The SIFD and the Three-Legged Stool

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Abstract

Background: *The Summer Institute for Faculty Development (SIFD) is a biennial workshop, hosted by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry, focused on providing optometric educators the knowledge and tools necessary for a successful career in academia.* ***Methods:*** *A survey was sent to 170 SIFD participants to evaluate the efficacy of the program.* ***Results:*** *The survey response rate was 44.7%. One or more short-term goals were met by 93% and one or more long-term goals were met by 82% of the surveyed participants. In addition, 59% of survey respondents developed new career goals, which led to significant career achievements.* ***Conclusion:*** *The SIFD has made a positive impact on enhancing careers in optometric academia.*

Key Words: *Summer Institute for Faculty Development, faculty development, promotion and tenure, career in optometry academia, optometry teaching, optometry scholarship, optometry service*

Background

The Summer Institute for Faculty Development (SIFD) is a biennial workshop hosted by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO).[1] It is designed to assist faculty members' transition into the academic culture by increasing their awareness and understanding of the tools and resources available to them. In 2006 the SIFD, aka the Institute, was established as a collaboration including all of the schools and colleges of optometry. It consists of workshops, small group sessions, lectures, panel discussions and mentoring. The Institute's goals as published on the ASCO website[1] are:

- to provide participants with an opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to enhance their success in an optometric academic environment as career-long, productive faculty members
- to increase retention of faculty in the schools and colleges of optometry

The program is designed for full-time faculty members with more than two years but less than 10 years of academic experience.[1] The Institute is a way to orient and prepare junior faculty for the process of promotion and development, including tenure when applicable. Faculty development and promotion is evaluated at each respective institution by the contributions made locally, nationally and internationally in teaching, scholarship and service. This is often referred to as the "three-legged stool" of optometric academia. In order for the stool to be balanced and not tip over, there must be relatively equal weight distribution to all three legs. This metaphor represents the need for relatively equal contributions in teaching, scholarship and service for a successful career in academia. The Institute dedicates time to discussing resources and tools available to the faculty members and brainstorming ways to enhance their careers by achieving balance in these three areas.

Six SIFD programs have taken place between 2006 and 2015. The Institute began as an annual workshop in 2006 and evolved into a biennial event starting in 2007. To evaluate the outcomes of the

program, a survey was sent to those who participated between 2006 and 2013.[3] The purpose of this study is to determine whether the Institute's goals were achieved, based on the survey findings. Specifically, do faculty members feel they gained the necessary skills to be a productive faculty member? Secondly, what is the retention rate of SIFD participants in optometric academia based on their mode of practice at the time of the survey?

Methods

The survey **(Appendix A)** was designed to specifically evaluate the Institute's goals and was sent to all 183 participants from five workshops between 2006 and 2013. The survey consisted of 16 questions with text box areas available for added comments. Each participant was sent the survey on Aug. 25, 2015. Those who had not yet responded were sent a reminder e-mail on Sept. 15, 2015. Participants' contact information was updated in October 2015 as was made available by public record. All participants for whom a different e-mail address was found were sent the survey again on Dec. 15, 2015, and a reminder e-mail on Jan. 4, 2016. The survey was not anonymous; however, the individual respondents and the data are not linked in this study. Utilizing a survey as the method of evaluation presents limitations in assessing the entire population. The survey may attract the participants with the strongest opinion, whether positive or negative. For the purpose of this study, our assumption is that those who responded represent the entire population.[1,2]

The survey evaluates whether the faculty members gained the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in academia through responses related to:

- accomplishment of short- and long-term goals
- evaluation of mentor relationships
- resources planned to be utilized in career advancement
- new career goals developed at the Institute
- knowledge of new potential barriers to career advancement
- the overall perceived effect of the program on the academic career

In order to evaluate participants' current mode of practice, additional research was conducted. Each participant's National Provider Identifier number was obtained[4] and confirmed via phone calls and Internet Google searches during October 2015. Each school and college of optometry website was reviewed to confirm the faculty positions.[5-27] The current mode of practice of all SIFD participants is reported regardless of their participation in the survey.

Results

TABLE 1
SIFD Participants' Survey Responses

2007	2009	2011
33	34	35
29	33	35
12	8	17
36.4%	26.5%	48.6%

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Table 1. Click to enlarge

The survey reached 170 of the 183 SIFD participants, and 76 responded, resulting in a response rate of 44.7%. We were unable to obtain accurate contact information for 13 participants. Prior to participating in the SIFD, 34% of participants had been working in academia greater than two but less than 10 years, within the Institute's recruiting goal. Those outside the Institute's recruiting goal represent 66% of the

respondents **(Figure 1)**. The distribution of feedback received is shown in **Table 1**. Annual response rates ranged from 26% to 52%.

TABLE 2
articipation Year and Long-Term Goals Accomp

2006	2007	2009	20
1	3	1	
2	1	3	
7	7	3	
3	1	2	
13	12	9	1

velopment

Table 2. Click to enlarge

This study showed that participants were able to gain the skills and tools needed to be successful. Among SIFD participants, 93% reported meeting one or more of their short-term goals, and 82% reported meeting one or more of their long-term goals, as depicted in **Figure 2**. There was no significant association between SIFD year of participation and number of long-term goals accomplished (Chi-Squared = 15.2, p = 0.2, **Table 2**). Several National Institutes of Health grants for research were funded for multi-centered studies that initiated from the goal development workshop.

The mentoring program was reported as an extremely valuable resource for providing tools and skills as demonstrated in **Figure 3**. Respondents commented on the benefits of maintaining relationships with their mentors. Other resources strongly valued were the connections made with faculty at other institutions, curriculum vitae (CV) evaluation, and test-writing skills. More than half of the participants (59%) developed new career goals as a result of their experience.

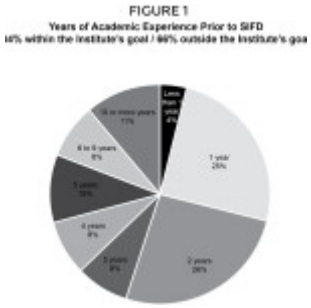


Figure 1. Click to enlarge

Figure 4 shows the respondents acknowledged barriers to career advancement. The most frequently mentioned barriers were too much time devoted to other duties and changed priorities. Participants commented on the challenges of work-life balance and time management. Five respondents felt as if their promotion and advancement were hindered without a PhD. A majority of respondents stated the need for additional mentorship at their respective institutions. The challenges identified at the institution level reportedly led several respondents to gain a better understanding of future expectations.

This study showed that 86% of the 170 SIFD participants surveyed were working in optometric education for a total of six to 10 years at the time of the survey **(Figure 5)**. The modes of practice of these 170 SIFD participants were included regardless of their participation in the survey.

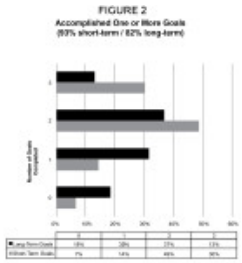


Figure 2. Click to enlarge

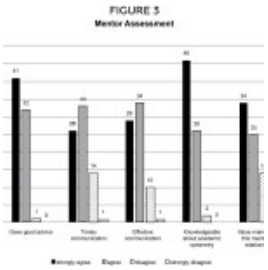


Figure 3. Click to enlarge

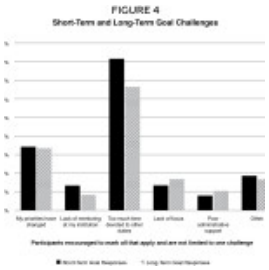


Figure 4. Click to enlarge



Figure 5. Click to enlarge

Discussion

The SIFD set out with an intention to enhance faculty development throughout the colleges and schools of optometry. This study found multiple aspects of the Institute that support the goal of gaining the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in a career in optometric academia.[1] The information gathered in the following areas was used to assess the Institute's goals:

- accomplishment of short- and long-term goals
- evaluation of mentor relationships
- resources planned to be utilized in career advancement
- new career goals developed at the Institute
- knowledge of new potential barriers to career advancement
- overall perceived effect of the program on the academic career

During the SIFD workshops, each participant develops three or more short-term and long-term goals. Time is dedicated to developing these goals in the areas of teaching, scholarship and service. Having a balanced career that addresses all three of these factors is crucial for successful promotion and growth as a faculty member. The results of the survey demonstrate that 93% of participants achieved one or more of their short-term goals, while 82% achieved one or more of their long-term goals **(Figure 2)**. There was no statistically significant relationship between long-term goals accomplished and year of SIFD participation.

The significant achievements that were reported as a result of goals developed from the Institute are a strong indicator of the success and benefit of the program. Several participants had goals from various areas, including but not limited to:

- leadership responsibilities that include more administrative roles in their institution
- becoming a fellow and diplomate in the American Academy of Optometry
- further education such as obtaining a master's degree in public health or a PhD
- writing a textbook

Those who had not met their short- or long-term goals indicated their time was dedicated to other assigned duties. Participants mentioned they faced many obstacles in striving to accomplish their career goals. However, time limitations stood out as the main factor for the participants. Implementing added focus on time management at future SIFD programs may be beneficial based on the findings of this study. While this study did not prove that accomplishing short- and long-term goals was directly related to retention, lack of time was the main reported obstacle to success in this area. **Figure 4** details the challenges in reaching goals as reported by participants.

The feedback obtained throughout this research positively pointed toward the importance of the

connections that were made during the SIFD. The networking opportunity ? the connection of junior faculty members with mentors from all of the optometry programs involved ? was mentioned as a vital aspect of the program. **Figure 3** shows the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the mentors' ability to:

- provide good advice
- have timely communication
- have effective communication
- demonstrate their knowledge of academic optometry
- be a valuable relationship to maintain

The administrators of the workshops act as mentors to the participants. This mentorship is created to facilitate the relationship between the faculty members at different institutions. Small groups are created with representatives from a variety of programs. This provides the opportunity to discuss goals, tenure and promotion, and more specific questions related to the individual and group. A participant reported that this provided the courage necessary for creating mentors at his/her own institution. Those who were no longer in contact with their mentors reported a benefit from networking with faculty at other Institutes as well.

The participants reported that the SIFD provided tools and strategies for addressing potential barriers to career advancement. One individual reported feeling lost at his/her institution due to a lack of communication related to expectations and development. The SIFD was able to clarify for the participant what is expected of faculty working in optometric education so that he/she could focus on balancing the three-legged stool of teaching, scholarship and service in order to have a complete CV for career advancement. Understanding the balance of the three-legged stool in optometric academia is necessary for a successful career in academia. Each leg of the stool needs to be addressed so the stool can remain upright, i.e., so the faculty member can be successful.

Specific resources from the Institute that have been utilized in career development are test-writing skills and techniques, outcome assessments, and creation of timelines for accomplishments. For example, multiple participants noted that focusing on a timeline to achieve goals and promotion allowed them to explore new areas of academia and find ways to incorporate them into their careers. The public-speaking suggestions and demonstration given were also a valued resource for developing career skills in teaching. Furthermore, the assistance provided in reviewing and strengthening a professional CV was repeatedly mentioned as a beneficial resource.

The overall perceived effect of the program on the academic career was extremely positive. An underlying passion was apparent in all aspects of the research. "I truly don't think I would be where I am today without this program" was expressed by a participant. This comment, along with many other strong words of support, demonstrated that participants felt the SIFD program was an important part of their career development. The mentorship and connections that were made were identified as the greatest resources participants utilized in assisting them in being a productive faculty member. The SIFD motivated and rekindled their love of teaching and provided ways of being a more effective teacher. It helped establish a perspective on the role of faculty in the larger scheme of academia and optometric education.

Ideas for re-evaluating some SIFD practices also emerged from the study. For example, the majority of participants in the Institute were outside the recruiting goal (to attract participants with more than two but less than 10 years of faculty experience). The majority had between one and two years of experience **(Figure 1)**. However, the survey results indicated the participants outside of the recruiting goal valued the program and found it beneficial. This information can be used to assess and possibly adjust the recruiting goal for future SIFD programs.

Several survey respondents suggested a need for consistent follow-up after the program as a way to increase the number of goals achieved and address any new barriers to career development. It was also suggested that participants be regularly updated on currently available resources and tools. The follow-up and updates could come from mentors, SIFD leaders, and/or the home institution. One of the participants reported that taking the survey was a reminder of the goals set and information obtained at the Institute and as such that it indirectly acted as follow-up. The authors suggest creating additional networking and mentorship opportunities by connecting SIFD "graduates" with new participants.

The survey was conducted between September 2015 and January 2016. In May 2016, ASCO launched an online community called ASCOConnect. The SIFD participants have a private community with a discussion forum and an area for posting comments and providing links to files of interest. This forum provides an opportunity for participants to continue collaborating, networking and sharing tools for navigating the culture of optometric academia. The key is to engage participants to maximize the benefits of this online community.

This study also asked the SIFD participants about their opinion of optometry as a profession and academic optometry as a mode of practice. Only 4% reported they would not recommend optometry as a career due to a concern with the debt to income ratio. There was resounding support for recommending a career in optometric academia. "Seeing the growth of students and the impact that you can have on their career is rewarding," one participant reported. A career in academia was described as fulfilling, rewarding and autonomous with a wide variety of opportunity. It was felt that this career provides the opportunity for "lifelong learning" in a balanced and stable environment.

The retention of faculty members in optometric academia is extremely high in the SIFD participant population, based on their current mode of practice at the time of the survey. **Figure 5** shows the current mode of practice of all participants regardless of their participation in the survey. (The mode of practice of five participants was unable to be identified. They are included in the category labeled "other.") **Figure 5** shows that 86% are still in academia even if they changed institutions. Those who are no longer in academia have moved on to different areas of optometry, such as private practice and industry. Further research needs to be done to compare the retention rate of non-SIFD participants with the retention rate of SIFD participants to determine whether this is a significant relationship.

Conclusion

This study indicates that the SIFD is a successful program that has reached the goal of providing knowledge and tools for being a productive career-long optometric faculty member while demonstrating retention of SIFD participants in academia based on their mode of practice at the time of the survey. To evaluate whether the Institute increases faculty retention, a follow-up retrospective cohort study to determine statistical significance is needed.

Benefits of this study include the ability to provide quantitative information to help individual schools and colleges of optometry make future decisions regarding their participation in the SIFD. Also, ASCO can use this research to show achievement of the program's published goals and objectives based on measurable, successful outcomes.

By utilizing the feedback of the participants, organizers of the Institute can make adjustments, advancements or changes to the program that they deem appropriate. The authors suggest consideration of the suggestion for additional program follow-up as it was mentioned throughout the survey feedback. The new online community, ASCOConnect, will provide participants an opportunity for additional follow-up and continued collaboration and networking. Future assessments of the Institute will include this online community resource and are projected to provide a significant benefit to the participants. Re-evaluation of the recruitment goal is recommended as the participants outside of the

recruiting goal reported a significant benefit from the experience.

The ability to evaluate participant feedback from multiple schools and colleges of optometry is a significant strength of this study. The weakness of this study was the inability to reach all participants, which resulted in a response rate of 44.7%. There also may be a bias in the research as the study did not reach all participants who are no longer in academia for their feedback.

This study shows a significant positive impact made by the Summer Institute for Faculty Development on enhancing careers in optometric academia. The SIFD is able to help participants understand the need for balancing their professional three-legged stool, which includes teaching, scholarship and service, in order to have a successful career in academia. “The opportunity to be around some really great teachers inspired me to create my own legacy,” was one powerful response from a participant. It exemplifies the strong perceived benefit and passion felt for the program. Based on the results of this study, the authors recommend the continued delivery of this program. The next opportunity for participation in the Summer Institute for Faculty Development will be in July 2017. It is the authors’ opinion that all optometric faculty would benefit from this program with a specific additional enhancement to those who are new to optometric academia.

Acknowledgements

I (SM) sincerely thank all of the SIFD participants who responded to the survey and took the time to write their comments. The feedback and input were crucial to this report and show the dedication to the field. I also acknowledge LaShawn Sidbury, Director, Meetings and Special Interest Groups, ASCO. She was an integral help in distributing the survey and assisting this research. The co-chairs of ASCO’s SIFD, Dr. David Damari and Dr. Tiffenie Harris, were motivating and informative mentors to me during this research. I thank them for their support and guidance through this process. Lastly, I’d like to acknowledge Dr. Fraser Horn and Dr. John Hayes at Pacific University College of Optometry for their mentorship and time and assistance in editing. I am privileged to have worked with this team.

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APPENDIX A
2015-2016 SIFD Outcomes Survey

* 1. How many years of academic experience did you have when you participated in the SIFD?

* 2. In which SIFD did you participate?

- ◯ 2006
- ◯ 2007
- ◯ 2009
- ◯ 2011
- ◯ 2013

* 3. Are you still in academia?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

* 4. If yes, how many cumulative years of academic experience do you have?

- ◯ <3
- ◯ 3-5
- ◯ 6-10
- ◯ 11-15
- ◯ >15

* 5. Of your short term goals, how many did you achieve?

- ◯ 0
- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3

6. If you didn't achieve one or more of them, can you explain why? (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ My priorities have changed
- ☐ Lack of mentoring at my institution
- ☐ Too much time devoted to other duties as assigned
- ☐ Lack of focus on my part
- ☐ Poor support for chosen goals by administration
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 7. Of your long-term goals, how many have you already achieved?

- ◯ 0
- ◯ 1
- ◯ 2
- ◯ 3

8. If you didn't achieve one or more of them, can you explain why? (Choose all that apply)

- ☐ My priorities have changed
- ☐ Lack of mentoring at my institution
- ☐ Too much time devoted to other duties as assigned
- ☐ Lack of focus on my part
- ☐ Poor support for chosen goals by administration
- ☐ Other (please specify)

* 9. Would you recommend optometry as a career?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why? Or Why Not?

10. Please describe how your participation in the SIFD program has specifically affected your career.

11. Please rate your level of agreement with the following aspects of your assigned mentor:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
gave good advice				
communications are timely				
communications are effective				
knowledgeable about academic optometry				
I would value maintaining this mentoring relationship				

12. Are there any new career goals you have developed for yourself as a result of your experience at the Summer Institute?

13. What resources will you plan to use that will help you advance your career as a result of participating in SIFD?

14. What barriers to advancement do you see that you didn't know about before your participation in SIFD?

* 15. Would you recommend a career in academic optometry to an optometrist, research scientist, resident, or current student?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

Why? Or Why Not?

16. Please describe how you believe your participation in the SIFD program will affect the future of your career.

Appendix A: Click to enlarge

Dr. Martin (sarah.martin.od@pacificu.edu) participated in the SIFD program in summer 2015. She is the Director of Community Outreach and an Assistant Professor at the Pacific University College of Optometry. She graduated from New England College of Optometry and completed a residency at the Southern Arizona Veterans Administration Health Care System.

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Dr. Damari is Co-Chair of the SIFD and Dean of the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University. His is a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry and the President-Elect of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. He graduated from SUNY College of Optometry and completed the college's residency in Vision Therapy.

Dr. Harris is Co-Chair of the SIFD and an Associate Professor at Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry, has served on the Academy's admissions committee, and has lectured numerous times at Academy meetings. Dr. Harris has also served on the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry's Clinical Affairs Committee and Diversity Task Force. She graduated from Indiana University School of Optometry.