

## LETTER

### Response to: But Scholarship *Can Be Hard* in Many Ways

Timothy J. Bloom, PhD<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Shenandoah University, Bernard J. Dunn School of Pharmacy, Winchester, Virginia

<sup>b</sup> Editorial Board Member, *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, Arlington, Virginia

Submitted April 5, 2021; accepted April 14, 2021; published November 2021.

*To the Editor:* I appreciate the feedback from Dr. Janke and colleagues in response to my commentary,<sup>1</sup> particularly the reminder that despite the title, there are aspects of scholarship that can be difficult. I think we agree there are considerable hurdles to overcome for any kind of scholarship, for both the faculty member and the institution where they work. Faculty doing scholarship must make time in their schedule around teaching and service expectations as well as their personal lives. The institution may provide release time for scholarship, and may also provide financial and physical resources to support the planning, execution, and in some cases, even the publication of results. Time, money, and space are all challenging to give when institutional resources are limited.

As the authors point out, developing rigorous scholarly projects is challenging. It takes time to become familiar with the literature and develop comfort with methods suitable to address meaningful questions. It takes time and energy to develop the network one may use when initiating collaborations or maintaining them over time. However, though they may be challenging, they do not necessarily make scholarship hard. This was one of my intended points, inasmuch as the barriers I faced made the rewards of scholarship too limited to justify the costs. The most difficult barriers were not directly related to scholarship per se, but were more about how I interact with my scholarly environment. Setting aside the details of the personal journey that led me to where I am today, the intent of the commentary was a reminder that there are alternative pathways through which the needs for scholarship, both internal and external, can be satisfied.

I agree that being able to maintain focus over time in a particular research area has benefits. There is an increased understanding of the field that comes with time, as well as opportunities to develop deep and meaningful

collaborations that can enhance the experience of everyone involved. Experience also allows familiarity with tools and approaches that increase one's ability to ask more in-depth and meaningful questions. I experienced those benefits in my bench work, when I had longitudinal, sequential projects that led logically from one to the next. Although I enjoyed the satisfaction of following a research question over time and seeing my understanding of that topic deepen, my curiosity about new things that popped up made it very difficult for me to continue by focusing on one topic area.

The authors remind us of the importance of a team-based approach for scholarship. Deeper thinking often results from interacting with others and hearing differing or even contrasting opinions. I have worked with a number of collaborators over the years and agree it can be challenging to learn to work with a new collaborator. It takes time to develop the trust that leads to good scholarship and good writing. But I've also found that I enjoy a diversity of opinions, and I get this from working with new collaborators. Being able to learn about someone new and their thoughts on a topic, their ideas of how to develop a project, and their methods for writing make the work worth the effort.

The authors also correctly pointed out that there are many avenues of research in teaching and learning, and therefore it can be difficult to choose a new question. I would not advocate my approach for anyone who does not have a deep curiosity about a wide variety of topics, and would advise junior faculty against the approach I use. For purposes of promotion and tenure, it is important to be able to demonstrate to one's peers the ability to maintain consistent scholarly output, and it seems easiest to do that by demonstrating focus in an area over time. I was unable to do that very well once the external motivation of promotion was satisfied, and scholarship became an unwelcome burden as a result. The approach I describe in the commentary is my solution to that situation, meeting not only the demand that my institution places on me for scholarship, but also my curiosity to learn about as many things as possible.

---

**Corresponding Author:** Timothy Bloom, Shenandoah University, Bernard J. Dunn School of Pharmacy, 1775 N. Sector Ct., Winchester, VA 22601. Tel: 540-678-4395. Email: tbloom2@su.edu

One of the points perhaps understated in the commentary was that scholarship can be easier if one goes with one's style and plays to one's strengths. There are many ways to be successful as a scholar, and it is important for faculty to be reminded to find their own path, just as we try to help students find theirs. For some, focused scholarship over time in a specific area is the way to move forward, and I have not ruled that out for myself. However, reviewing my history suggests my scholarship will continue to include

looking into something new that makes me curious. While scholarship has inherent challenges, these make us grow and should be embraced. Using self-awareness of our weaknesses and our strengths, we can take steps to prevent scholarship from being hard.

#### **REFERENCE**

1. Bloom TJ. Scholarship Does Not Have to Be Hard. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2020;84(11):Article 8173.