

Presentation of Self: An Analysis of Family Science Scholars' Vitae

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An analysis was conducted of the curricula vitae submitted by 60 family science scholars identified as the leading writers of family articles. Results indicated that family scholars included many of the recommended categories, but much variation in content and format existed. Suggestions for developing curriculum vitae as a communication tool are offered.

The effective presentation of the self through symbolic representation in the form of a vita is a task with which all family scientists struggle throughout their academic careers. In the world of academe, the curriculum vitae is the established form of communicating the whole of an academic career. Virtually all announcements require the curriculum vitae to accompany application for an academic position. Therefore, given the importance the vita has to career advancement, as well as the time and energy involved in developing and updating it, the vita, itself, takes on many of the dimensions of a scholarly activity.

The term curriculum vitae also is referred to as vita or detailed resume. There is confusion as to the correct usage of the term vita or vitae. Technically, vitae is in a different Latin form than vita and is not the plural of vita in this usage; it is the genitive case of the noun "vita" and stays the same for one curriculum or several curricula (Wolke, 1983). However, in contemporary usage, it appears that one would be advised to use the term vitae as in curriculum vitae and vita if used alone (Anthony & Roe, 1984). Therefore, for the remainder of this report, vitae will be used in reference to curriculum vitae or when used as the plural of vita, and the singular, vita, will be used elsewhere.

Most information concerning the development of a resume or vita is located in campus career placement offices or in private consulting organizations primarily oriented toward first-time employment in non-academic settings. Advice concerning resume development is centered around an abbreviated description of education and work or work-related experiences as they relate to skill development and targeted for the desired position. Emphasis tends to be on length (1-2 pages), on print (clear, neat, current), and on paper quality (high) and color (i.e. subdued grey or beige). It seems important to

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have a resume which takes only a few moments to scan and which is attractively organized and printed so as to merit attention from a busy potential employer (Ryland & Rosen, 1987). How do curriculum vitae differ from resumes, or do they?

A curriculum vitae literally means "course of life" but has come to include a written summary of an individual's educational and professional experience. It typically contains the following major divisions: Identification (name and complete addresses), Education (degrees earned or in progress), and Professional Experience (current and previous work including graduate assistantships) (Anthony & Roe, 1984). Developing a curriculum vitae involves expanding these three major areas and typically includes the following (Career Planning and Placement, University of Michigan, 1980):

- . Name, Address and Phone Number
- . Education (in reverse chronological order)
- . Dissertation
- . Honors/Awards (optional)
- . Military Experience (optional)
- . Professional Employment (in reverse chronological order. For academics, this section is typically divided into Teaching, Research, Administration, Consulting)
- . Teaching Interests and/or Research Interests (optional)
- . Publications
- . Professional Activities (related titles might be: Professional Memberships; Academic Service; Professional Certification)
- . Languages
- . References

Because little is written about curriculum vitae in general, and nothing specifically aimed at family scientists, the authors believed such information would be useful especially to young professionals. Therefore, the purpose of this report is to provide insight into the content and format of curriculum vitae prepared by leading family scholars.

PROCEDURES AND CONTENTS

Analysis was conducted of the structured elements included in the curricula vitae submitted by 60 scholars identified in an earlier study as the leading writers of family articles during the 1980's (Meredith & Abbott, 1988). First, all categories were identified and every classification was listed and coded. For instance, because work experience was designated in various ways (i.e. "academic experience", "professional experience", "non-academic experience") each was included. Similarly, all classifications were included with the corresponding frequencies. Next, various classifications were combined so that regardless of the term designating the information, if it dealt with past work experience, it was collapsed into a category called "employment history." Again, frequencies were tabulated. In this way, general categories were identified. It was possible, then, to consider vitae in two ways: (1) diversity of content and format; and, (2) similarity of content and format.

Comparing the Michigan document with the vitae in this sample, it was determined that family scholars generally included similar designations to those suggested. Only three of the recommended categories (Dissertation, Language, and References) were not included by at least 50% of our sample. Additionally, more than 50% of family scholars

designated University & Departmental Responsibilities, Grants (sources, amounts, and dates), and Editorial Activities, which are categories not among those recommended in the Michigan document.

Even though the categories used in this study's sample of vitae were similar to the categories recommended by Career Planning and Placement at the University of Michigan (1980), considerable variation occurred in content and format within each category. Vitae ranged in length from 5 to 59 pages ($M=11$ for women and $M=13$ for men). Most began with personal information including Name (53% listed as first, middle initial, last), Office Address/Phone (72%), Home Address/Phone (56%), Date of Birth (43%), Marital Status (20%). Some individuals, however, included a variety of personal information such as place of birth, race, spouse's name and place of birth, spouse's degrees, social security number, military rank and experience, names and ages of children, and one person even included height and weight.

Employment history included the present previous positions (94%), institutional affiliation (90%), and most listed them in reverse chronological order (71%). Many included the titles of courses taught (71%) and various committee memberships and responsibilities (86%). All family scholars included an educational history (59% in the recommended reverse chronological order); nearly all listed degrees and the institutions from which they were granted (97%), with 19% including the title of their dissertations.

Naturally, publications was a category included by all scholars. However, much variation occurred within this broad category. In some cases, individuals simply listed all publications; most, however, subdivided the general publication category into journals or refereed articles (60%), books (62%), book chapters (40%), book reviews (33%), papers (41%), and reports (10%). For those listing publications appearing in a foreign language (18%), most (82%) used the APA recommendation of also including the English translation. Editorial activity was included as a category by 64% of the scholars. Papers delivered at meeting tended to be grouped together in a separate category (59%). In a few cases, manuscripts currently under review were listed and, rarely, those manuscripts in the process of being written.

Research interests and current research activity was included by 67% of the scholars, and most (71%) listed grants they had received including the dates (66%) and amount of the award (55%).

Interestingly, among the family scholars, most entitled the document "vita" (52%), 24% as "vitae," and 18% did not mention either vita or vitae. Also, most did not include professional references (95%).

SUGGESTIONS

Adequately representing one's academic life in a document is an extremely important professional activity which, if done properly, is a continuous process throughout one's career. Family scientists' vitae do not need to be exactly the same, but the authors were struck in this analysis by some of the most successful family scientists with the dramatic differences in many areas (e.e. length, format, content, style, quality of paper, neatness, type of print, major divisions in the vitae).

It may be true that many doctoral students pattern their curriculum vitae after their major advisors'. It is also probably true that most academics, including advisors, do not know what exactly should be included in a curriculum vitae. However, it is an activity

on which most professionals spend a good amount of time. Many revise, revise, and revise, perhaps wisely developing several different versions of the curriculum vitae emphasizing different aspects of one's professional life as the situation for which the vitae will be used demands. Most just hope that one's vitae are close enough to that which is desired to successfully compete for jobs, grants, and/or for promotion and tenure. But there must be a better way to approach this task.

It was evident that, given a stack of vitae (which is often how one's vita is used in the case of a position search), those with particular characteristics stand out--sometimes in the positive sense and in others, not so positive. From this review, the following seem to be most positive:

- . high quality paper
- . clear, dark, distinct print. Relevant subcategories clearly indicated and off-set in darker print
- . uncluttered appearance; not too much on a page
- . no fluff; included only relevant educational and professional experiences and information
- . logically ordered (preferably in reverse chronological order)
- . relevant sub-categories
- . publications separated into categories (i.e. refereed journals, book chapters).
- . did not include manuscripts not yet accepted

Those curricula vitae which seem to make less than a positive statement about the author were lacking one or more of the above qualities and also included such things as:

- . inappropriate material such as personal information which federal legislation prohibits perspective employers from soliciting (i.e. age, sex, marital status, age of children, religion, ethnic origin, health including height and weight)
- . personal community service as evidence of professional service (professional service typically should reflect service to one's department, university, professional societies and organizations or community service clearly related to one's professional role)
- . disproportionately long and/or cumbersome to read
- . an abstract of the vita. (It may be appropriate to have a short resume to be used in some circumstances, but probably should not accompany the curriculum vitae)
- . typographical errors

This analysis has pointed to the fact that there is no single style used in developing a curriculum vitae. Obviously, the persons represented in these vitae are highly successful family scientists. However, even among such a select group of professionals, some vitae definitely made a more positive impression than others.

A curriculum vitae is primarily a communication tool. In a sense, it can be categorized as an advertisement tool as well. It is the mechanism by which the family scientist initially "sells" him or herself to a prospective employer, selection committee, granting agency, board of directors, and/or promotion and tenure committee. It is vitally important that the document be an accurate, concise representation of the individual. "Truth in advertising" may be an appropriate concept in this regard. Family scientists owe it to themselves to prepare the best possible document and, more importantly, advisors owe young professionals with whom they are associated positive examples and effective mentoring in this process.

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