



Introduction

1

Rosa Lee

Health Professions and Academia: How to Begin Your Career was written by health professions' students, trainees, and faculty members of BNGAP – Building the Next Generation of Academic Physicians. BNGAP is an organization whose mission is to help diverse learners become aware of academia as a career option and to provide them with resources to further explore and potentially embark on an academic career. BNGAP's first book, *Succeeding in Academic Medicine: A Roadmap for Diverse Medical Students and Residents* (2020), provided core information and inspiring stories for graduate trainees, particularly from groups underrepresented in medicine (UIM) to consider careers in academic medicine. This second book is aimed at college and post-baccalaureate learners who are considering careers in academic health professions. This book is a testament to BNGAP's recognition that (1) the key to recruiting diverse faculty in academic health professions is to inform and inspire students early, and (2) while BNGAP's work was initially focused on trainees in the field of medicine, its curriculum and resources for pre-faculty development can be effectively applied to promote the development of diverse faculty across academic healthcare disciplines such as nursing, medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry. We not only want readers to be on Pre-Nursing, Pre-Med, Pre-Pharm, or Pre-Dental career tracks, but we also want diverse learners to become Pre-Faculty or PREFAC. Pre-Faculty development is defined as providing trainees with foundational self-efficacy, knowledge, skills, and experiences to be successfully appointed, and eventually promoted and tenured within an academic institution. (Sánchez J.P. and Williams V., 2019).

Being PREFAC is inclusive of all healthcare disciplines and can apply to students who wish to pursue a career in academia, like Pre-Nursing applies to students pursuing a nursing career. Like its predecessor, this book serves as a guide to inspire students from diverse backgrounds to pursue careers in academic healthcare. However, this book focuses on college and post-bac learners. First, the book

R. Lee, MD (✉)

Associate Dean for Curriculum and Assessment, CUNY School of Medicine, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: rlee@med.cuny.edu

presents an overview to possible career pathways in academic health professions so that early (college, pre-graduate) learners can recognize opportunities for themselves in these fields. Second, the book addresses the core domains (community service, leadership, educational scholarship, and research) from which students can develop themselves as competitive applicants to graduate school, but also as a foundation from which they can establish successful careers in academic healthcare.

Author's Perspective

As I reflect on the content of this book, I wish that an organization such as BNGAP had been available to me when I was a college student and an early trainee in medicine. As I look at my own career, I realize that my own path to academic medicine came through what I can only describe as moments of *serendipity* and *blind leaps of faith* in which I followed opportunities that let me develop my interest in teaching and medical education. I was drawn to academic medicine based on my personal encounters with physicians and faculty members whom I deeply admired. Yet I had never had the courage early in my training and career to formally ask for mentorship or help in identifying clear steps to advance my career in academic medicine. While I could identify role models in medical school and residency whom I admired for their outstanding clinical acumen, empathy, and passion for teaching, I still felt lost in those years of training. It was only later in my career as an attending physician, when I heard a speaker describe the concept coined by Bill George at Harvard Business School as “finding one’s true north,” that I recognized the impact and importance of identifying my personal mission and developing a career trajectory that was intentional and guided by that mission. I realized that my personal mission was to make medical education equitable – to empower students from all backgrounds to succeed in becoming physicians.

Additionally, as an Asian-identified person in academic medicine, I have looked to my identity as a rich source of pride and support. Finding connections with other Asian-American colleagues has been inspiring, and while I may not have encountered many Asian-identified faculty in positions of leadership at my academic institutions when I was a college or medical student, I take great pride in seeing myself and my peers taking on leadership positions in academic medicine now. At the same time, I am appreciative of how heterogeneous our Asian-American community is and how important it is to acknowledge the varied life experiences of Asian-American trainees and faculty. While Asian-Americans are often referred to as a “not-underrepresented” minority group in medicine?, this term belies the diversity of the Asian-American community and the very real disparities and opportunity gaps in education that exist among different origin groups in the Asian-American population. This is something that can only be addressed and ultimately mitigated through a deeper and more nuanced understanding of diversity.

In my current role as a curriculum dean at CUNY School of Medicine, a seven-year BS/MD program, I encounter students who have committed to a career in medicine early on. While they have already entered into a medical program as college

students, they too ask questions and seek guidance on ways to thrive academically and develop themselves professionally for a rewarding career in medicine that allows them opportunities and choices while staying authentic to their personal values. During a recent conversation with first-year college students in my program, I was asked to give advice to those who might be unsure of how or where to start to develop research interests or professional development opportunities. Their questions reminded me of the value that this book holds for students who wish to pursue the health professions, and my response to my students' questions was informed very much by the premise of this book - it is to start with yourself. It is your identity, values, and experiences that you bring as diverse learners to the health professions and ultimately to the care of patients that matters tremendously. To recognize and align these values and experiences to the health professions is to identify your vocation, and this alignment can set you on a career path that will inspire you throughout your professional life.

Book Outline

The fields of academic healthcare and its entry points through graduate health professions schools are admittedly competitive. With the many hurdles that stand before applicants to enter health professions schools, including standardized tests and large applicant pools for limited slots in schools, it is understandable to feel overwhelmed at times, and perhaps even doubt in one's ability to enter and succeed in these fields. For everyone who may have ever felt this way, I wish to say that this book was written for you. This book has been written in recognition of the challenges of applying to and matriculating into health professions schools, particularly as they may be accentuated for applicants from under-represented backgrounds in health professions, including those underrepresented in medicine (UIM) groups, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and first-generation college students. It serves to encourage and guide students particularly from diverse backgrounds in preparing for and applying to health professions graduate schools and considering future career opportunities such as academic positions.

This book is meant to be interactive and to engage with you directly as a reader. Each of the nine chapters in the book begin with reflections from students and health professionals on their personal journeys to careers in academic healthcare. All but one of the chapters' co-authors identify with groups underrepresented in the academic health professions - women, sexual and gender minoritized individuals, and racial and ethnic minoritized individuals. Their diverse voices and honest accounts of the challenges and rewards of their career paths may resonate with your own life experiences. Their stories are here to inspire you as well as to help you see a little bit of yourself on these paths. Each chapter also contains exercises and activities which will also help you apply the principles from the chapter to your own career path. Case examples offer additional exercises to help the reader recognize opportunities and challenges. I encourage you to use these stories and activities as a springboard to further your own reflections and clarify your own goals and plans.

Chapter 2: What Is Academia All About? Academic Career Roles and Responsibilities

If considering a career in academic healthcare, it is important to recognize common career roles and opportunities. This chapter describes the structure and leadership roles within academic healthcare fields as well as common career tracks for faculty in academic healthcare. The core pillars upon which academic careers are developed – scholarly teaching, research, and service – are introduced. The chapter concludes with exercises to help you envision the steps along your own academic career journey.

Chapter 3: Leveraging the Value of Diversity in the Academic Workforce

After defining diversity and intersectionality as important concepts that shape healthcare delivery, this chapter highlights the ways that diversity not only adds value, but drives excellence in academia and healthcare. This chapter presents data on the current state of diversity in academic healthcare workforces, and reinforces the urgent need to diversify the healthcare workforce to meet the needs of our diverse society. This chapter concludes with concrete suggestions on how applicants from diverse backgrounds can leverage their experiences, values, and personal mission to enter the academic workforce.

Chapter 4: Integrating Community Service into Your Career Success

This chapter provides instruction on how applicants can harness their passion and engagement in community service into scholarly activities that can facilitate their professional development as applicants to health professionals schools. Community service, community engagement, and service learning are defined. Exercises are included to help readers align their personal values and mission to community service projects. Advice is provided on how to gain institutional support for community-focused projects. The chapter concludes by presenting the Kern model for curriculum development as a framework by which you can turn education-related community-focused projects into scholarly activities.

Chapter 5: Realizing Your Leadership Potential

This chapter recognizes leadership as an essential quality for those in academic health careers and as a quality that can be cultivated and developed within every individual. The chapter introduces readers to several examples of leadership theories as well as core traits, values, and work ethics that mark leadership roles across

generations. This chapter contains several exercises that will help you clarify the core traits of leadership as well as the skills that you may already possess and wish to develop to become an effective leader. Case studies are included to highlight opportunities for you to develop leadership skills through typical activities in your undergraduate experience.

Chapter 6: Building Your Social Capital Through Mentorship

This chapter explores the power and impact of mentoring in helping individuals pursue their careers in academic healthcare. The roles and responsibilities for both mentors and mentees are described. This chapter then outlines the keys to establishing and maintaining a successful mentor–mentee relationship.

Chapter 7: The Scholarly Educator

This chapter outlines the steps that students can currently undertake to strengthen their foundation as an educator and in completing educational scholarship. The typical activities of an educator in health professions as defined by the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) are presented to help readers understand the scope of opportunities as an educator in academic healthcare. The chapter then defines educational scholarship and instructs readers on how they may turn their current activities as educators into scholarship activities that can further advance their applications to graduate school as well as their careers in academic healthcare.

Chapter 8: Advancing Change Through Discovery

With research previously described as a core tenet for careers in academia, this chapter delves into providing an overview into the types of research that one can engage in within academic healthcare: basic science, clinical, health services, community-based participatory research, and educational research. Educational research and scholarship is further addressed in Chap. 6. The different research methods, including quantitative and qualitative research, are highlighted. Finally, the chapter guides the reader through steps needed to succeed as well as describing the skills that one will develop while performing research.

Chapter 9: Telling Your Story: Resume, CV, and Applications

In this chapter, “Telling Your Story” refers to the professional attributes and experiences that individuals present to make themselves attractive candidates to institutions. This is formally presented in academia through CVs, resumes, and graduate school applications. This chapter distinguishes features among these three

documents and identifies concrete strategies to help students create their strongest CVs and applications. This chapter also describes ways that you can utilize networking strategies alongside submission of your applications to achieve visibility and success. Additionally, this chapter identifies ways that you can document your current activities to position yourself for future career advancement.

Chapter 10: The Profile of a Competitive Applicant

This final chapter highlights core elements that can make an applicant attractive to health professions graduate schools and can also launch a junior trainee's academic health career. Extra-curricular and professional development activities help applicants demonstrate commitment and can offer pivotal leadership opportunities simultaneously. Understanding the process and timelines for applying to graduate schools is critical to success as well, and this chapter reviews key components of the application process. This chapter also presents the AAMC's "Experiences-Attributes-Metrics" model for holistic review of individual candidates to medical school. Drawing from this model, readers will identify ways that they can establish themselves as unique and competitive candidates for health professions graduate schools. The chapter also presents examples of resources that students may find both within and outside of their institutions to help them with personal and professional development. A final word on career trajectories reminds us that while the strategies presented in this book can help each applicant develop a strong foundation for professional success, the pathway does not have to be same for each applicant, and divergences – both intended and unintended – can ultimately still help applicants reach their goals.

In summary, as you read through each of the chapters in this book, you will find a recurrent theme, which is about recognizing your own values and then considering how they may align with careers in academic healthcare. At its core, this book is a guide to help you turn your interests, values, and talents into a personal mission that can guide your career as a leader in academic healthcare. It has been written to help you find your own "true north." Enjoy the journey and know that we want you to become a faculty member or senior administrator!