

EDITORIAL

The Journey of Scholarship

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As journal editor, my responsibilities include encouraging and supporting faculty in their scholarly efforts and helping to sustain a culture of scholarship. Teaching, service and scholarship are closely linked activities for most university faculty. Scholarly activity is usually required for advancement in academic rank or tenure. Engaging in scholarship pro-

vides faculty the opportunity to be leaders in their specialty areas. However, the expectation of service and scholarship was not always present in the history of the American faculty member.

Early American colleges were modeled after British institutions. These colleges focused on “building character and preparing new generations for civic and religious leadership.”¹ The focus for faculty was on teaching, not on scholarly achievement. Charles W. Eliot, who served as president of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, said “the prime business of the American professors must be regular and assiduous teaching.”²

As the country evolved in the 19th century so did the focus of higher education. The industrial and agricultural revolutions created a need for individuals who would transfer knowledge from the classroom to the farm or factory.³ Americans wanted to send their male children to college to learn something useful.¹ This concept made it necessary for college curricula and faculty to reflect the more practical aspect of education. The land grant program that allowed states to develop universities helped to produce individuals and faculty who could support the needs of the community.³ The focus for faculty shifted from purely teaching to a role that included service to the community. Science at this time took on

a new and important role. It was acknowledged that scientific discovery could enhance the productivity of farms and factories. Through applied research, educational institutions could impact industrial and agricultural productivity and provide a direct benefit to the community. These changes led to additional faculty responsibilities, which now included teaching, service and scholarship. Scholarship was reflected in both applied and basic science research. By 1895, William Rainey Harper, the renowned president of the University of Chicago, required that faculty promotion in rank and salary be dependent on scholarly productivity.³

Scholarship in Optometric Education Today

The historical perspective provides an interesting backdrop. In the profession of optometric education, most faculty are selected because of a clinical or subject expertise and lack formal training in scholarly activities/research. Some optometric institutions do not require faculty to participate in scholarly activities. However, isn't the goal of generating, disseminating, interpreting and applying knowledge central to the role of a faculty member and academia? If that is the case, how do institutions support a culture of scholarship? In this edition of Think Tank (page 14), leaders in optometric education write about how a culture of scholarship is supported and nurtured at their institutions.

Always More to Learn

In reflecting on my own journey from a private practitioner who read journal articles to a faculty member who contributes, I often think of the challenges and rewards involved in the learning process. As a private practitioner, I read clinically relevant information, which helped me to provide a high level of patient care. I did not engage in research or scholarship, as working and taking care of a young family

consumed most of my time. When I joined the New England College of Optometry, I quickly realized that the role and responsibility of a faculty member involved scholarship. I appreciated the importance of scholarship and was excited to get started on this journey.

Although enthusiastic, I was at a loss as to how to get started. My entry into scholarship was to write cases for fellowship at the American Academy of Optometry. Patient care was familiar to me, and the cases enabled me to obtain my fellowship. At that point, I was approached by a colleague who invited me to join his project. I will always be indebted to him for this invitation. I immediately accepted the invitation and soon realized that although we were both ambitious and motivated, we lacked skill and expertise in the area of research. I can honestly say, during that time self-directed learning took on a new meaning. We attended research seminars, sought the advice of more experienced researchers and undertook many revisions and rewrites to our project. Our initial submission for publication met with revisions that seemed endless. We persevered and were rewarded by our first published manuscript.

The struggle was worth it, and I excitedly pursued another project. The second project was a result of a student's experience in the ocular disease lab, which I was supervising. As time went on, I undertook more projects. At first, I used my teaching experiences as the origin of research questions. I started with posters for the Academy and then developed the posters into publishable articles. I learned on the job and the more projects I completed the more I learned about research design, writing and publication. The rewards also

increased. The literature searches and data analysis provided an opportunity for learning. I looked forward to the time I spent writing. Writing was concrete and creative, and I had control over the progress or lack of progress. Scholarship became part of my identity and something I enjoyed.

I often look at this journey and feel proud of the accomplishment. Seeing your name in print is an intrinsic reward, as is the feeling of accomplishment after designing a research project and seeing it through to publication. Most rewarding is to know that I have contributed to the optometric educational literature. I will always be grateful to my colleague who provided me an initial opportunity and to our mentors, who provided unlimited patience and expertise. Participating in scholarship is a continuous process. Although my journey started many years ago, it is far from complete. There will always be more to learn, a new idea, a new project, and ultimately helping others in their journey.

References

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