



Scholarly productivity for nursing clinical track faculty

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have yielded substantial advancement by clinical track faculty in cohort expansion and collective contributions to the discipline of nursing. As a result, standards for progression and promotion for clinical faculty need to be more fully developed, articulated, and disseminated. Our school formed a task force to examine benchmarks for the progression and promotion of clinical faculty across schools of nursing, with the goal of guiding faculty, reviewers, and decision makers about what constitutes excellence in scholarly productivity. Results from analyses of curriculum vitae of clinical professors or associate professors at six universities with high research activity revealed a variety of productivity among clinical track members, which included notable diversity in the types of scholarly products. Findings from this project help quantify types of scholarship for clinical faculty at the time of promotion. This work provides a springboard for greater understanding of the contributions of clinical track faculty to nursing practice.

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Although clinical track faculty (CTF) in schools of nursing have existed for over 2 decades in the United States, the number of individuals on this career trajectory has grown substantially in recent years. This growth has most likely been caused by faculty shortages and role strain related to the achievement of excellence in practice, education, and research and increased emphasis on these same achievements in academic medical centers. In response to the question of whether it is feasible to expect excellence in all of these roles, alternative models were proposed. One such model proposed is the clinical track, with its

major emphasis on faculty practice and clinical education (Sorrel et al., 2008). In nursing, the majority of CTF are clinical experts who hold a master's or doctoral degree and specialty certifications. Their roles focus on nursing education and advancing the scholarship of nursing practice within their respective clinical specialties.

According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the number of CTF in the professorial ranks (i.e., clinical assistant professor, clinical associate professor, and clinical professor) has grown substantially. In 2007, an AACN survey revealed that

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nationally there were 401 CTF members, and this number had doubled by 2012. Although growth was similar across the ranks, the greatest rate of growth was in the clinical assistant professor rank (from 270 to 542). In contrast, the nonprofessorial clinical instructors' growth rate nearly tripled (95 reported in 2007 and 283 reported in 2012). According to AACN data, only 38% of clinical faculty in the professorial ranks held doctoral degrees (Fang, Htut, & Bednash, 2008; Fang, Hu, & Bednash, 2010; Fang, Li, & Bednash, 2012; Fang, Tracy, & Bednash, 2009; Fang, Wilsey Wisniewski, & Bednash, 2007).

With the continued growth of the clinical track, standards for promotion need to be more fully developed, articulated, and disseminated (Honig, Smolowitz, & Larson, 2013). Among tenure track faculty, such standards have evolved over time so that both review committees and external reviewers have a reasonable sense of what constitutes both quantity and quality of scholarly productivity worthy of promotion and tenure. This has not yet been the case for clinical track faculty. For this reason, a clinical track faculty task force was formed at the University of Michigan School of Nursing to examine practices for progression and promotion among comparable schools of nursing, with the goal of guiding faculty, reviewers, and decision makers about what constitutes excellence and progression in scholarly productivity.

Background

A critical role for CTF includes advancing the clinical practice of the discipline, with products of scholarly productivity serving as evidence of this role. Over the last decade, expectations for nursing CTF have been developed describing the types of scholarly activity required for the role. Although there are some differences, there are also a number of similarities when compared with requirements for tenure track faculty. For example, Sneed and colleagues (1995) published a brief list distinguishing the scholarship between educator/researcher and educator/practitioner faculty members. Although individuals on the educator/researcher track were expected to garner national and international recognition for expertise in research, those on the education/practitioner track were likewise expected to gain national and international recognition for their ability to advance the scholarship of practice. The requirements for peer-reviewed presentations, publications, and service as reviewers for others differed primarily in terms of the intended audiences of the scholarship products (i.e., other researchers or practitioners; Sneed et al., 1995). Similarly, Rudy, Anderson, Dudjak, Kobert, and Miller (1995) provided little differentiation in terms of scholarly productivity, other than the expectation that research (i.e., tenure) track faculty were required to develop and submit grant proposals and data-based publications.

The evaluation of what constitutes sufficient quality and quantity of scholarly products as a basis for CTF promotion continues to evolve. Boyer's seminal work (1990) speaks of the value of various forms of scholarship, including discovery, teaching, application, and integration. Discovery refers to new knowledge generation, which, in turn, requires application (i.e., the use of the knowledge in solving problems in the clinical setting). Teaching involves creatively bridging faculty understanding with students' learning. Finally, integration occurs with the discovery of new discipline connections/relationships (Boyer, 1990). The AACN (1999) further described the work of Boyer in a position article aimed at providing examples of how to document scholarship in the areas of discovery, teaching, practice, and integration. Hutchings and Shulman (1999) succinctly differentiated scholarly activity, especially teaching, from scholarship, which was defined as work that is public and peer reviewed and can be further developed by other scholars (Glassick, 2000). Viewed this way, the practice of counting the number of scholarly products, such as publications, presentations, and grants, may seem to be a reasonable way to quantify scholarly productivity, while relying to some extent on peer review to maintain quality standards.

Although the roles of CTF have been clearly defined and scholarly products for this track have been delineated and juxtaposed with tenure track scholarship criteria (Honig et al., 2013), discussion about the quantity of scholarly productivity for CTF remains at the descriptive level. Becker et al. (2007), in their comparison of clinical and research track faculty, found substantially fewer scholarly products (i.e., publications, presentations, peer review contributions, and grants) for CTF when compared with those in the research (i.e., tenure) track. Although there have been efforts to expand the definition of what constitutes a sufficient quantity of scholarship, differences remain. For example, using portfolio data from a random sample of 15 clinical track medical school faculty who had been promoted between 1990 and 1997 at Harvard University, Hafler and Lovejoy (2000) described productivity for each rank in terms of original articles (i.e., peer-reviewed papers, including educational scholarship) and other publications. Other publications for this group included book chapters, textbooks, editorials, syllabi, newsletters, and computer and video resources. The mean cumulative number of publications among assistant clinical professors was 3.4, with a range of 0 to 17. At the associate level, the cumulative mean was 34.2 (range, 24-49), and at the rank of full professor the cumulative mean was 42.6 (range, 19-61).

The variability of scholarly products among CTF may be associated with workload, educational preparation, and perceived value of scholarship. Higher teaching and practice workloads have been identified as possible reasons for lower rates of scholarly productivity among CTF. Faculty participating in focus

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