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The Development of a Portfolio for Academic Promotion and Tenure for Occupational Therapy Educators

Abstract

Advancement of occupational therapy educators is a significant achievement and important contribution to the American Occupational Therapy Association's *Vision 2025* and *Centennial Vision*. Successful promotion demands excellence and active engagement in faculty skill development, both of which are essential to student learning. The academic promotion and tenure process presents a new and unfamiliar expectation for entry-level and tenure-track occupational therapy educators. A multitude of institutional policies and procedures, formal and informal recommendations from administrators and colleagues, and lack of mentorship can make planning for academic promotion and tenure confusing and difficult. The purpose of this article is to provide guidelines and practical examples based on evidence from higher education and the occupational therapy profession that can assist in the preparation and composition of a portfolio for academic promotion and tenure. Through appraisal and application, a portfolio can successfully present a record of quality teaching, advising, scholarship, professional development, and service while highlighting the distinct value of occupational therapy practice.

Comments

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

Keywords

education, faculty, professional development, rank, tenure

Credentials Display

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Academic promotion and tenure is a common expectation and significant achievement for occupational therapy educators (Morgan et al., 2019). Occupational therapy educators who earn academic promotion and tenure have been recognized by peers for outstanding contributions to students, the institution, society, and their profession. The portfolio submitted for academic promotion and tenure is a tedious and significant time investment but provides an opportunity to better understand and acknowledge the value and impact of years of hard work and dedication. Entry-level and tenure-track occupational therapy educators (i.e., clinicians transitioning to academia) have limited experience with the academic promotion and tenure processes. An improved understanding of academic promotion and tenure concepts will improve preparation and implementation of a portfolio development plan.

Earning academic promotion and tenure is a peer-reviewed process that can involve internal and external reviewers from a multitude of disciplines. Peer reviewers are more commonly colleagues from the institution of employment serving in administrative, academic promotion and tenure committee, and departmental roles, but can also include students (Weiser, 2012). External reviewers may be faculty, administration, or board members from other institutions. Peers from disciplines outside rehabilitation may have little or no understanding of occupational therapy. For this reason, a successful portfolio should define occupational therapy in an easily understandable manner and describe how the occupational therapy educator's record of professional activities addresses values and expectations of the institution and their profession.

This article will provide entry-level and tenure-track occupational therapy educators with guidelines and practical examples for preparing a portfolio, including assessment of professional activities and how to present a record of quality teaching, advising, scholarship, professional development, and service informed by evidence and credentials, displaying the distinct value of occupational therapy practice. These ideas are directed at portfolio preparation, which is only a small part of the academic promotion and tenure process. Different institutions have different criteria and expectations, and the occupational therapy educator should primarily rely on direction from their own institution.

Preparing the Portfolio

The journey to successful academic promotion and tenure begins on the first day as an occupational therapy educator. The cumulative professional activities of teaching, advising, scholarship, professional development, and service provide documentation to support and guide the occupational therapy educator to academic promotion and tenure.

The narrative is the main portion of the portfolio that presents the applicant's "case" for earning academic promotion and tenure. The narrative must be well organized and clearly document how the occupational therapy educator's credentials meet or exceed criteria for academic promotion and tenure. Examples of criteria for academic promotion and tenure will be used throughout this article; however, readers should realize criteria vary widely across higher education institutions (Weiser, 2012). Table 1 provides recommended actions for the planning and preparation of the narrative that occur from day one of an occupational therapy educator's career. In addition to these recommended actions, occupational therapy educators should be vigilant about other resources offered by their institution and the profession.

Table 1*Recommended Actions for Planning and Preparing the Narrative*

Action	Purpose
Carefully review institution, college, and department missions, visions, strategic plans, and the institutional policy manual (IPM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify how professional activities serve the missions, visions, and strategic plans - Identification of stakeholders - Identify criteria for academic promotion and tenure (i.e., IPM)
Create a system of files/folders for recording evidence of professional activities and periodically set reminders to backup files	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence should be filed using the same organization, categories, and language of institutional documents (i.e., IPM) - Recovery of data in the event of hardware failure or unintended data loss
Continuously record and file all professional activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The significance and relationship between professional activities is not always apparent - Professional activities that meet multiple criteria can be stored in multiple files and folders - Maintain a current and accurate curriculum vitae
Use annual self-evaluation to compile progress toward promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Serves as a reference tool for self and administration to monitor progress toward academic promotion and tenure goals
Build a mentorship team of 2–3 trusted colleagues who have previous experience serving on academic promotion and tenure committees and/or recent success in academic promotion and tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Source of experience, expertise, and guidance for portfolio development plan - Reviewing recently accepted portfolios can inform development of a preferred narrative format
Attend institutional educational or training sessions on the process of academic promotion and tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask questions that clarify expectations - Samples of previously accepted portfolios - Demonstrates engagement in the process to peers
Create a project timeline that allows time for review/revisions and application. Be flexible and aware of unexpected delays or problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of tasks that need to be completed - Identification of human resources needed to complete tasks (i.e., secretary or grad assistant for scanning and uploading documents) - Assign designated review period for mentorship team

Composing the Portfolio

Areas commonly addressed in a narrative include teaching, advising, research and scholarship, professional development, and service. Based on review of the literature, teaching and research and scholarship criteria were the most carefully reviewed by peers. In each area, occupational therapy educators are encouraged to use appraisal and application to demonstrate the merit of professional activities and whether they have met or exceeded criteria for academic promotion and tenure. Appraisal involves describing the value or impact of the professional activity to stakeholders. Application involves describing how knowledge or skills are used to perform or advance the quality of professional activities and one's profession.

Teaching and Advising

Students are the primary stakeholders or clients of occupational therapy educators. In addition to institutional expectations, accreditation standards will guide appraisal and application of teaching activities. For example, the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA) *2018 Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) Standards and Interpretive Guide* contains professional development standards such as evidence of currency in the areas of teaching responsibilities and scholarly activity (AOTA, 2018a).

Narratives should include a representation of student course evaluation scores. This can be provided in descriptive or graphical form or a combination of the two. This quantitative data represents students' perception of their learning and the learning environment (Linse, 2017). The research on the validity and usefulness of student course evaluations is split and including this data in the narrative will

depend on institutional requirements. Adverse trends or dips in scores should be addressed in the narrative, including changes implemented to address student feedback. Qualitative comments on course evaluations, unsolicited emails, thank you cards, etc., or other feedback such as peer observations can enhance quantitative data and be further explained in the narrative (Yon et al., 2002). Peer observations are a widely recognized practice and can be a meaningful exercise for improving teaching effectiveness (Fletcher, 2018). When referring to peer observations, occupational therapy educators should emphasize when they followed recommendations to improve teaching effectiveness.

Occupational therapy educators are advised not to rely totally on student course evaluations or peer observations as an appraisal of teaching effectiveness. Occupational therapy educators are viewed as experts in their discipline and inherent in that role is the responsibility for continued competence (AOTA, 2015). A significant amount of professional activities that develop expertise and improve teaching effectiveness occur outside the classroom. Professional activities, including advising, scholarship, professional development, and service can promote teaching effectiveness. For example, concurrent clinical practice is a professional activity that can further develop expertise in assigned coursework. Table 2 illustrates how applying best practice to teaching can simultaneously address other performance areas and criteria for academic promotion and tenure (AOTA, 2018b). This planning exercise can be used to support the writing of the narrative.

Table 2

Applying Best Practice in Occupational Therapy Education to Support Academic Promotion and Tenure

Pedagogy	Method	Professional area	Narrative comments
Collaborative and problem-based learning	Interdisciplinary occupational and physical therapy skills lab with adult stroke survivors and clients with Parkinson's disease	Teaching	- Supports mission, vision, and strategic plan - Connects classroom theory to clinical application - Meets ACOTE® accreditation standard for interprofessional education (IPE)
		Scholarship	- Involves clients from a population in research agenda
		Professional development	- Requires clinical skills and application of evidenced-based practice (EBP)
		Service	- Clients from community receive treatment and contribute to training of future therapists
Course revision	Development of new lecture content, EBP, assessment rubric, and instructional technology	Teaching	- Meets IPM requirement for excellence in teaching - Improves clarity of expectations that were previously reported on student course evaluations - Applied continuing ed course on virtual anatomy to implement new learning resource
		Professional development	- Meets ACOTE® accreditation standard related to consuming the latest research and knowledge to support role as educator

Note. This table applies elements from the AOTA *Occupational Therapy Education Research Agenda Revised and 2018 Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) Standards and Interpretive Guide*.

It is important to be mindful of how teaching responsibilities can provide opportunities for productivity in other performance areas. Teaching is professional development, and as it develops, it should be evident that teaching has evolved with additional knowledge, best practice, and the changing needs of the students.

The most important goal of academic advising is academic advancement and growth of students.

At the core of academic advising effectiveness is the ability to form a positive and consistent relationship with students throughout their matriculation (Barnes & Parish, 2017; Thomas & McFarlane, 2018). In addition, occupational therapy educators may also be required to participate in advising activities that support institutional growth. Examples of academic advising duties include the following:

- serve as a student advocate for addressing day-to-day needs and career goals
- adherence to policies and procedures for academic advisement
- professional development in areas of advising
- accessibility to students outside the classroom, including strategies to improve communication or understanding of course content
- writing a letter of recommendation for an advisee resulting in a significant award or appointment
- faculty research mentor or thesis advisor
- serving in a leadership role in a student organization
- participation in university or program sponsored events that support recruitment, retention, or career advising opportunities for students

When describing one's record of academic advising, the occupational therapy educator can use appraisal and application to clearly show how they have met or exceeded expectations in advising. For example, an occupational therapy educator who completed a continuing education training course on first-year college student advising uses that training to create a resource checklist and advising log that is reviewed with advisees at midterm. In addition, the occupational therapy educator can describe the value of these advising tools in supporting academic advancement or growth of students, such as tutoring referrals or scheduling coursework.

Scholarship

Higher education institutions and AOTA recognize the four major forms of scholarship as described by Boyer in *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990): the scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching and learning (AOTA, 2016; Boyer, 1990; Trower, 2000). In 1996, Boyer added a fifth type of scholarship, "engagement," to address faculty teaching, research, service, publications, and expert contributions that link academic expertise to community needs and result in community growth and/or development and impact the community as a whole (Boyer, 1996; Ivey et al., 2016). Occupational therapists' role in public health policy and advocacy in the community aligns with the scholarship of engagement to advance knowledge and practice (Hammel et al., 2015).

Occupational therapy educators can use the Boyer model of scholarship and literature from the profession to assess the value of their professional activities and document growth in teaching, advising, scholarship, professional development, and service, including application to occupational therapy practice. Occupational therapy resources, such as the AOTA position statement *Scholarship in Occupational Therapy*, which applies the Boyer model of scholarship, and the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT®) Renewal Activities Chart, can be used for discipline specific guidance on scholarly activity (AOTA, 2016; NBCOT®, 2020). Based on experience, occupational therapy educators should focus their development in all areas on 1–3 types of Boyer scholarship which reflect clinical practice interests or line of research.

Scholarship, especially research, is typically the most valued and carefully reviewed area of faculty performance (Linse, 2017; Yon et al., 2002). The narrative should explain how each scholarly activity is professional, communicated, and peer-reviewed as defined by institutional and professional

standards (Glassick et al., 1997). Pay careful attention to assessing and describing the quality of the peer-review process. What constitutes quality peer-review and research and scholarship varies greatly across academia, and therefore, occupational therapy educators are encouraged to consult institutional, college, and departmental goals and expectations for overall assessment of research and scholarship activities. Administrators, trusted mentors with recent experience with academic promotion and tenure, and recently accepted portfolios can also be helpful.

The narrative should describe how scholarly activities enhance teaching and advance occupational therapy practice. Based on our experience, scholarly activities with students is especially valued across disciplines. Table 3 is a planning template for one example of scholarship that can be used to organize narrative content.

Table 3
Planning Template for Scholarly Activities

Published abstract	Wilson, D., Clarion, J., Fillmore, B., Makaya, R., & Martone, K. (2019). Quality of life and family choice in planning discharge for stroke survivors. <i>Stroke Care International</i> , 15, 968–998. https://doi.org/10.1001/s14411-018-00673-5
Merit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional, Communicated, Peer-reviewed - Co-authored with occupational therapy graduate students - Included travel grant award
IPM requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scholarship of Discovery (Policy #1.2.7a): item #1: Peer-reviewed publications of research item #4: Presentations of research item #9: Peer-reviewed or published research and scholarly collaboration with graduate or undergraduate students
Peer-review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authors submit blinded abstract without author names. Each abstract is reviewed in a double-blind review process by a publication committee of health care experts. - The current acceptance rate for <i>Stroke Care International</i> is 23%.
Role Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Faculty thesis advisor and lead author - This conference proceeding provides new insights regarding the attitudes, beliefs, and personal experiences of stroke survivors and their families engaged in decision-making during the discharge process. Occupational therapists can use this information to guide planning and goal setting. - Highlights the university and program for graduate student research - Meets scholarship goal of ACOTE® professional development plan
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This scholarly activity demonstrates command of one's discipline and supports teaching effectiveness in assigned coursework

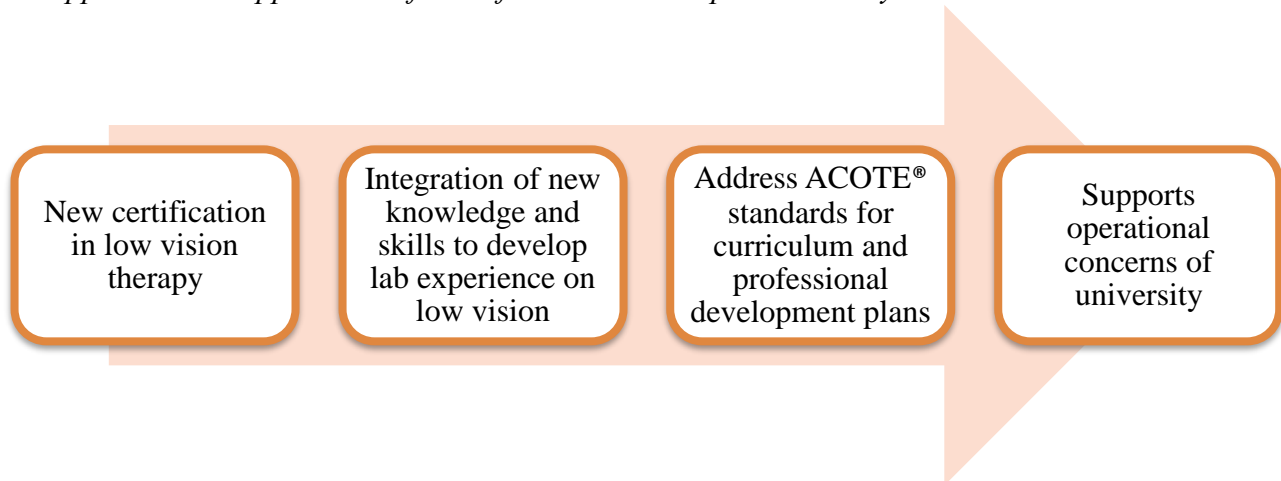
Professional Development

Occupational therapy educators are required to demonstrate a consistent commitment to advancing knowledge and skills required to fulfill the institution's mission and one's discipline. What constitutes effective professional development is variable across institutions. AOTA defines continuous professional development as lifelong learning that maintains practitioner competence, ensures client safety and quality outcomes, enhances professional practice, and reaching career goals (AOTA, 2017). The AOTA *Professional Development Tool* (PDT) is a member benefit tool that facilitates assessment of learning needs and interests, creating a professional development plan, and documenting professional development activities (AOTA, 2020). Additional occupational therapy resources, including the AOTA position statement *Continuing Professional Development in Occupational Therapy* and the NBCOT® *Renewal Activities Chart* can also direct forms of recognized professional development (AOTA, 2017; NBCOT®, 2020). There are a wide range of formal and informal professional development activities

used by occupational therapists (Johnson Coffelt & Gabriel, 2017). The narrative should describe how professional development has value to one's academic expertise, institution, and can be applied to teaching or clinical practice (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Appraisal and Application of a Professional Development Activity



Service

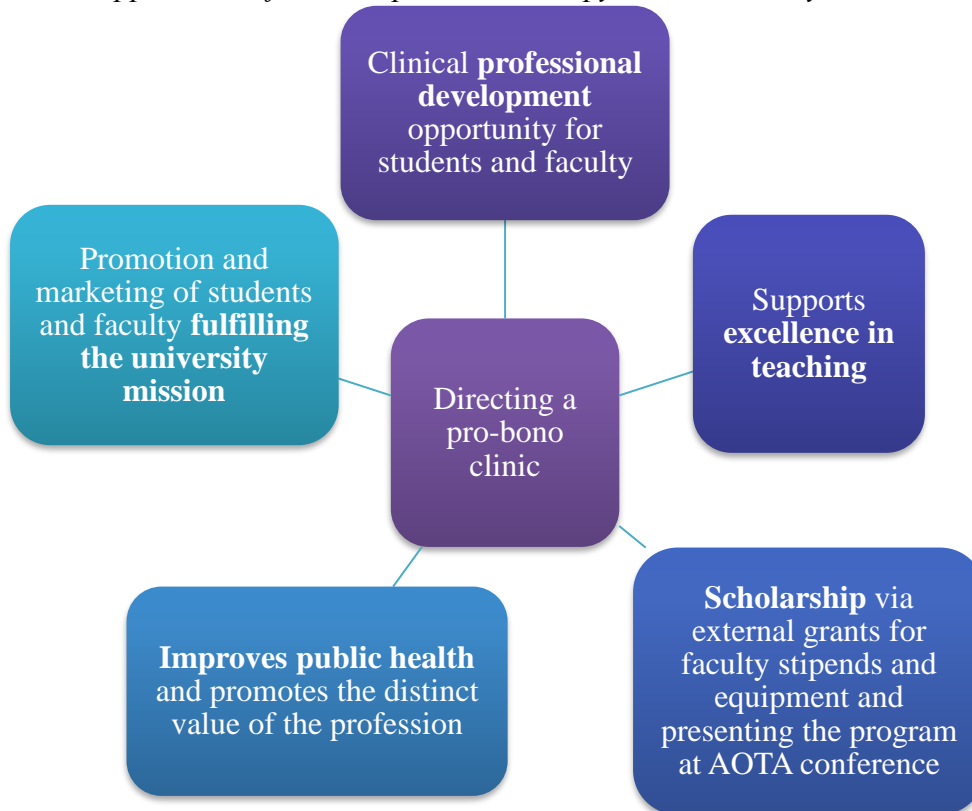
Service to the institution, one's profession, and community are common categories addressed in the portfolio. As previously mentioned, occupational therapy educators should refer to the various institutional resources and literature from the profession to inform criteria for service. Service by the occupational therapy educator is often an integral component of teaching and research/scholarship activities (AOTA, 2016). For example, occupational therapy educators and students frequently host social events for organizations that serve individuals with physical or intellectual challenges. These social events benefit community members and provide students with an opportunity to develop communication strategies that improve occupational performance.

Leadership roles will generally have more value in the promotion and tenure review process, and this should be emphasized and explained. There are distinctions between service activities that impact appraisal and this should be discussed with administrators and trusted mentors. For example, volunteering to participate in a 1-day fundraising event does not involve the same level of commitment as serving in a sustained leadership role in an institutional, professional, or community organization. The trajectory of service should ultimately subscribe to the mission of the institution, benefit the institution, and support your role as an occupational therapy educator.

Service opportunities can vary greatly among institutions. Track and record any volunteer activities that serve to benefit the institution, one's profession, or community. Be sure to obtain letters or other documentation of service that specifically explains the impact or value of the activity. Be deliberate about service opportunities and try to focus on 1–2 per semester. Faculty should carefully plan and invest time in service endeavors that contribute to multiple areas of faculty performance. Figure 2 is one example of illustrating the appraisal and application of service to the community.

Figure 2

The Appraisal and Application of an Occupational Therapy Service Activity



Finishing the Portfolio

A prudent first step in completing the portfolio is review for adherence to application instructions outlined by the institution. This initial step underscores the importance of attending educational or training sessions on the process of academic promotion and tenure. Second, the portfolio must be organized and clear in emphasizing how the occupational therapy educator’s record has met or exceeded expectations for academic promotion and tenure. To aid this second step, ask one trusted colleague and one objective colleague to review the narrative and specify areas to focus their review. Keep in mind that readability of the portfolio can determine failure or success. Third, if permitted, include letters of reference to support and add dimensions to the portfolio. Finally, proofread the portfolio carefully; we recommend an initial read, wait a few days, and then proofread again.

Conclusion

Successful promotion of occupational therapy educators contributes to the pillars of the profession’s *Vision 2025* and *Centennial Vision*. This article, as well as resources in the profession of occupational therapy, can inform a portfolio development plan. Understanding expectations and maintaining consistent focus on academic promotion and tenure goals can aid successful academic promotion and tenure.

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