



Position: Dean

Position Description: A Dean serves as the senior academic and administrative leader of a college of osteopathic medicine, responsible for setting strategic vision, ensuring academic quality, advancing accreditation and outcomes, supporting faculty and learners, and representing the institution internally and externally.

Ideal skill sets include strategic leadership, communication, change management, fiscal oversight, accreditation expertise, relationship-building, and a deep commitment to osteopathic principles, inclusion, and mentorship.

Education, Licenses, Certifications, and Leadership Development:

- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) degree
- Board certification in a clinical specialty
- Unrestricted medical licensure
- Strong understanding of accreditation processes (AOA, COCA, ACGME, ACCME)
- Optional additional education:
 - Master's degree (e.g., education, leadership, public health, or administration)
 - Medical director or academic leadership certifications
 - Leadership programs:
 - [AOA Leadership Academy](#)
 - [AACOM Senior Leadership Development Program](#)

Foundational Clinical and Teaching Experience

- Develop clinical credibility through full-time practice
- Serve as:
 - Clinical faculty or adjunct faculty
 - Clerkship director or preceptor
 - Residency faculty or program director
- Build a reputation as a strong educator, mentor, and collaborator
- Maintain excellence in patient care while exploring teaching and administrative interests

Early Leadership and Service Roles

- Say “yes” to leadership opportunities that arise organically
- Engage in:
 - Committee chair or task force leadership
 - Residency or program development roles
 - Medical staff leadership (e.g., Chief of Staff, Medical Director)
- Participate actively in:
 - State osteopathic associations
 - National organizations (AOA, AACOM, specialty colleges)
 - NBOME National Faculty
 - AOA board certification item writer or examiner
 - Advisor to student organizations
- Develop skills in communication, conflict management, operations, and accreditation



Advancement into Academic Administration

- Transition from faculty roles into formal leadership positions, such as:
 - Course Director
 - Clerkship Chair
 - Department Chair
 - Assistant Dean
 - Associate Dean
 - Program Director
 - Designated Institutional Official
- Gain hands-on experience with:
 - Budgeting and resource management
 - Faculty recruitment and development
 - Curriculum delivery and oversight
 - Accreditation reporting and compliance
 - Listening to learners and faculty needs
 - Ensuring learner competencies from national organizations are adequately carried out
- Learn through “on-the-job” leadership, often without formal training; adaptability is critical

Mentorship, Networking, and Sponsorship

- Cultivate multiple mentors (inside and outside your institution)
- Build authentic professional relationships across disciplines and institutions
- Allow mentors to:
 - Open doors
 - Recommend you for opportunities
 - Provide candid feedback
- Pay mentorship forward by sponsoring students, residents, and junior faculty
- Networking consistently emerged as a defining factor in advancement to dean-level roles

Leadership Philosophy and Personal Attributes

Successful deans consistently demonstrate:

- Commitment to service over self (“eulogy virtues” vs. résumé virtues)
- Resilience and comfort with ambiguity
- Willingness to learn, unlearn, and grow without formal roadmaps
- Strong work ethic, integrity, and accountability
- Ability to balance vision with operational realities
- Focus on diversity, representation, and lifting others as they advance
- Acceptance of non-linear career paths shaped by timing, geography, and opportunity
- Strong networking skills
- Communicating impact of physician education on local community health care needs
- Ability to connect and build trust with learners, faculty, staff at institution



Preparing for the Dean Role

- Demonstrate readiness by:
 - Leading through institutional change or growth
 - Managing complex stakeholder relationships
 - Communicating transparently during uncertainty and taking accountability
 - Being able to delegate
 - Navigating competing professional school needs at institution
- Maintain national visibility through speaking, publishing, and organizational leadership
- Be open to geographic mobility and unconventional paths
- Recognize that many deans did not anticipate the role early but were prepared when the opportunity emerged

Key Takeaways for Aspiring Deans

- There is no single pathway but common experiences include clinical excellence, progressive leadership, mentorship, and service.
- Leadership development is often informal; proactive learning and adaptability are essential.
- Relationships, reputation, and readiness matter as much as credentials.
- Aspiring deans should focus less on titles and more on impact, integrity, and long-term contribution to medical education.