Rethinking the Educator Portfolio: An Innovative Criteria-Based Model

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Abstract

Problem

Academic medical centers struggle to achieve parity in advancement and promotions between educators and discovery-oriented researchers in part because of narrow definitions of scholarship, lack of clear criteria for measuring excellence, and barriers to making educational contributions available for peer review. Despite recent progress in expanding scholarship definitions and identifying excellence criteria, these advances are not integrated into educator portfolio (EP) templates or curriculum vitae platforms.

Approach

From 2013 to 2015, a working group from the Academy of Medical Educators (AME) at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) designed a streamlined, criteria-based EP (EP 2.0) template highlighting faculty members' recent activities in education and setting rigorous evaluation methods to enable educational scholarship to be objectively evaluated for academic advancement, AME membership, and professional development.

Outcomes

The EP 2.0 template was integrated into the AME application, resulting in high overall satisfaction among candidates and the selection committee and positive feedback on the template's transparency, ease of use, and streamlined format. In 2016, the EP 2.0 template was integrated into the campus-wide curriculum vitae platform and academic advancement system.

Next Steps

The authors plan to increase awareness of the EP 2.0 template by educating promotions committees and faculty at UCSF and partnering with other institutions to disseminate it for use. They also plan to study the impact of the template on supporting educators by making their important scholarly contributions available for peer review, providing guidance for professional development, and decreasing disparities in promotions.

Problem

Medical educators often struggle to achieve academic advancement at the same rate as their research-focused colleagues.[1] Achieving parity in academic promotions between educators and researchers has largely been hindered by a narrow definition of scholarship, a lack of clear criteria for measuring educator excellence, and a paucity of strategies to make educational contributions available for rigorous, efficient peer review. As a consequence, educators are promoted more slowly and are less satisfied with their promotions than their research-focused counterparts.[1]

Over the past several decades, education scholars have made significant strides in addressing these impediments. In a seminal work, Boyer[2] argued that institutions should move past the research versus teaching debate and broaden the term *scholarship* to include education work. Later, Glassick and colleagues[3] created six standards of educator excellence (adequate preparation, clear goals, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique), and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) identified five core educator roles (teaching, curriculum development, advising and mentoring, education leadership, and learner assessment).[4] Since then, others have built on this work and proposed guidelines for evaluating educator excellence.[5]

Increasingly, those in education have recognized that educational scholarship, like publications, must be made available for peer review.[6] To address this issue, the international teaching community developed the concept of the educator portfolio (EP).[7] The EP was designed both as a place for individuals to document their teaching activities and accomplishments in education and as a tool to contribute to their professional development.[7] In medicine, EPs are often included in applications to academies of medical educators (AMEs), which in turn play a crucial role in advocating for improving teaching quality and for recognizing distinguished teachers.[8]

Although EPs are intended to display educators' best work, their introduction to medical education has been flawed. EPs are highly variable in content, often excessively long, and difficult to assess consistently because few evaluation guidelines exist.[9] Furthermore, EPs are frequently prepared as optional attachments to educators' curricula vitae (CVs) and may not focus on individuals' recent work, clearly define their teaching and educator roles, or describe the significance of their contributions to their fields. Therefore, EPs have not adequately contributed to the objective evaluation of educators' academic contributions.

After recognizing many of these deficiencies, we redesigned our

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institutional EP to display faculty members' current academic activities related to education, facilitate rigorous and efficient peer review, enhance academic promotions, and provide an improved tool for professional development. In this Innovation Report, we describe the development of our new EP—a streamlined and criteria-based template for succinct, relevant, and standardized EPs that can be integrated into existing CVs and used to objectively evaluate the quality of an educator's work. We report the implementation of this new model first into our Academy of Medical Educators (AME) application process and subsequently into the campus-wide academic advancement system.

Approach

Redesigning the EP template

In 2013, the AME at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) appointed a working group to redesign the existing EP (EP 1.0) template for use in the AME application process and in academic promotions. The working group modeled the new EP (EP 2.0) template on two narrative sections in the existing CV platform used at UCSF, entitled Research Program and Significant Publications. The former encourages faculty members to describe their current area(s) of research and its significance, and the latter requests information about faculty members' most important, recent publications with details of the impact of those publications. This approach resulted in a redesigned EP template that consists of a one-page executive summary that lists up to five of the faculty member's key, recent contributions to education (including time allocation to educator roles, changes in those roles, and evidence of impact) and up to three 2-page detailed role descriptions based on the five AAMC core educator roles, which provide more granular information on the educational activities outlined in the executive summary.

The EP 2.0 template also provides criteria to evaluate educator excellence, which were adapted from Glassick's criteria for standards of educator excellence and the AAMC toolbox for evaluating educators (see Table 1).[3,10] These criteria were designed to address the long-standing lack of standardized metrics to assess EP quality. Of note, there is no rubric or scoring system connected with these criteria, as they are intended to be used as qualitative tools to assess a faculty member's educational contributions based on broad indicators of excellence. Overall, the critical elements of the new EP 2.0 template include a structured framework and standardized layout which define different roles, provide information on the significance of a faculty member's recent contributions, and convey clear, qualitative standards for evaluation.

Piloting the EP 2.0 template with the AME

To provide proof of concept, the AME working group applied the new criteria to EPs from the previous round of AME applications and found the included information to be inadequate for evaluating educator excellence. The working group members then completed EP 2.0 templates as examples to share with the AME members and conducted two workshops, first to gather feedback on the new model and then to coach AME members in preparing their own EP 2.0s. The examples and workshops were enthusiastically received, and suggestions for improvement were incorporated into the new EP 2.0 template.

In 2014, AME candidates were required to submit applications that included the new EP 2.0 template (see Appendixes 1 and 2 for blank copies of this template and Supplemental Digital Appendixes 1 and 2 at http://links.lww.com/ACADMED/A503 for completed examples). The AME supported candidates throughout the application process by providing an optional portfolio coach and an administrative review of a draft of each candidate's application to ensure alignment with the requisite standards. Candidates and coaches also received a frequently asked questions document (see Supplemental Digital Appendix 3 at http://links.lww.com/ACADMED/A503).

Integrating the EP 2.0 template into the UCSF academic advancement system

Throughout the pilot, the AME engaged the Office of Academic Affairs in discussions about the limitations of the current campus-wide CV platform and the need for improved tools to demonstrate educator excellence. In 2015, UCSF convened a faculty academic advancement task force to review the existing CV platform and to recommend changes. An AME member (K.S.) served on that task force and advocated for inclusion of the EP 2.0 template in the online CV platform, based on the relevance of educator excellence to the academic promotions process (particularly in those advancement series in which educator roles are a major academic activity) and the need for improved, rigorous evaluation of educator roles. The task force agreed that faculty members whose major academic contribution is in education faced bias in the existing CV platform due to the emphasis on discovery-oriented research publications; absence of a succinct, consistent, and robust format to document teaching excellence; and lack of specific criteria to rigorously evaluate educator contributions. Furthermore, in the existing promotions process, the EP was considered supplemental information, appended as an electronic attachment, and inconsistently transmitted with the faculty member's CV to those writing letters of support and to the promotions committee.

The task force's concerns about integrating the EP 2.0 template into the CV platform included the potential for increasing the length of the CV and the time needed for review, as well as the possibility that those with minimal teaching roles would inappropriately use it. Addressing these concerns, the EP 2.0 template is succinct (see Appendixes 1 and 2) and offers specific criteria for evaluating excellence. Furthermore, the flexible electronic format permits faculty members to select either the traditional teaching narrative entry (a free-text description of their educator activities and/or teaching philosophy) or an alternative view with the EP 2.0 template, and embedded instructions encourage only faculty members with significant educator roles to use the EP 2.0 template. Importantly, the EP 2.0 template is also integrated directly into the online CV platform, making it consistently available to all letters of support writers and promotions committee reviewers.

Throughout this entire process, administrative staff provided answers to any queries the new EP 2.0 template users had via e-mail and telephone.

Table 1

Criteria for Evaluating the Scholarly Contributions of Educators and Examples of Broad Indicators of Educator Excellence Used in the New Educator Portfolio (EP 2.0) Template at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF), Adapted From Glassick's Criteria for Standards of Educator Excellence[3] and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) Toolbox for Evaluating Educators[10]

UCSF criteria	UCSF broad indicators of educator excellence	Glassick's criteria	AAMC broad indicators of educator excellence
Builds on best evidence/practices	• Use of best evidence/practices from the literature • Professional development activities and personal experience • Congruence with national, institutional, and/or program goals and integration with other components of the curriculum	Adequate preparation	• Needs assessment done, if required • Congruence with institutional/program goals and integration with other components of the curriculum • Use of best practices and approaches from the literature, professional development activities, and personal experience • Systematic approach to identifying and acquiring resources needed to implement the curriculum
Goals and learning objectives	Learning objectives for the teaching session(s) are: • Stated clearly • Specified to measure learners' performance • At the appropriate level for the targeted learners	Clear goals	Learning objectives for the curriculum are: • Stated clearly • Specified to measure learners' performance • At the appropriate level for the targeted learners
Methods	• Teaching methods are aligned with learning objectives • Methods are feasible, practical, ethical • Innovative teaching methods are used to achieve objectives • Rationale for choices	Appropriate methods	• Teaching, learner assessment, and curriculum evaluation methods are aligned with curriculum objectives • Methods are feasible, practical, and ethical • Innovative teaching and assessment methods are used and aligned with objectives
Results and impact within the institution	• Teaching evaluations: Include normative data if available • Learning: Measure knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviors • Application: Demonstrate desired performance in other settings • Impact: Impact educational programs and processes within the institution • Teaching awards locally	Significant results	• Satisfaction/reaction • Learning: Measure knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviors • Application: Demonstrate desired performance in other settings • Impact: Impact educational programs and processes within and/or outside the institution
Dissemination outside the institution[a]	Recognized as valuable by others outside the institution through: • Peer review or letters of reference • Dissemination (presentations, workshops, publications) and/or • Invited presentations and visiting professorships elsewhere • Use of teaching models or materials by others • Teaching awards nationally	Effective presentation	Recognized as valuable by others (internally or externally) through: • Peer review • Dissemination (presentations/publications) and/or • Use by others
Reflective critique	• Uses evaluation to guide improvement • Uses reflection to develop a specific plan for improvement	Reflective critique	• Reflection and evaluation results used for ongoing improvement

[a]This criterion is aspirational and illustrative rather than required for educators to demonstrate excellence for Academy of Medical Educators applications.

Outcomes

A brief narrative survey was administered to AME candidates after they completed the academy selection cycle in 2014–2015. Overall, candidates reported high satisfaction with the EP 2.0 template. They found it easy to complete and lauded its easy-to-follow directions and transparent evaluation system, citing that "the examples were excellent" and that the "direction[s] were very clear." Candidates also appreciated the examples of completed portfolios and benefited from working with the portfolio coaches (especially in determining which roles to emphasize and what documentation to include), stating that the coaches "helped hone my application," "gave feedback to my approach," and "provided guidance on fields to apply to." Some challenges included uncertainty about mentoring activities and identifying and accessing data for the Results and Impact section (particularly providing comparative teaching evaluation scores). In debriefing discussions with the AME selection committee, committee members unanimously affirmed that the EP 2.0 template provided superior information to the original EP 1.0 for conducting

peer review and making membership decisions, and they enthusiastically praised the new template's clarity, consistency, and conciseness.

The EP 2.0 template successfully addressed the major shortcomings of the EP 1.0 template, including variability, excessive length, lack of a structured framework and specific criteria for evaluation, and exclusion from the academic promotions process. Importantly, the new template may serve as a career development guide for new faculty members who aspire to medical education careers, and it offers a framework for how to best demonstrate educational scholarship achievements through explicit definitions of excellence.

We also learned several important lessons through the process of designing the EP 2.0 template. First, AME candidates posed common questions and portfolio coaches encountered typical challenges, which resulted in the creation of a frequently asked questions document (see Supplemental Digital Appendix 3). Second, the series of workshops helped introduce the EP 2.0 template to AME members and the selection committee, and trained portfolio coaches enhanced the implementation process. If other institutions plan to introduce a template like ours, faculty development for candidates, coaches, and promotions committees will be important to ensure its successful implementation. Third, the importance of having passionate faculty members to advocate for key changes to the advancement process cannot be overstated. Promoting the understanding that an improved, rigorous assessment of educator excellence is highly relevant to a promotions process in which educator roles are a major academic activity was central to the eventual adoption of the EP 2.0 template across the UCSF system. Fourth, faculty members appreciated the directions on the new template to select and highlight their best, current contributions in education. They liked that they controlled the process and could reflect on their accomplishments, and as a result, they felt empowered and engaged.

Next Steps

We will continue to increase awareness of the EP 2.0 template at UCSF and at other institutions as a model that offers educators the opportunity to display their important, recent scholarly contributions to education. Work continues at UCSF to inform faculty members on how to complete the EP 2.0 template and to direct promotions committees on how to apply the evaluation criteria to faculty members' EPs. We also seek to partner with other academic institutions and educational leadership organizations that are using, improving, or developing documentation for educator excellence to achieve national consensus on effective EP templates and to broadly disseminate these educator advocacy tools. Ultimately, we expect that the rigor introduced by the EP 2.0 template will reduce the disparities in academic promotions between educators and researchers and change the academic culture in positive ways.

In the future, we aim to carry out more quantitative investigations on the impact of the EP 2.0 template and to further characterize the responses of all stakeholders to its implementation. Specifically, we plan to study the impact of the new template on promotions rates, its utility to promotions committees that may not include educator faculty and/or to departments that may not include many educators, and the feedback from AME candidates in terms of satisfaction, ease of use, and time required for completion. Overall, we anticipate that our streamlined and criteria-based EP 2.0 template will enable educators to highlight their current creative academic work in education, provide guidance for professional development, and decrease disparities in academic promotions between medical educators and discovery-oriented researchers.

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Appendix 1

Executive Summary, New Educator Portfolio (EP 2.0) Template, University of California, San Francisco

Executive Summary of Most Significant Contributions to Teaching and Education	
Name: Name (click to enter text)	**Department:** Department
Overall faculty roles: In one sentence, list your faculty roles (teaching, research, patient care, administration) and approximate time allocation to each.	
Overall faculty roles	
Changes in role(s) over time: In one sentence, describe any major changes in teaching roles over the past 2 or 3 years.	
Changes in role(s)	
Important contributions to education: Identify educator role in parentheses and list contribution in a phrase. Describe what was done, how well it was done and its impact in 2–3 sentences. Use only as many as are appropriate to your teaching (1–5). Note that (a) Teaching and at least one additional Detailed Role Description are required for Academy membership applications, and (b) you must select from the contributions below in preparing your Detailed Role Descriptions (over the past 2 or 3 years).	
First important contribution to education: Teaching	
(Teaching), contribution, description.	
Second important contribution to education	
(Educator Role), contribution, description.	
Third important contribution to education	
(Educator Role), contribution, description.	
Fourth important contribution to education	
(Educator Role), contribution, description.	
Fifth important contribution to education	
(Educator Role), contribution, description.	

Appendix 2

Detailed Teaching Role Description, New Educator Portfolio (EP 2.0) Template, University of California, San Francisco (UCSF)

ROLE: Teaching (classroom or clinical)	
Name: Name (Click to enter text)	**Department:** Department
1. Name your teaching activity(ies): Identify the impactful activity(ies) you select to focus on.	
Name your teaching activity(ies)	
2. Your role(s): Describe your role(s) and specifically what you contribute.	
Your role(s)	
3. Learners and amount of contact: Describe types, levels, and numbers of learners; amount of contact you have with them.	
Learners and amount of contact	
4. Builds on best practice/evidence: Describe your preparation including the use of best practice and evidence where available, your professional development, and/or congruence with national, curriculum, and/or program goals.	
Builds on best evidence/practice	
5. Goals and learning objectives: List goals and learning objectives of program. If these are extensive, provide just a few illustrative examples.	
Goals and learning objectives of program	
6. Methods: Describe the methods used for instruction, how these align with objectives, and rationale for choices.	
Methods	
7. Results and impact: Describe evidence of learner ratings of teaching/course, learning outcomes, application of knowledge in other settings at UCSF, impact on educational programs within the institution, and/or teaching awards.	
Results and impact	
8. Dissemination: Describe how your efforts have been recognized by others externally through peer review, dissemination, use by others, or teaching awards nationally.	
Dissemination	
9. Reflective critique: Describe your reflections, what went well and plans for improvement.	
Reflective critique	