



Promotion Preparation Tips for Academic Family Medicine Educators

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: Promotion has historically valued the scholarship of discovery over the scholarship of teaching. The clinician-educator promotion pathway is an attractive option for academic family physicians engaged in significant teaching. However, clinician-educators are less often promoted than peers on other tracks. Family medicine educators face unique challenges in promotion due to clinical requirements and often less guidance on how to meet promotion criteria. Promotion recognizes achievements of faculty and is often tied to higher base salary. We aimed to identify promotion preparation tips for academic family medicine educators.

METHODS: We surveyed members of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM) Medical Student Education Collaborative electronically on promotion preparation lessons learned in (1) curriculum vitae preparation, (2) personal statement preparation, (3) selecting external reviewers, and (4) identifying measurable achievements. This qualitative study used grounded theory and constant comparison.

RESULTS: Fourteen individuals from 13 medical institutions responded with tips for success in promotion preparation. The tips identified actionable steps for promotion preparation of academic family medicine educators. Several main themes emerged, including the importance of timely and thorough documentation, detailed planning, and being knowledgeable about institutional-specific criteria early.

CONCLUSIONS: The tips provided in this study support family medicine educators in preparing for promotion and can be used as a tool for mentors, chairs and faculty development.

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When it comes to academic promotion, many medical schools value basic and clinical science research over medical education research. Promotion criteria often emphasize research and scholarship over teaching and service.^{1,2} Equal recognition for teaching or clinical achievement remains

an ongoing discussion in credit toward promotion. Academic rank continues to be linked to a higher base salary, further incentivizing promotion.³⁻⁵ A 2020 Council of Academic Family Medicine Education Research Alliance (CERA) survey of department chairs showed that only 28.6% of family medicine faculty have

protected scholarship time, and family medicine faculty with protected scholarship time were more likely to be promoted.²

Historically, clinician-educators are promoted less often and less quickly as compared to faculty in both clinical and basic sciences research tracks.⁶⁻⁸ The barriers cited for this include low percentage of time spent on research and teaching versus high percentages of time spent in patient care, with fewer opportunities for mentorship on career progression.^{6,7}

The positive influence of mentorship, faculty development, and explicit promotion criteria are several existing themes identified in the literature that support successful promotions. Mentored faculty are promoted significantly sooner than

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their nonmentored colleagues.⁹⁻¹¹ A robust program of faculty development enhances faculty success with promotion while a lack of faculty development is cited as a factor in the decision to leave academic medicine.¹⁰

With this background in mind, this study engaged the academic family medicine community in order to identify tips in promotion preparation for academic family medicine educators based on professional experience.

Methods

Participants

This qualitative, survey-based study utilized a convenience sample that included family medicine educators and members of Society of Teachers of Family Medicine (STFM) Medical Student Education (MSE) Collaborative recruited using the group listserv. The survey was sent out to the entire listserv by email and was designed to solicit specific tips for promotion based on the respondents' own experiences. No participants were excluded and all ranks were included as the authors wished to gather tips from all stages in the promotion process. Participants were

incentivized to contribute as they were invited to present their recommendations for promotion preparation as a part of a preconference session at the STFM Annual Spring Conference and to contribute as authors to a peer-reviewed publication. The Wake Forest School of Medicine Institutional Review Board approved this research.

Survey

The survey was sent electronically by email and contained a description of the preconference session objectives and four open-ended questions:

1. What tips do you have for identifying measurable achievements from promotion preparation criteria?
2. What tips do you have for CV preparation?
3. What tips do you have for personal statement preparation?
4. What tips do you have for appraising and selecting external reviewers?

Respondents had the option to provide tips for any number of the four subcategories.

Qualitative Analysis

This study qualitatively analyzed responses using principles of grounded theory and constant comparison.¹² Two of the primary authors (M.K. and M.P.) read all survey responses for familiarization. They independently identified themes and subthemes. They next iteratively compared themes and subthemes to the point of saturation. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus could be reached.

Results

We obtained 14 survey responses. Responses were received from four professors, six associate professors, two assistant professors, and two other faculty (director of faculty life, senior lecturer). Respondents represented 13 different institutions from the Southeast, Northeast, Midwest, Northwest, and Southwest regions of the country. Ten of the 14 respondents have served on promotion and tenure (P&T) committees, as external reviewers, and/or mentored faculty on promotion. Central themes that emerged from all data sets included the importance of timely and thorough documentation, detailed planning, and being knowledgeable

Table 1: Tips for Successful Promotion Preparation From and for Family Medication Educators

Tips for Identifying Measurable Achievements: 10 Respondents	
Tip 1: Plan ahead using your institution criteria.	Utilize the criteria for promotion to guide you when choosing between activities in which to participate.
Tip 2: Document everything!	Faculty should document all details about their teaching, scholarly activity (traditional and alternative forms), and professional service.
Tip 3: Get examples from others.	Frequently review your portfolio with experts and develop plans to cover any gaps that you may have in meeting criteria for promotion.
Tip 4: Network early and actively.	Contribute to professional discussions. Serve on professional committees. A regional/national presence is a requirement of promotion and expanding your presence through active participation can lead to recognition, nominations, and future opportunities.
Tip 5: Increase impact by narrowing focus and enhancing scholarly activities.	Find your professional niche. Build your career towards something you are passionate about. Enhance your teaching by transforming it into scholarship through presentations and publication. Work toward publishing in high-tier journals, and recognize that low-tier journals are a good alternative.
Tips for CV Preparation: 12 Respondents	
Tip 1: Follow institutional guidelines.	Use institutional guides to format your CV and to organize the presentation of materials. Seek examples from others.
Tip 2: Continuously update your CV.	Identify gaps and plan activities ahead using institutional guidelines to know what you need for promotion.

(continued on next page)

Table 1: Continued

Tip 3: List everything in your CV.	Use the CV to keep track of all activities but avoid padding the CV. Do not list the same item in multiple subsections, rather choose where to list an item based on institutional criteria and mentored guidance. Annotate CV entries where needed to demonstrate impact and quality.
Tip 4: Ask for feedback on materials.	Proofread materials extensively. Use mentors to evaluate the CV. Ask mentors for perceived gaps and continuously plan on how to cover gaps accordingly.
Tips for Personal Statement Preparation*: 11 Respondents	
Tip 1: Promote your brand.	Emphasize your niche/brand/strengths. Describe your impact. Quantify achievements when possible and include supporting details.
Tip 2: Optimize the presentation of your activities.	Ask for examples from colleagues or mentors. Organize the materials using institutional guidelines. Use expertise of mentors to edit and receive feedback on materials. Proofread materials extensively. Consider using a story format and describe future plans.
Tip 3: Continuously update the personal statement.	Identify gaps and plan activities ahead using institutional guidelines to know what you need for promotion.
Tips for Selecting** External Reviewers: 10 Respondents	
Tip 1: Follow your institutional guidelines.	Each institution has different policies/procedures in place for selecting external reviewers and who should or should not approach reviewers (letters can be solicited by the office of faculty affairs and/or the candidate and/or chair of the department). Review your institutional guidelines early to determine how best for you to prepare for this aspect of promotion.
Tip 2: Select reviewers who would understand your work.	Reviewers should be of the same discipline, interest, and/or expertise, from the rank that is aspired to or higher, and should know about you. Reviewers who have not collaborated with you in the past can balance reviewers who are personally familiar with your work. The former provides an unbiased view and the latter provides detail about the depth of your contributions.
Tip 3: Create a list of potential reviewers ahead of time.	Continuously expand on the list and have backup reviewers. If allowed, contact the reviewers before asking for a letter.

*Some institutions may not require a personal statement.

**Identify reviewers, but avoid contacting them unless the institution instructs you to do so.

about institutional-specific criteria. Table 1 presents the consensus tips in promotion preparation.

Discussion

While there is variation in promotion criteria between institutions, this study identified themes to guide family medicine educators. The tips complement institution specific guidance and emphasize the importance of knowing one's own institutional criteria early as the most important first step. Our study suggests that planning ahead with documentation and networking is important for all those pursuing promotion. Additionally, using a network to optimize promotion preparation, albeit mentors reviewing documentation or strategically selecting external reviewers (should your institution allow) is highlighted.

We hypothesize that the proposed tips can be used as family medicine educators focus on promotion when completing annual review materials, setting goals, negotiating new roles and responsibilities, or advocating for protected scholarship time. Faculty mentors and developers can use the tips to guide faculty through promotion preparation. Those with faculty development responsibilities can use the tips as a resource to assist in their coaching efforts.

Limitations of this study included the small convenience sample size and focus of educators of undergraduate medical education. Incentivizing responses with collaboration for a preconference workshop likely promoted selection bias. Future studies could address this by: (1) recruitment across additional national collaboratives, (2) targeted recruitment of faculty affairs and development

experts (such as members of the Association of American Medical Colleges Group on Faculty Affairs), and (3) inclusion of responses from faculty attendees at national conference when presenting this topic. Additionally, to build on the groundwork laid by this study, the recommendations identified in this survey could be included in a validation survey of content experts.

Conclusion

The tips identified in this study assist those family medicine educators seeking promotion and may provide a structured tool for promotion preparation across institutions. Family medicine educators considering promotion and those who support the promotion process can utilize the tips as collected knowledge as a guide through the promotion journey.

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