

University of Massachusetts Medical School Academic Personnel Policy (APP)

Selecting Areas of Distinction (AoD). Faculty are expected to demonstrate excellence in one or more Areas of Distinction (AoD) that provide a unifying theme for their activities, achievements, scholarship, and academic reputation. A faculty member selects a primary AoD in consultation with their chair, chief or dean. The AoD should reflect the focus of their work and their career plan—the goals that they wish to achieve at UMMS.

Appointment. For the appointment process, new faculty members are typically guided in the selection of a primary AoD by the individual (chair, dean, program director) who hires them. This decision is usually straightforward and is based on the expectations for the faculty member and their distribution of effort:

Health Care Delivery: intended for faculty who devote majority effort to clinical practice.

Investigation: intended for faculty engaged primarily in research, either as a PI or as part of a research team.

Education: intended for faculty who focus on educational activities and scholarship.

[Note: clinicians who are appointed as Affiliate Faculty to provide clinical teaching services should select Health Care Delivery as their primary AoD, reflecting their clinical expertise, rather than Education.]

Population Health & Public Policy is intended for faculty members who collaborate with communities and local, state, and federal agencies in developing, implementing and evaluating health programs and policies.

Annual Performance Review (APR). Faculty identify their primary AoD on their APR form. Review your selection annually as career goals and distribution of effort may change over time. The APR provides an opportunity to discuss your AoD with your chair, chief or dean and will help you set your goals and objectives, so that your future activities are aligned with your progress towards academic advancement. Consider the following:

What are the expectations for you as a faculty member?

What were you hired to do and in what Area? Are you achieving those expectations or have your goals changed? For example, perhaps you were hired for your clinical expertise (and appointed with a primary AoD of Health Care Delivery) but you have developed a strong research program with publications, presentations and external funding, potentially supporting a transition to Investigation as your primary AoD.

Where do you devote most time and effort?

The primary AoD for many faculty will be where they devote most effort, and your achievements should match your distribution of effort. For example, Health Care Delivery would be the appropriate AoD for a clinician who has most effort allocated to patient care. To be considered for promotion, however, faculty need to ensure that their effort generates the achievements required for promotion in Health Care Delivery.

Where do you have the highest achievements?

On the other hand, an AoD where you devote lesser effort may have yielded more substantial achievements. For example, a clinician-educator with 30% effort allocated to the role as residency program director and who has developed new courses, published in educational journals, and has a reputation as an educator beyond UMMS might propose Education as their primary AoD.

Promotion. Faculty candidates identify their AoD as part of the promotion process. Consider the following:

How can you make the best case for promotion: i.e., in which Area(s) do you meet the criteria?

Assess your progress towards promotion by examining the tables of achievements in the Academic Personnel Policy (APP). For example, to meet Established level of achievement, you must demonstrate excellence in your AoD, have a record of scholarship, and be recognized beyond UMMS for your work. All three elements are essential. Do you meet the criteria? What more do you need to do?

What if you are strong in two Areas?

Promotion requires achievements in *at least one* AoD at the level required for the rank you are seeking. Faculty who are strong in two AoDs may identify a second AoD. For example, a clinician who conducts some research may assert that their achievements in Health Care Delivery, as their primary AoD, are supported by their achievements in Investigation or, vice-versa, that their primary AoD of Investigation is informed by their clinical expertise. In deciding between two areas, a useful “reality check” is to ask yourself what in Area is your academic reputation the strongest? You may wish to seek consultation with an OFA specialist.

Resources and additional information are available on the OFA website: <https://www.umassmed.edu/ofa/>.