

Turning your Passions into Scholarship

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Goals and Objectives:

1. Discuss the changing face of education and scholarship in EM, and the importance of developing your niche in academic Emergency Medicine
2. Describe techniques for identifying areas that you are passionate about and mechanisms for turning areas of interest into areas of expertise.
3. Demonstrate the role of emerging technologies in Emergency Medicine in the clinical and educational context including VR, AR, 360 video, and simulation

You joined an academic medicine department because you love teaching residents and medical students. But now you find yourself struggling to find ways to turn your efforts into productive scholarship. As a new faculty member, it can be overwhelming to initiate the process of “scholarly work” to launch a successful academic career. One of the first steps is to develop a niche, a special interest that can be a common thread towards gaining national reputation and successful promotion. But this process in itself can be problematic as many new faculty are not sure what specific path they would like to follow to be successful. We’ll discuss in our session how to search for a niche in unexpected places to find your passion, and then how to convert these interests into productive scholarly work to get promoted.

Approach 1 - Identify a Niche (The Standard Advice)

One of the first steps to a successful academic career is to develop a special area of interest, a niche. This is important because it is impossible to be good at everything. And if you attempt to do everything, more likely you will spread yourself too thin to make progress. So, what makes a good niche?

First, it should be something that you **enjoy**. This will allow for intrinsic motivation to help drive these projects forward. No one wants to toil away at an academic niche that they hate.

Second, you should have some natural talent in this special area. While this is not always required, most of us gravitate towards activities that we have **aptitude**. Now saying this, if you find a passion but also discover no innate aptitude, it’s okay to follow this passion so long as there is a clear path for improvement. If you discover that you are not improving, then it is likely better to move on to other pursuits to find easier success.

Also, this area of interest or passions should **be unique** so that the niche is not already filled with other successful academics. If everyone has already explored this particular passion, it will be that much more difficult to find novel approaches to gain national reputation. Areas that are not already saturated with experts are much easier to break into early in an academic career. Unique does not mean that NO ONE is doing work with this topic, however, as it can be equally challenging to be the first in uncharted territory.

As you work through the early years of an academic career in search of your niche, keep these general principles in mind:

- **Say YES** to new opportunities. Early in a career, your passions may not be clear and it can be helpful to try out many different possible opportunities in administration, education and research.
- But, **say NO** to current obligations that are not enjoyable or productive. There will always be more work to do that physically possible, so it's important to pick the projects that bring self-fulfillment and are productive. Certainly do your best on a coding project to see if you can bring it back to life, but after a few rounds at some point it's time to call the code and move on to other opportunities.
- Work projects in **parallel**. Have work done on one project apply to multiple types of scholarship. Take the talk you prepared for resident conference and give it to local EMS and improve for a national audience. Write a blog post on the topic, be a guest on a podcast. With each new exposure gives opportunities to hone the project and further develop a possible niche.

Looking for a passion or niche in personal hobbies can be a natural way to fulfill these three principles, as you are likely to find your hobbies enjoyable and are already a relative expert in this somewhat outside the box approach to academics.

Approach 2 - Adapt Hobby or Outside Interest (“Venn Diagram” Approach)

Consider your interests and hobbies and think about how it could relate to others, and how you could make it appeal to a more general audience. In this way, instead of keeping your personal life and professional life circles separate, see how they overlap for the Venn Diagram approach to scholarship. This is another way to use the **parallel** strategy mentioned above.

Is there any overlap with current activities? How can it be applied to EM clinical care?

How can it be applied to EM teaching?

How can it be applied to other areas: communication, teamwork, leadership, resilience, wellness?

Summary:

How do you leverage what you're interested in to make a meaningful experience for others? Essentially, it boils down to finding a part of Emergency Medicine that you love and can develop expertise, which will make it more sustainable for you to devote your time and energy to generate scholarly work.

A project that you are excited to share creates a natural incentive to spend your finite time and energy effectively. This type of scholarship can be the enjoyable aspect of your career as opposed to just another "necessary evil" checkbox towards promotion. More traditional niches such as undergraduate medical education can serve this role, but do not short change your personal interests that may be a gold mine of potential scholarship and professional fulfillment.

Examples:

- Technology
- Bringing humor to research can make it fun. In the article "[Everything is Awesome: Don't forget the Lego](#)" study, authors tested average time for a lego head to pass through volunteers. It's a funny read!
- In another fun study, researchers built a kidney stone model and tested the ability of a [roller coaster to dislodge a kidney stone](#).
- White Coat Investor / Physician on FIRE
- Teresa Chan - was board game lover and then developed EM board game [GridLockED](#) that has players manage ED flow.
- Interest in running could lead to becoming an expert in marathon medicine

When you go to turn your passion into scholarship, think beyond the traditional:

- New curriculum
- Teaching methods
- Pilot projects
- Assessment / evaluation methods
- Policy statements
- Position papers
- Guidelines
- Educational reviews
- External Validation

If your niche relates to EM Education, know these venues that will accept education scholarship: JETem, Teaching and Learning in Medicine, MedEdPortal, WestJEM Education Supplement, AEM Education and Training, Cureus

More traditional venues with higher impact (lower acceptance rate!): Academic Medicine, Advances in Health Sciences Education, Medical Teacher, Medical Education, Journal of Graduate Medical Education

When you go to prepare your submission, keep in mind these key reasons for rejection:

- Not generalizable
- Mismatch of objectives/goal and measurement instrument
- Does not contribute to the field
- Failure to adequately address revisions

We hope that this information gives a new faculty member a different perspective on the idea of developing a niche and provide some next steps on making progress towards that promotion to associate professor.