

10-2019

## Who's in the Inner Circle? Exploring Network Connections Among Health Professions Faculty for Career Advancement

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### Recommended Citation

Becker, Maureen; Wordekemper, Elsie; and Becker, Betsy J., "Who's in the Inner Circle? Exploring Network Connections Among Health Professions Faculty for Career Advancement" (2019). *Posters and Presentations: Physical Therapy*. 21.

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# Who's in the Inner Circle? Exploring Network Connections Among Health Professions Faculty for Career Advancement

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## Background and Purpose

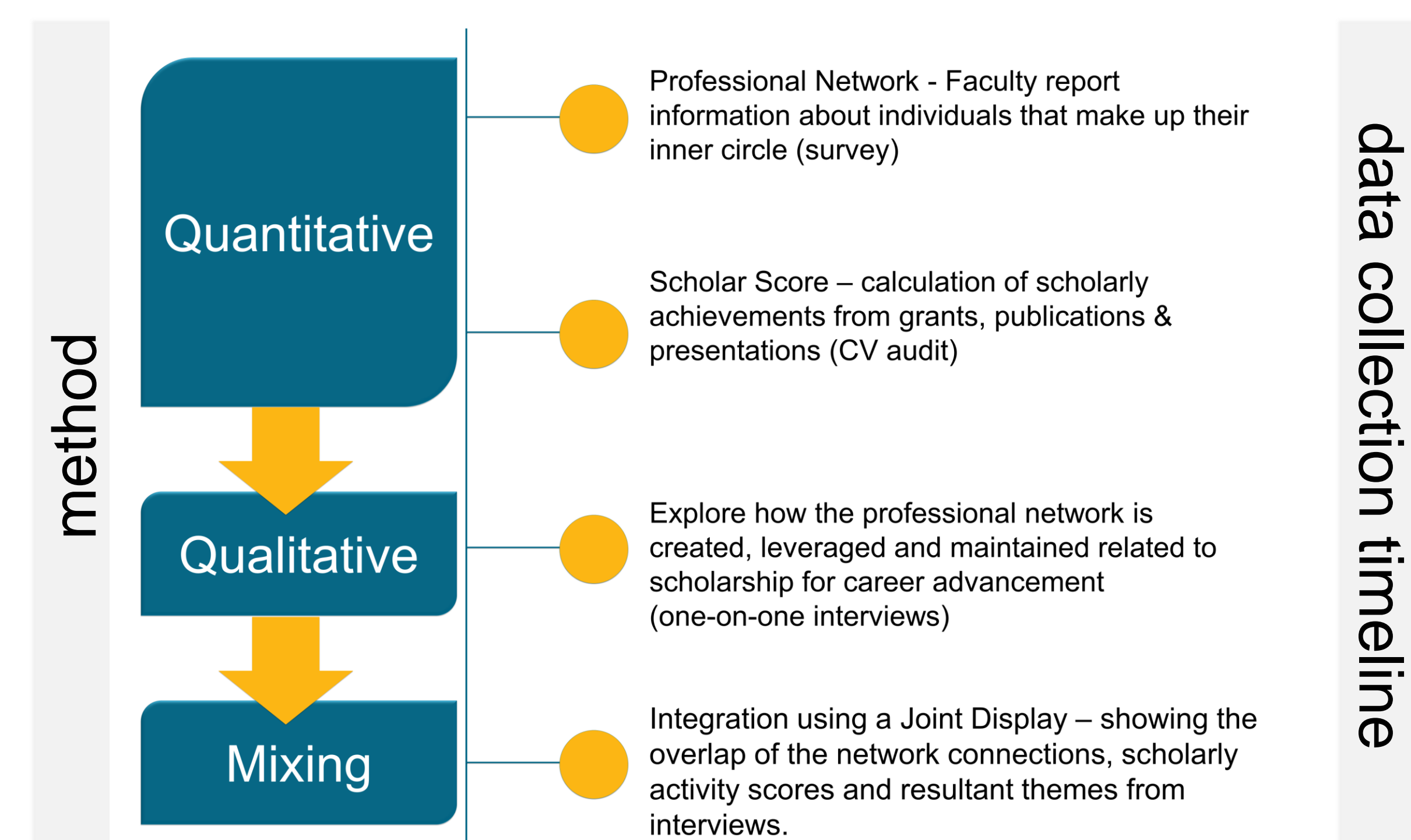
The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of network connections in new or early career health professional faculty.

Knowing this information can foster targeted faculty development strategies to build, leverage and maintain connections for advancement with scholarly activity.

- Faculty shortages currently exist amongst the medical and healthcare professions compounded by an aging U.S. population, increasing the demand for health care services.<sup>1</sup>
- Each year, new faculty are hired, following carefully executed and costly searches. Much time, energy and finances are invested into "human" resources, not limited to, but including; salary, benefits and start up packages. This only matters if the new faculty member is retained and successfully achieves promotion and tenure.<sup>2,3</sup>
- All faculty must retain an active scholarly agenda to successfully advance in the higher education paradigm. Each discipline may have unique challenges; however, all must achieve optimal performance in the three pillars: teaching, service and scholarship.<sup>4,5</sup>
- When mentors and faculty members are knowledgeable about the existing and potential network connections, a more individualized approach is possible.<sup>6</sup>
- Armed with professional network information combined with the goals and resources of the institution, career advancement may be achieved quicker or with less confusion.

## Methods Description

An explanatory sequential mixed methods study design was employed in this study. The data was collected in series and analyzed separately. This poster presents data from the quantitative phase of the project.



This pilot study took place at an urban university system, City University of New York – York College (CUNY-York). We studied the CUNY-York School of Health Sciences and Professional Programs new faculty. In an early preemptive strategy to promote faculty development and retention, the CUNY-York Dean meets twice a semester with this interdisciplinary faculty cohort, at the Dean's New Faculty Luncheon Forum. Participant names were replaced with a numerical code, while mentor/collaborator names were replaced by alpha coding. The lists linking names and codes were maintained by the independent researcher not at CUNY-York.

## Scholarship & Network Outcomes



**Scholar Score** – Each grant, publication and presentation is given a value based on quantity and quality. For example, grants with higher funding amounts are worth more than lower funding, first author peer reviewed publications are worth more than middle authorship, and a peer reviewed national presentation is worth more than a local invited presentation.<sup>6</sup>

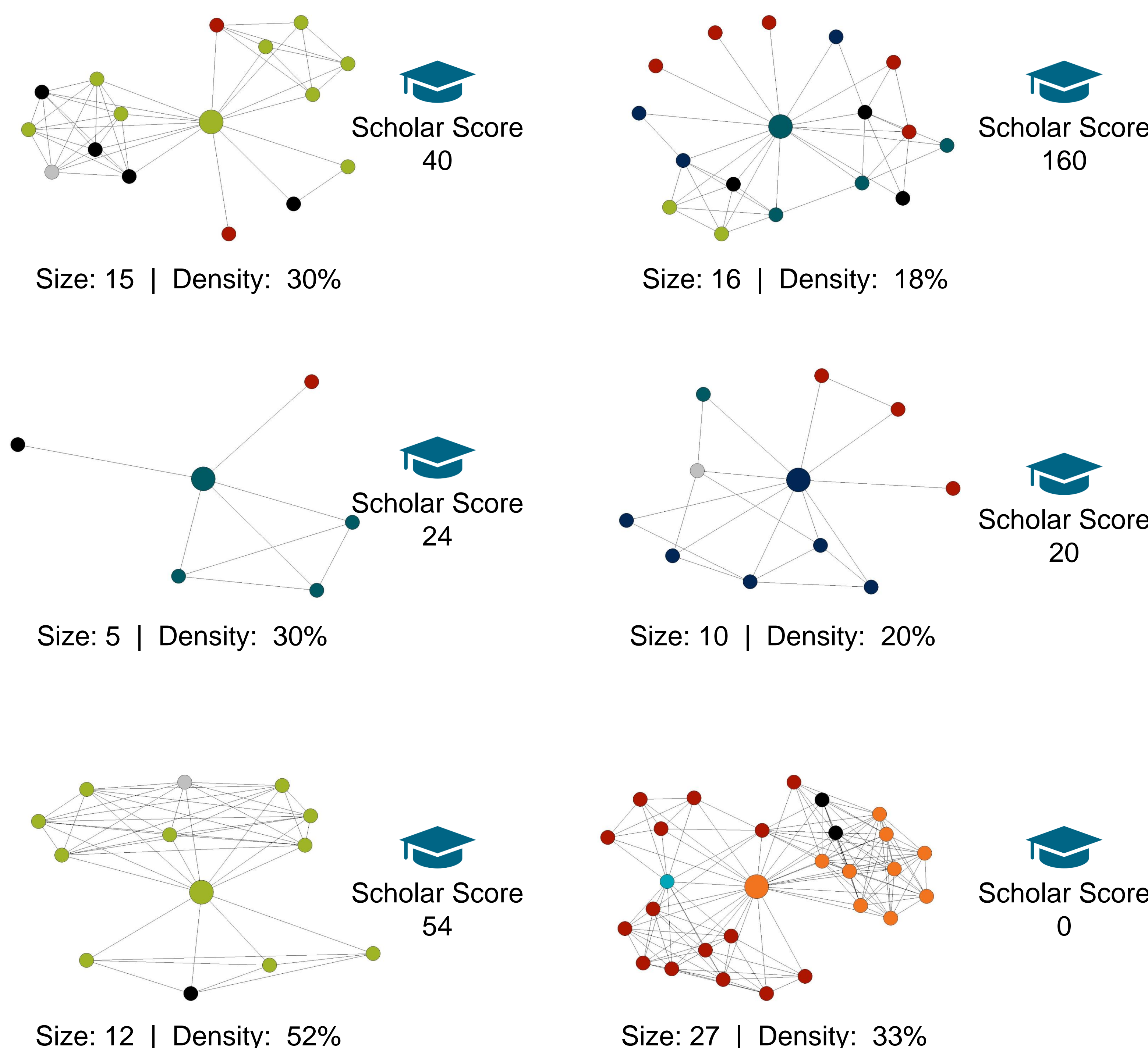


**Size** – The number of individuals in the professional network. Participants listed people who are very important collaborators and sources of information for scholarship.

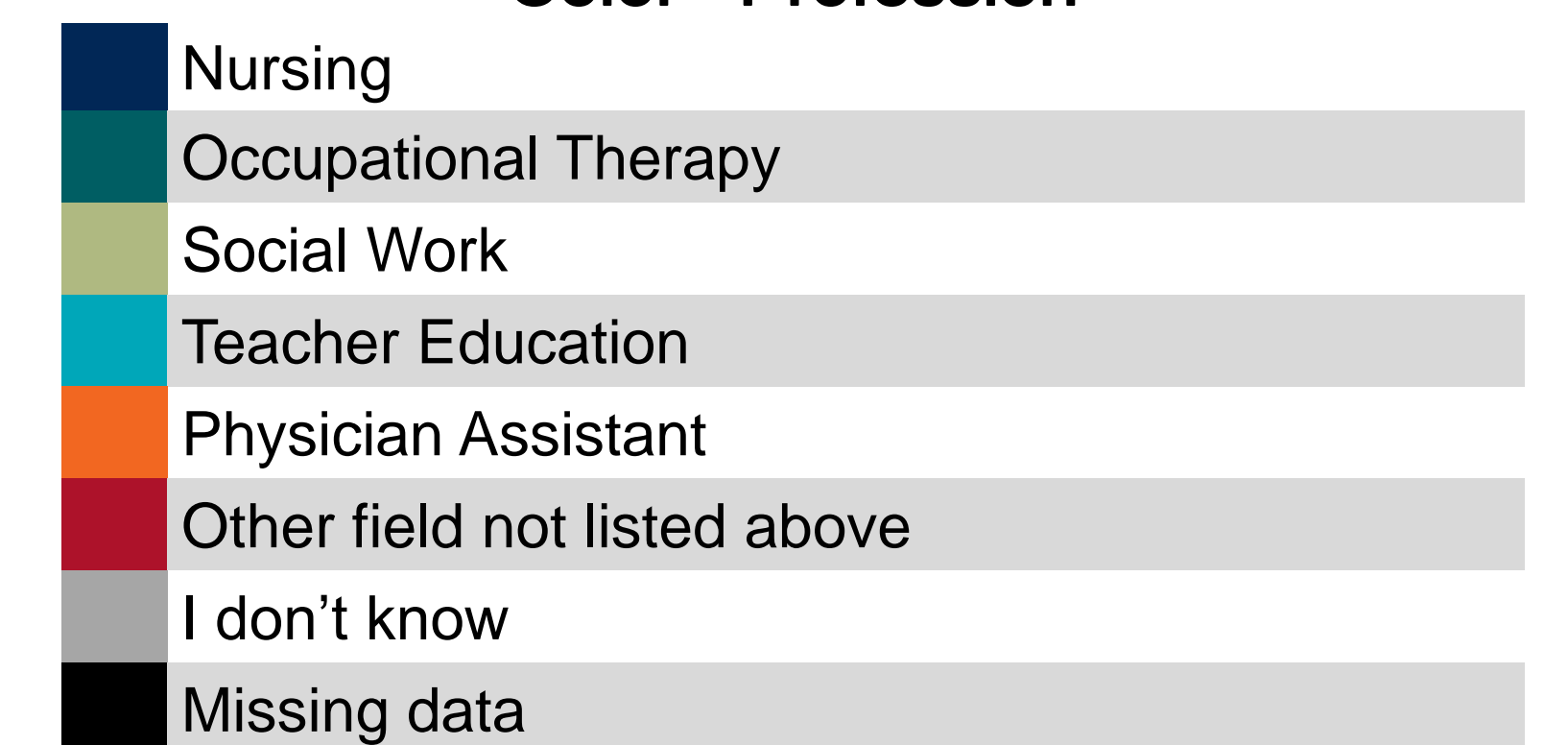


**Density** – A measure of interconnectedness between the people in one's professional network, or the proportion of one's network members who are also connected with each other. The more connections, the higher the density and the more closed and interconnected the network becomes. With lower density the reciprocal is true: fewer connections mean the network is more open and less interconnected.<sup>6</sup>

Individuals on the maps are placed nearest to those with whom they share the most connections. The closer an individual is to another, the more relationships they have in common.



### Color - Profession



### Size of the Marker (node)

The larger center circle is the study participant. The smaller markers represent the individuals named in the network.

## Conclusion and Future Directions

This study illustrates a method to increase self-reflection about one's professional network and the role it may have on faculty development toward scholarly activity goals. Strategies for creating effective networks of collaborators should be implemented and utilized as one of the tools used by mentors in the development of new and early career faculty scholarly pursuits.

Continuing this strategy of self-reflection each year with all new and early career health professional faculty as a cohort model will be further executed and monitored to continue to better define/refine strategies to positively influence faculty scholarship, career advancement and retention.

The medical and health professions faculty shortages are real issues which will only get worse unless deliberate measures are taken to reduce faculty attrition, while enhancing faculty preparedness and scholarship to address the challenges that lie ahead (large numbers of senior faculty approaching retirement).

The academic strength of an institution is tied to its faculty success. They represent diversity of expertise in research, education and scholarship. This one strategy along with a combination of other strategies, some of which were built into this cohort model (an interdisciplinary cohort group, opportunities for collaboration and mentoring, along with administrative support), aims to help increase faculty numbers to better educate students and provide high quality care to an ever growing, diverse aging population.

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