It has been suggested that research in occupational therapy should come primarily from the profession’s academic faculty, because its members represent the most highly (academically) educated group of the profession. Can faculty members who are already overburdened by heavy teaching loads and other responsibilities fulfill such a role? The steady increase in the number of people with doctorates has not led to a corresponding increase in the research output.

I am convinced that the expectations that faculty members engage in or lead the way in traditionally defined research (i.e., published contributions to the knowledge base of occupational therapy dealing with development of theory) are idealistic and do not take into account the many other role responsibilities carried by a faculty member in a practice profession such as occupational therapy. To assess the research potential for the purpose of long-range planning, the profession must either redefine the demands made on faculty members in their everyday teaching roles or reevaluate the meaning of “research contributions” in the context of occupational therapy. To assess the research potential for the purpose of long-range planning, the profession must either redefine the demands made on faculty members in their everyday teaching roles or reevaluate the meaning of “research contributions” in the context of occupational therapy.

This paper outlines some of these activities to demonstrate that all faculty members can (and most of them do) participate in research at a level compatible with their skills, interests, and other time commitments.

That the profession is committed to the value of and the need for research no longer requires documentation. In tracing the history of this commitment, Moersch (3) identified a spectrum of available roles that enables all occupational therapists to participate in research activities. She divided these roles into two categories: (a) the “doers” and (b) the “supporters” who make doing possible.

Support roles include encouraging organizations to support research, making financial contributions, interpreting and evaluating articles, questioning the authors, going to research workshops, and using research findings to improve practice. Doer roles include generating research ideas, conducting research, collaborating on research projects in clinics, publishing findings, publishing about the research process, passing the results on to students, hypothesizing about further research, and carrying on a dialogue about theory.

Along this spectrum, opportunities exist for further within-group specialization of function between clinicians and academic faculty. By the nature of their settings and their work, clinicians have access to populations for data collection. Academicians, on the other hand, have access to university resources, training opportunities, and institutional interdisciplinary collaboration. Collaborative re-
search between clinicians and academicians has therefore been suggested as a way to maximize these different research potentials of the two groups (4). But because clinical and academic institutions vary in mission, resources, and individual focus, not all clinicians and not all academic faculty members are exposed to the same set of pressures and opportunities.

A pluralistic approach to faculty research roles is appropriate also because it offers a continuum of research opportunities.

Although the teaching and research roles of occupational therapy faculty members are interrelated, there are many good reasons why most faculty members do not engage in traditionally defined research. Occupational therapy is a practice profession: Academic faculty members are primarily engaged in educating practitioners (2, 5). Unlike in some other purely academic disciplines, faculty members in occupational therapy have certain responsibilities for assuring the quality of clinical practice skills. This forces them to participate in the formulation of and adhere to strict standards for accreditation and licensure. In addition, many of the institutions with occupational therapy programs emphasize teaching and training over “pure” research activities; faculty members are rewarded for concentrating their efforts in these areas (2).

Yet activities that refine theory are critical for the survival of the profession as an academic discipline (5). The challenge is twofold: We need to focus more on theory building and documentation, yet as a practice profession we also need to produce applied research.

In addition to the roles of doer and supporter, faculty members can assume the role of “facilitator” to promote research. By sharing knowledge with a group of students, the teacher can create a ripple effect.

I propose the following continuum of research roles to be assumed by faculty members at varying times in their careers:

1. **Independent researcher**: Acts as a role model; has expertise and interest in forging new knowledge (theoretical and applied); and devotes a substantial portion of his or her time to research activities done alone.

2. **Researcher working in collaboration with students**: Concentrates primarily on his or her own research; includes students in various aspects of the project (data collection or expansion of portions of the theory) in either an assisting or a collaborative role; includes salary for research assistants on funded research projects; is instrumental in the production of journal articles, theses, dissertations; and provides guidance to students who are using his or her data base for publishing.

3. **Teacher and facilitator**: Passes on to students basic knowledge about statistics, research methods, and clinical application of research; reacts to students’ work, helping them refine their research design and rewrite their proposals and reports; teaches courses; serves on thesis and dissertation advisement committees, reviews master’s and doctoral research proposals, and serves as reader for orals of finished research projects.

4. **Mentor and guide**: Uses knowledge of research opportunities and funding trends and network of professional contacts to help students or colleagues (a) join ongoing research projects, (b) write grant proposals to obtain funding, (c) pursue issues with high priority to AOTA and other agencies, and (d) publish in quality research journals. Uses influence to further students’ careers by means of reference and support letters and through personal contacts.

5. **Collaborator**: Works with clinicians to act as a consultant and to train data collectors or evaluators, and data analysts on research teams (4); participates in larger university research groups and “think tank” efforts; writes grant proposals, using university resources and professional collaborations with other researchers, departments, schools, or agencies connected with the university; and adds occupational therapy expertise to research projects in other fields.

6. **Professional contributor**: Reviews grants for AOTA and other agencies; reviews fellowship applications; serves on editorial boards of journals; reviews and selects papers for national and local conferences; acts as discussant for research forum presentations; and serves on validity study panels to
critique research from other disciplines.

7. **Trainer:** Prepares training materials to teach others to be raters and evaluators; writes articles and textbooks on research; and conducts workshops on research, ethical standards, and similar topics (4).

8. **Institutional facilitator:** Designs curriculum and research-oriented post-professional graduate programs; consults with industry to develop research opportunities; meets with foundations to solicit funds for occupational therapy research; participates on boards of trustees of foundation and research institutions; raises money for AOTF and for university projects through fund-raising activities with major donors; attends major conferences as occupational therapy representative; is active in other associations to promote research with an orientation toward occupational therapy; works for AOTA and AOTF in organizing research fellowships and other programs; and establishes research consortiums at universities to work with federal, state, and local agencies.

Judged by these standards, research activities are alive and well in academic faculties. If the time and attention that are being devoted to these kinds of activities are not sufficient for accomplishing the research goals of the profession, then a reevaluation of roles and expectations, as well as of the research process, is in order.

If additional traditionally defined research is demanded from faculty members, then we need to increase their numbers and give them grants to support release time, sabbaticals, research positions without teaching responsibilities, and relief from many of the professional tasks that now consume their time. If none of these conditions can be met, then another group within the profession will have to bear the major responsibility for conducting traditional research.

**REFERENCES**