LETTER

But Scholarship *Can Be* Hard in Many Ways

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To the Editor: We greatly enjoyed reading Dr. Timothy Bloom's recent commentary,¹ especially his discussion about the importance of curiosity, intellectual excitement, and intrinsic motivation as academicians engage in the scholarly process. There are many benefits to sharing stories of our career journeys, particularly the unanticipated but beneficial detours. We agree that in scholarship, ideally, we should tap into our personal interests, to persist through layers of planning, data collection, and analysis along the lengthy road to dissemination of knowledge. However, while Dr. Bloom contends that "scholarship doesn't have to be hard," we contend that scholarship *can be* hard in many ways, particularly for those new to rigorous scholarship within the educational realm.

Meaningful scholarly contributions, especially in the scholarship of teaching and learning, require significant personal and organizational investment. Faculty need a solid foundation and familiarity with the wide body of educational literature beyond pharmacy education to "map the gap" and ensure that their contribution is consequential.^{2,3} We suggest that a number of additional skills are needed for successful educational scholarship, including use of theory, theoretical frameworks, and conceptual frameworks,⁴ as well as understanding and applying different research methodologies.⁵ Of note, many faculty face broader systems-level challenges which may impact them, including differing experiences in foundational training, availability of mentorship, and institutional support.

While it may not be necessary to choose one research question or thread to stick with across our careers, educational scholars can benefit from working within a defined

area that they know very well. It is time-consuming to master the nuances in a body of literature, including previous lines of inquiry, the theories and methodologies being used, and the succession of knowledge, as well as the associated controversies, assumptions, and shortcomings. How a research study builds on the prior literature is often central to articulating a meaningful response to the "so what?" question for that study. Lack of focus within a defined area may also jeopardize the quality of the work or its impact. In addition, starting again in a new area of inquiry is a luxury some faculty may not be able to afford. During promotion, tenure, or annual review processes, faculty may be asked to explain their focused area of expertise, their accumulated scholarship, and its collective impact, which may be difficult with shifting research areas. As such, freedom of intellectual pursuit may be a privilege not accessible to everyone across pharmacy's Academy.

It's also important to consider the team-based approach in this environment. As an applied social science, educational scholarship is a skill-intensive, effort-filled process to move interesting teaching/learning questions through systematic examination. Team formation, management, and leadership can become valuable in developing the necessary "bench strength" that can lead to meaningful contributions to the literature over more than one scholar's career. Sustained effort within a defined area allows for deepened inquiry, asking more substantive and revealing questions, and often presents opportunities to connect with other like-minded scholars. These people often become our next collaborators, further strengthening the scholarly product through professional partnerships. It takes time for members to be assembled and to work into a well-functioning authorship team. This also is more feasible with a sustained focus of inquiry.

With so many possibilities in educational scholarship, it can be difficult to select the next inquiry. We have found

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that sometimes the most accessible and personally motivating research question does not necessarily result in the most powerful work. Our efforts as scholars should balance questions that excite and challenge us with questions that will advance pharmacy education's body of knowledge and the investigator's scholarly line of inquiry. It seems important to give earnest consideration to the skills we need to build to be successful, the investment we're making in understanding an area of research, the availability of collaborators, and the importance of the work in moving education as a whole forward. Does that sound easy? No, but so far, it has been worth it for each of us.

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