

EDITORIAL

Reflections on the Past

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In 1974, the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) established a national office. One of the first responsibilities of the fledgling office was to establish a journal to serve as a forum for dissemination of information related to optometric education. In the winter of 1975, the first edition of the *Journal of Optometric Education* was printed. This year

we celebrate the publication's 36th anniversary.

To gain a deeper appreciation of the value of an academic journal, I explored the academic and professional environment of the mid-1970s. In 1975, there were 14 colleges of optometry in the United States and Puerto Rico.¹ Only four states included the use of diagnostic drugs in the scope of optometric practice.² In 1974-75, admissions to Optometry College were considered very competitive, with 3,500 applicants competing for 982 available seats. The applicant-to-vacancy rate was 3.6 to 1. The mean grade point average of entering undergraduate students was 3.08 out of a possible 4.00. Females constituted 10% of the enrolled students, and tuition/fees were \$2,500 at private institutions and \$1,500 at state institutions.³

The Evolution of a Profession

It was during this time in the mid-1970s that the profession started to evolve from one whose main focus was refractive, accommodative and binocular conditions to one in which the optometrist was considered a "first contact health professional."⁴ As first contact healthcare professionals, or primary healthcare professionals, optometrists took on the responsibilities of early diagnosis of ocular and systemic diseases, especially those that presented with ocular symptoms.⁴ They needed to be able to recognize non-optometric health problems and make appropriate and timely referrals. Additionally, optometrists were expected to assume responsibility in the community by providing leadership in health planning, education and administration.⁴

Along with the evolution of the profession, changes occurred in the education and clinical training that facilitated

subsequent changes in scope of practice. The evolving scope of practice, and its associated legislative processes, led other professionals (such as physicians and legislators) to look more closely at the education of optometrists. As the education of optometrists came under that critical review, the *Journal of Optometric Education* provided a crucial avenue for disseminating educational information to help faculty members teach students to the highest levels using sound methods and innovative ideas. Additionally, the journal provided a substantial and concrete representation of the quality of optometric education for review by educators as well as other professionals.⁴ In 1975, changes in the profession both supported and necessitated the creation of an academic journal.

The Evolution of a Journal

In doing research for this editorial, I reviewed the earlier editions of the journal. Throughout the years, many common themes repeated. Articles on the cost of education, how to best educate our students, and faculty issues such as professional development and tenure were addressed in the '70s as well as in more recent editions. However, I was very struck by the types of articles and how they changed over time. In the early editions of the journal, most of the articles were descriptive or opinion pieces. It was not until the late 1990s that educational research articles started to appear with some frequency. The journal, renamed *Optometric Education* in 1991, still provides a forum for disseminating educational information. Now, however, the emphasis is on educational research as a means of achieving evidence-based teaching and learning. Our educational decisions should be well-grounded in evidence, and the journal should be the means of disseminating that information.

The research into the '70s was both interesting and informative. Those who have contributed to the journal in the past should be commended for their support of optometric education. The previous editors should be praised on their leadership and hard work. The authors who have contributed to the journal have made an impact on the growth and development of both the profession of optometry as well as optometric education. Also, a journal would not have the capacity to influence a profession if it were not for the readers, so a special thanks to our readership, too.

In This Edition of the Journal

This edition highlights several topics. As a tribute to our 36-year history, former editors were asked to comment in the “Think Tank” on their years with the journal and how it has changed.

Also featured is a topic most educators have often debated: how to find the time to properly cover course content. Expansion of scope of practice often leads to an increase in information needed. However, this is usually accompanied by a desire to decrease didactic hours and increase clinical time. Dr. Bill Sleight’s paper, “Assessment of the Ocular Disease Diagnostic Tutor as a Learning Tool,” investigates the use of technology in helping students learn. His research also provides important insight and raises many questions concerning the best use of instructor/student face-to-face time.

Drs. Tressa Eubank and Jill Pitts document the changes in students’ learning styles in their paper, “A Comparison of Learning Styles Across the Decades.” It provides interesting information for educators teaching the current generation.

In her paper, “A Backward Glance on Optometric Education: Institutional Profile of Schools and Colleges of Optometry,” Dr. Shilpa Register takes a historical look at optometric education, including the development of core competencies, a fitting topic in light of the 36th anniversary of the journal.

Articles concerning the cost of education have been published since the first edition of the journal. Dr. Barbara Brown and colleagues identify ways to minimize student debt in today’s environment in their paper, “Best Practices in Debt Management for Optometry Students, A Roadmap from Inquiry to Graduation.”

Two papers in this edition specifically address clinical education, another topic that has been consistently represented in the journal over time. Dr. Cheryl Ervin and colleagues provide information about a novel means of providing clinical training in “Private Practice Residency in Vision Therapy and Rehabilitation,” and Drs. Len Hua and Lorne Yudcovitch provide educators with an important resource in “Anterior Uveitis: Teaching Case Reports.”

References:

1. Register S. A backward glance on optometric education. *Optometric Education*. 2011 Winter-Spring ;36(2):76-81.
2. Filer C. Pacific University in profile: generation of leadership. *Journal of Optometric Education*. 1975 Summer-Fall;1(3):113-16.
3. Gold AR. Optometric education in the seventies. *Journal of Optometric Education*. 1975 Summer-Fall;1(3):120-23.
4. Baldwin WR. Tomorrow’s challenge. *Journal of Optometric Education*. 1975 Spring;1(2):74-9.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:

ASCO LAUNCHES “STARTER GRANT” PROGRAM FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) is pleased to announce the launch of a “starter grant” program dedicated to educational research. Funding from The Vision Care Institute, an affiliate of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc., will support two starter grants in 2011.

The educational research grants will serve to introduce and support the concept of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). Although **all types** of educational research projects will be considered for a grant, priority will be given to those that embrace SoTL. SoTL applies to all disciplines and levels of academia. It embraces teaching as a worthy subject for research with the goal of producing a public body of knowledge that is reviewed, developed and tested for the purposes of increasing the effectiveness of teaching and student learning.

Faculty from the 20 ASCO member institutions will be eligible to apply. Grant applications and information will be available by March 15 through the deans, presidents and chief academic officers of the schools and colleges of optometry.