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Opinion

Re-evaluation of a scholarship committee's ability to foster scholarly growth of pharmacy practice faculty[☆]

Brian T. Cryder, PharmD, BCACP, CACP*, Justin M. Schmidt, PharmD, BCPS,
Sally A. Arif, PharmD, BCPS, AQ-Cardiology,
Christie Schumacher, PharmD, BCPS, BC-ADM, CDE,
Nicole G. Rockey, PharmD, BCACP, Ana C. Quiñones-Boex, PhD

Department of Pharmacy Practice, Chicago College of Pharmacy, Midwestern University, Downers Grove, IL

Abstract

The objective of this article is to describe the impact of a pharmacy practice department scholarship committee on faculty scholarship attitudes and abilities, as well as change in faculty perception since initial evaluation. A questionnaire was distributed to pharmacy practice faculty to assess: (1) participation in events, (2) barriers that prevented participation, (3) importance and satisfaction of committee goals, (4) satisfaction with committee's programming formats, and (5) change in attitudes and interests toward scholarship that resulted from programming. The survey instrument included open-ended, rank order, and Likert-scale questions. A total of 27 faculty members completed the survey (61% response rate). Respondents indicated schedule conflicts were the main participation barrier (92%), committee goals were perceived as important, and most were satisfied with goal achievement (>93%). Most faculty attitudes toward scholarship and scholarly abilities improved as a result of committee programming (88%). Compared to prior evaluation, faculty were less likely to agree that the committee inspired them to take on additional projects (66% vs 95%, $p = 0.022$) and continue (73% vs 95%, $p = 0.026$) or complete (70% vs 94%, $p = 0.03$) previously started projects. Compared to a high initial benchmark, faculty participate less frequently in scholarship committee activities due to schedule-related barriers. As a result, perceived benefits of scholarly programming have slightly diminished since initial observation. Re-evaluation of faculty experience level, workload, and preferences for topics might be required to maintain participation and perceived benefit.

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Introduction/background

Teaching, service, and scholarship constitute the foundation of academia in higher education. The definition of

what constitutes scholarship varies between institutions; however, Boyer's¹ concept framework of discovery, integration of knowledge, teaching, and service is commonly used to facilitate qualification. Most faculty members recognize the significance of accomplishing scholarly work for reasons of promotion and tenure at all stages of their careers. This was exemplified in a study of first-year pharmacy practice faculty, in which 42% were expected to initiate research and 35% were expected to submit a manuscript for publication.² Although scholarly activity is recognized as important, most faculty members find scholarship development a challenge. A variety of barriers that

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* Corresponding author: Brian T. Cryder, PharmD, BCACP, CACP, Department of Pharmacy Practice, Chicago College of Pharmacy, Midwestern University, 555 31st Street, Downers Grove, IL 60515.

E-mail: bcryde@midwestern.edu

prevent faculty from fully partaking in scholarly work have been identified. Based on a survey of approximately 250 pharmacy practice faculty, lack of time to work on scholarship was identified as a major barrier, and additional barriers included a lack of collaborators and funds.³ Inadequate orientation to scholarship or coursework in scholarship has also been reported by pharmacy practice faculty as a hurdle to producing scholarly work.^{2,4} In addition to lack of time, medical literature on teaching and learning identifies lack of guidance, access to support staff, inability to finish projects, and rejection of papers as barriers for their faculty.^{5,6} Additional barriers identified from a review of the pharmacy, medicine, nursing, and dentistry academic literature included inconsistent promotion and tenure guidelines, a lack of awareness regarding the types of scholarship applicable to promotion and tenure, and limited mentorship for scholarship as additional barriers.⁷ While this review also identified a reduction of opportunities for scholarship due to requirements in clinical service and teaching, this did not translate to student–faculty ratios being an obstacle to scholarship based on an assessment of 87 colleges of pharmacy by Benavides et al.⁸

Allocation of time and resources to scholarship while fulfilling teaching and service responsibilities is a dilemma that faces faculty across many disciplines.^{5,9} According to the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP), faculty orientation programs should include a review of the policies, procedures, and processes for submission of research to the institutional review board, identifying support services to assist faculty in research and scholarship as well as describing the expectations of scholarship at that particular college of pharmacy.¹⁰

At Midwestern University Chicago College of Pharmacy (henceforth referred to as “the college”), barriers preventing full faculty participation in scholarly work were recognized. This resulted in the institution of a Scholarship Committee (henceforth “the committee”), in the Department of Pharmacy Practice (henceforth “the department”) in 2002. The objectives of the committee are to foster and support scholarly development in order to (1) create an open, responsive, diverse, and organizationally effective environment in the department to promote professional development and collegiality and (2) enhance national recognition of the Department of Pharmacy Practice faculty.¹¹

In order to address many of the barriers identified in the literature, the committee developed a variety of programs to promote scholarly work by its faculty members. The forum format was adopted for many of the programs to improve collegiality while enabling scholarly work. Forum topics have included peer-reviewing skills, identification of programs within the department that can enhance scholarship, and use of technological tools to enhance writing and collaboration. In an effort to improve collaboration between faculty members with common research interests, the “You Asked For It” series was created. This series allows faculty to introduce and discuss a variety of scholarly ideas on a regular basis. The scope of discussions is focused by

establishing a different content area at each monthly meeting (e.g., ambulatory care and acute care meetings). Faculty collaboration with students is encouraged with the annual “Student–Faculty Research Forum”; a one-to-two-hour open forum where interested students can meet with faculty actively recruiting students to join their ongoing/planned scholarly projects. Numerous collaborative projects have been initiated through this forum, resulting in several abstract presentations at local and national exhibits. The committee also operates The Virtual Writing Club (VWC), the department’s electronic, non-face-to-face replacement for the traditional scheduled writing club. The VWC is an internal peer-review resource available on an as-needed basis. Volunteer faculty review manuscripts, abstracts, and grant proposals with the goal of creating a submission that is more likely to be accepted or awarded. Outcomes from the VWC submissions have been very positive, with a majority of submissions accepted by external entities for publication or presentation.¹² The VWC could potentially serve as a model for other academic departments to consider.

Since the original description of the committee in 2004,¹¹ there have been many changes within the college and the department that required a greater commitment to the teaching component of academic responsibilities. For example, the faculty teaching load has expanded as the average student class size increased from 150 to 214 and weekly graded small group workshops were added to the pharmacotherapeutics course sequence. Additionally, since the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education requirement to introduce students to pharmacy practice experiences earlier in the curriculum, more time is required from the clinical faculty schedules. Finally, the number of PGY-1 residents, PGY-2 residents, and fellows employed by the college has expanded. Due to a lack of literature addressing how to adjust scholarship training and faculty development when faculty teaching and service workload increases, the committee has little specific guidance as to the most appropriate adjustments to future programming. Thus to best meet the needs of our pharmacy practice faculty and our continued determination to reach committee objectives, the investigators sought to update the original assessment and resurvey faculty about the impact of committee activities on their scholarly attitudes and abilities.

Methods

An electronic questionnaire was developed using a previously created instrument as the foundation.¹¹ The committee members collaborated to modify the questionnaire and make it relevant to current faculty. The initial portion of the questionnaire sought to gauge experience of the respondent. This was executed with open-ended question items asking the number of years the respondent has been a faculty member at the college and at any academic institution. A multiple-choice item established the position of the respondent as a resident, fellow, non-tenure track (NTT) or tenure track/tenured (TT) faculty. Participation in

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