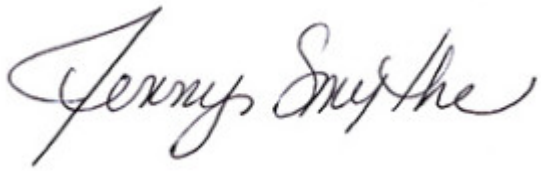
Welcome to the Profession Class of 2014!

The spring cycle of academia is back and once again we are all encountering the March Madness and April Anxieties that ultimately lead to my favorite time of year — Ceremony Season! The stress level of our students rises dramatically as they face national boards, pre-clinic proficiency checkouts, final projects and exams, preparation for residencies and ultimately major decisions about their optometric careers. Out-of-the-ordinary events and unusual reactions escalate at a similar pace. Just as we think "we have seen it all," a new frantic scenario presents itself. I realized early in my administrative career that it is human nature to become distracted by things that at other times of the year may not even register as a blip on the radar. These distractions during times of extreme stress are natural deflections from what is really bothering us, which is the intense pressure to succeed.

How do we help our students to be successful beyond providing the curricula, not just during times of overload but throughout their optometric education? We put ourselves in their shoes. I recognize that on the surface it may seem overly simplistic, but recently I experienced some of their reality: a distracting, constant digital bombardment of information and communication reality. It was a time of enlightenment that also was comparable to a sledgehammer to the head. In January, I took the ABO Board Certification examination. It was the first time in decades I had been challenged to study so purposefully. It was such an amazing opportunity for me as an educator and administrator because I was tasked with concentrating on learning under their conditions. As I tried to read the electronic textbooks and study the PowerPoints, I was constantly distracted by email, text messages, social media updates, etc. I also recognized that I had the advantage of already possessing the foundational knowledge and I wasn't learning all new concepts and material. Technology has brought information right to our fingertips, but it has also greatly added to the list of potential stressors and distractors.

I have a renewed respect for the ability of this generation of students to focus and learn in this digital world, and I look forward to formally recognizing their achievements, placing those hoods over their shoulders at Commencement and welcoming them to our profession as doctors of optometry. And … yes, I passed!

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