

EDITORIAL

Embracing Scholarship in Optometric Education

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Over the past year and a half, I have had the pleasure of visiting 14 schools and colleges of optometry in the United States and Puerto Rico. My goal is to visit all of the institutions in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The outreach visits allow me to tour the physical surroundings, gain insight into the unique culture of each school, and

talk with faculty members about this journal, research, writing and scholarship in general. I have been enthusiastically received by the faculty and administration at each institution, and I have very much enjoyed the opportunity to get to know my colleagues.

My visits include a presentation on professional writing and the journal. I am continually surprised by the diversity of responses to the concept of scholarship and publication. Some faculty members express a genuine desire and excitement about scholarship but feel they lack the necessary skills and confidence. Others embrace scholarship and display a curiosity and creativity that propels them forward. Yet a third group seems somewhat apathetic or feels overwhelmed by the potential time commitment. Faculty, especially clinical faculty, may find themselves in situations where heavy teaching and service commitments limit their ability to participate in scholarship.

Barriers to Scholarship

Smesny et al., in 2001, undertook a review of barriers to scholarship in clinical professions such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and nursing. Limited time to engage in scholarly activities was a common barrier to scholarship.¹ Other common barriers to scholarship were identified as lack of appropriate promotion and or tenure guidelines specifically in recognizing other forms of scholarship, faculty members

not being aware of other forms of scholarship and not knowing how to document other forms of scholarship, few role models/mentors, and an institutional culture that does not promote or foster scholarship.¹

Understanding the Broader Definition of Scholarship

The scholarship of discovery (research) represents the traditional and familiar view of scholarship. However, there are other types of scholarship that may not be as well understood by faculty members. In 1990, Ernest Boyer's landmark work, "Scholarship Reconsidered," expanded the definition of scholarship and more broadly defined it.² Boyer's interpretation of scholarship, which is widely embraced and accepted, is based on the scholarship of discovery, integration, application and teaching.² The scholarship of discovery represents original research; integration represents novel insights, interpreting themes in discoveries and identifying connections between discoveries; application indicates building bridges between theory and practice; and teaching represents communicating one's knowledge, facilitating student learning and the development of reflective knowledge about teaching and learning.

The broader definition of scholarship supports the concept of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). SoTL 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 purpose of increasing effective teaching and student learning.³ In their book *Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons*, Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings say "Teaching will be advanced when it is seen as intellectual work inviting careful deliberation among those who constitute the professional community and who take responsibility, as professionals in all fields must do, for improving the quality of the enterprise."⁴

What are some of the characteristics that scholarship must

contain to advance and move the profession forward? Lee Shulman, former President of the Carnegie Foundation, developed three criteria for the scholarship of teaching. Shulman says, "The work must be made public, must be available for peer review and critique according to acceptable standards, and it must be reproduced and built on by other scholars."⁵

Scholarship is important in every aspect of the profession of optometry. Original discovery brings new knowledge to the profession. The impact of new knowledge depends on the ability to integrate, teach and apply that knowledge to our current base of information. All faculties should be encouraged and supported in their efforts to pursue scholarship.

Starter Grants are Available

In an effort to provide faculty with opportunities for scholarship, I am pleased to report that this issue of the journal announces the 2012 Educational Starter Grant Program, which is sponsored by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry and The Vision Care Institute, LLC, an affiliate of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care, Inc. The starter grants were first awarded in June 2011 to Dr. Rebecca Kammer and Dr. Patricia Sanchez-Diaz.

The goal of the grant program is to stimulate educational research and provide faculty an opportunity to get started. This is a terrific opportunity to get involved with an exciting project that can impact optometric educators. I encourage all faculties to consider this opportunity and submit a proposal.

References:

1. Smesny AL, Williams JS, Brazeau GA, et al. Barriers to scholarship in dentistry, medicine, nursing and pharmacy practice faculty. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2007 Oct 15;71(5):91.
2. Boyer EL. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate.* Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. 1990.
3. What is SoTL? Available from: http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/cet/sotl_info.htm. Accessed Aug. 26, 2009.
4. Huber MT, Hutchings P. *The Advancement of Learning: Building the Teaching Commons.* San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass 2005.
5. Shulman L. The scholarship of teaching. *Change.* 1993;31(5):11.