

IMPROVING THE CULTURE OF SCHOLARSHIP/RESEARCH IN PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAMS

ACAPT Institute for Scholarly Inquiry (ISI) White Paper

BACKGROUND

In 2022, the American Council on Academic Physical Therapy (ACAPT) created four different institutes to support the mission and vision of the organization. One of those institutes, The Institute for Scholarly Inquiry (ISI), was charged “to cultivate a culture of scholarship and research” [among physical therapy programs]. The first step in improving the culture of excellence in scholarship in physical therapy programs was to create an inclusive, aspirational vision statement to which ALL programs could align to improve their culture of scholarship. With this charge, the ISI created the ISI Vision Statement Task Force to craft this vision. An important focus of the Task Force was to create an inclusive vision accessible to all programs regardless of their Carnegie Classification. This vision statement is an initial, foundational step laying the groundwork for future ISI initiatives aimed at supporting programs in their pursuit of an improved culture of scholarship. ISI intends to support programs interested in building and enhancing their culture of scholarship by developing and providing resources and tools designed to foster a shared value of scholarly inquiry within programs. Ultimately, it is hoped that a unifying vision will help elevate the collective impact of physical therapy research, which strengthens the profession by advancing practice, driving innovation, and positioning physical therapy to lead future healthcare solutions.

WHY ESTABLISH A VISION STATEMENT FOR ISI?

Physical therapy is at a critical inflection point for the profession. Science in healthcare is expanding exponentially, and there is concern that our current pace of knowledge creation in physical therapy is not keeping pace with these changes.¹ Moreover, the value proposition of being a physical therapist is also being challenged as salaries are not keeping up with inflation, physical therapy education costs are increasing, and insurance reimbursement for physical therapy services is constantly being challenged. These pressures create a critical need to accelerate our efforts to build the science of physical therapy, and this falls squarely on the scholarship being conducted by the educators and researchers at physical therapy programs, the primary foundational entity for knowledge creation in physical therapy. While the profession has made great progress in building research infrastructure, a pressing need remains to increase our effort, focus, and commitment to scholarly inquiry that will ultimately improve societal health through improved physical therapy practice. To have the desired impact, this vision statement calls all programs to a united effort to address this critical need.

HOW WAS THE VISION DEVELOPED?

The Task Force that developed the vision statement consisted of a 6-member team, with individuals representing both teaching-focused universities (i.e., Carnegie Master's Colleges and Universities) and research-focused universities (Carnegie R1/R2 universities). This Task Force met monthly for over a year and received regular feedback from ISI leadership and another 6-member ISI Task Force with an adjacent charge. In addition, the Task Force sought feedback from a focus group of approximately 20 physical therapy educators from various institutional types at the 19th Annual Physical Therapy Education Leadership Conference in Oakland, California. These focus groups offered valuable insights about the direction of the vision statement and need for supportive documentation.

HOW WAS THE VISION DEVELOPED?

After considerable discussion and input, the following vision was adopted:

PT programs will produce impactful scholarship through rigorous scientific inquiry that advances PT practice and enhances the health of individuals and society.

As mentioned earlier, the vision statement aims to balance inclusivity and aspiration by providing a unifying goal, which highlights value in the profession and its contribution to society. The vision statement was designed to be broad enough for all programs to align, while inspiring them to elevate their scholarly and research culture, not by pursuing a singular model of excellence, but by fostering growth and impact in ways that reflect each program's unique strengths and context. The Task Force also recognized that some of the terms in the vision would need to be clearly defined to promote a shared language around scholarship. The words underlined above are defined as follows:

1. PT program includes the personnel and invested parties of the program (i.e., faculty, administrators, students, clinical education faculty).
2. Impactful (also advances and enhances) is defined as having a measurable effect, benefit, or contribution to the health of individuals and society in terms of primary research-related impact, influence on policy-making, health and health systems impact, health-related and societal impact, and broader economic impacts.²
3. Scholarship is defined as Boyer's Model of Scholarship: Scholarship of Discovery, Scholarship of Integration, Scholarship of Application (Scholarship of Engagement), and Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.^{3,4}
4. Rigorous is the strict application of the scientific method to ensure unbiased and well-controlled design, methodology, analysis, interpretation and reporting of results.⁵

WHAT DOES THIS VISION MEAN FOR PT PROGRAMS?

The Task Force recognizes that some programs might find this vision statement daunting, especially if their program does not have the infrastructure or administrative support to prioritize the types of scholarship espoused in the vision statement. It is hoped that this statement can lift programs where they are as part of an iterative process toward a common goal. The Task Force recognized that changing the culture of scholarship in physical therapy programs takes sustained effort over time. While a cultural shift is undoubtedly a philosophical change among all the invested parties (e.g., faculty, administrators, students, clinical education faculty), it is strongly connected to robust support systems (e.g., workload, personnel, equipment, space), meaningful collaborations, and faculty expertise and engagement. Collectively, all of these elements need to be in place to have a thriving and productive culture of excellence in scholarship. However, in most cases, it will take years of effort with incremental changes in many of these different areas and this does not need to happen in sequence. The culture can improve across different areas at varying paces. However, significant progress can be made as has been demonstrated by many programs over the years who have worked hard to improve their culture. It is also hoped that this vision statement can be used by programs to align faculty and leadership with a scholarship identity and can be used to advocate or negotiate for more resources within their institution. The unifying vision of improving the culture of scholarship is an important foundational step in the process.

HOW WILL ACAPT SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO ALIGN WITH THE VISION?

ACAPT and the ISI are committed to supporting physical therapy programs in their effort to align with this new vision. Another ISI task force is currently developing a Scholarly Assessment Tool (SAT) that can be used by programs to establish a baseline, develop a plan to determine how best to prioritize resources, and monitor progress. It is critical that a physical therapy program have a way of determining if efforts to improve their culture of scholarship are effective. This SAT will be forthcoming in the next year. Among the many other ideas to support programs, are several future initiatives to develop mentorship programs (e.g., program-to-program, chair-to-chair), webinars/courses/workshops (e.g., scholarly resource development, optimizing workload for research, faculty scholarly development, negotiation skills for more scholarly resources, grant mechanisms), and collaborations (e.g., faculty-to-faculty matching across institutions). There will be an effort to make sure that ALL programs can find benefit from the aforementioned resources. For instance, in the grant mechanisms workshop, there will be discussions about grant programs for universities with limited resources as well as grant programs for universities with an already well-developed scholarly infrastructure. ACAPT and ISI are committed to tailoring initiatives to programs' unique starting points and offering support applicable across various institution types. The ISI anticipates that several of the aforementioned resources will be developed in the near future as the focus of the Vision Task Force and Assessment Task Force will change from vision and assessment to support and development. The ISI will also seek input on the topic and format of programs to be offered to ensure that the needs of ACAPT members are being met. As we move forward together, ACAPT and the ISI remain steadfast in

their commitment to nurturing a vibrant culture of scholarship across all physical therapy programs, providing the tools, resources, and collaborative opportunities needed to transform this vision into reality.

References

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