularly in the areas of vision and health care. We do this by recruiting and retaining faculty who have demonstrated scholarly excellence and by empowering them to follow their area of interest. The college provides encouragement, support and professional development opportunities for faculty in an environment of collaboration within the college and with leading local, regional, national and international institutions. Our graduate programs and our systematic collaborative ongoing curriculum assessment and use of professional instructional designers demonstrate our commitment to research and education.

Send Us Your Comments

Do you have any thoughts or insights related to the support of scholarship at our schools and colleges of optometry? Send your comments to Dr. Aurora Denial at deniala@neco.edu, and we will print them in the next edition of the journal.