Managing Your Career as a Nurse Educator: Considering an Academic Appointment

ABSTRACT

As schools of nursing are continuing to actively recruit faculty, nurse educators must be familiar with the requirements for academic appointments and the process by which they are made to make well-informed career decisions. This column discusses academic appointments, requirements for appointments, and the appointment process.

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS
Academic appointments in schools of nursing are made to both the school and the college or university by the faculty and governing body of the institution. Faculty appointments are made to meet the mission of the institution of higher education in which the school is situated and may include not only teaching nursing students, but also service and research (Boyer, 1997).

Appointments to positions in schools of nursing may be made to a clinical track, with a focus on teaching and clinical practice; to a tenure track, with an emphasis on teaching, service, and research; or as a research scientist, with an emphasis on conducting research.

Within each track, there is an opportunity for advancement through a series of ranks. Ranks advance as follows: instructor, assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor. Appointment and advancement criteria are specified for each rank, and review of criteria and advancement in rank and tenure is made by a committee of peers who hold similar or higher rank.

There are a variety of other full-time, part-time, or temporary appointments to schools of nursing that may be attractive to nurses who do not have the requisite educational preparation or wish to continue to work in a full-time or part-time position in clinical practice. A visiting professor is a time-limited (usually 1 to 2 years) appointment for a nurse educator who is on temporary assignment or is being considered for full-time appointment at a later date. Visiting professorships can be appointed at all ranks. Adjunct appointments are courtesy titles, typically without pay, and are given to nurses and others who are providing service to the school, usually by teaching students or assisting students with research. Teaching assistant or associate appointments are temporary and usually part-time, with the main responsibility to assist faculty with teaching responsibilities. Teaching assistantships are usually assumed by graduate students and are an ideal way to determine if a faculty appointment fits with career goals.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS
Requirements for academic appointments are set by each college or university and vary by the mission of the institution of higher education and school of nursing. For example, a community college with a mission of teaching may require a master’s degree for appointment, whereas a research-intensive university will require a PhD. Other requirements may include experience teaching, a record of research or scholarly work and dissemination (publication and presentations at professional meetings), local or national professional service, or clinical expertise.

Nurse educators who are contemplating completing a doctoral degree with the intent of seeking appointment at a school of nursing should consider carefully the match between the desired type of appointment, rank, and track and the preparation offered by the advanced degree. Doctor of nursing practice (DNP) degrees prepare graduates for clinical practice and typically are considered preparation for clinical track appointments. Those seeking a tenure track appointment with job expectations of teaching, service, and research are better served by enrolling in a program that awards a PhD. Educational preparation (major or minor in master’s or doctoral courses or teaching certificate) for teaching is also necessary; educators who will conduct their research in the area...
of nursing education should have a PhD with a focus on the science of nursing education.

**THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS**

The appointment process in academic settings is different from the employment process in nursing service or a government agency. Nurse educators who are seeking an academic appointment should first determine if the missions of the college or university and the school of nursing fit with their career goals, and then understand the requirements for appointment (i.e., degree and experience). The appointment process involves having an interview with the dean, director, or department chair of the program. If seeking a clinical or tenure track rank or tenured appointment, the process also involves an interview with a search and screen committee appointed by the dean or university administrator that makes recommendations to the dean or director for rank and tenure status for the appointment. The applicant’s credentials are also reviewed by a standing Appointment, Promotion and Tenure committee that reviews the applicant’s curriculum vitae for accomplishments that match the requirements for the track and rank. The applicant may also be required to make a presentation to the faculty demonstrating his or her teaching, presentation, or research abilities.

A successful academic appointment fits the needs of both the nurse educator and the school of nursing and has clear expectations (Siler & Kleiner, 2001). Nurse educators must develop, manage, and advance their careers by obtaining requisite educational preparation and teaching experience and producing scholarly work. Understanding the implications of the track, rank, and related responsibilities is important for negotiating the most appropriate academic appointment and developing a long and satisfying career as a nurse educator.

**REFERENCES**


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