

Turning Committee Work and Course Leadership into Teaching Scholarship: A guide for educators at the University of Colorado School of Medicine.

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Opportunities to Participate in Curriculum Reform at the School of Medicine

For the first time in more than fifty years, the University of Colorado School of Medicine is undertaking a comprehensive redesign of its 4-year curriculum. The process of “curriculum reform” will include a fundamental exploration of many assumptions about medical education --- what students should learn, when they should learn and relearn it, by what methods and under the guidance of which teachers. There will be a new emphasis on integration, relevance, self-study and continuous assessment of learning and teaching. Interdisciplinary committees and task forces are now being assembled to decide on the organization, content and best teaching methods for a variety of new block and longitudinal courses.

Faculty participation is essential. But faculty are busy and some (Assistant Professors, especially) may wonder whether serving on curriculum reform committees will be recognized when it comes time for promotion. The purpose of this memorandum is to explain how you can participate on curriculum reform and course development committees --- and simultaneously take credit for the scholarly “products” of your work.

Promotion Requirements

Promotion in the School of Medicine requires that all faculty members, regardless of their job assignment or focus, participate in scholarship. Scholarship is broadly defined. In fact, the SOM lists four types of scholarship, only one of which (the “scholarship of discovery”) requires hypothesis-driven research and peer-reviewed publications. The scholarship of application, integration and teaching are also recognized by the School’s promotions committees. But for promotion, all faculty must be able to show tangible “products” of scholarship. As outlined in the Rules, “The products of all scholarship must be in a format that can be evaluated, which would normally mean a written format but could include video or computer formats.” In the past, the Faculty Promotions Committee has accepted educational manuals for students, innovative competency-based curricula, novel educational videotapes and computer-assisted learning programs as examples of the scholarship of teaching.

We are convinced that educational scholarship can be intellectually rewarding and can assist faculty in career advancement and promotion. But to count as scholarship, the faculty member’s work in this area must reflect creativity and must also include: Clear goals; appropriate methods; a connection to existing knowledge or contemporary work undertaken by peers in other institutions; significant results; and effective, written presentation.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations to help you document “scholarship” as you participate in the School’s educational reform process. Of course, meeting these tests does not guarantee recognition or promotion.

- Assume responsibility for a “big-picture” area --- a block, a thread, a course, a laboratory module, an area of reform. Insist on being designated the project director in this area. Document your leadership role.
- Decide on colleagues’ roles and even “authorship” in advance, just as you would in the early stages of a research project.
- Document how your work meets the other concrete tests of scholarship:
 - You had clear objectives and methods that helped you define the content, as well as the logic, sequencing, organization, relevance and interdisciplinary connections, of the course;
 - You integrated information and perspectives from several clinical, biologic or sociologic disciplines;
 - You demonstrated your knowledge of the scientific content as well as awareness of educational processes and varied methods of presentation;
 - You developed methods in your course to encourage and evaluate independent learning and critical thinking by students;
 - You actively incorporated feedback from stakeholders (colleagues and students) and respected peers in other schools;
 - You developed strategies for ongoing evaluation and improvement.
- Take credit for your other contributions and products: Products may include course outlines, learning objectives, laboratory manuals, syllabus materials, problem-based learning exercises, case simulations, video- or computer-assisted exercises and course or student evaluation tools. Insist that your name remains attached to these scholarly works that will be presented to the school’s promotions committee.
- Try to judge, and even expand, the impact of your work. Consider not only its eventual use school-wide but whether the information can be disseminated on a regional or national level. Articulate in specific terms how your work has been read, shared, understood and critiqued by others. Consider preparing summaries of your work that are suitable for publication in peer-reviewed journals.