Developing a Research Agenda

This material serves as an introduction to developing a research agenda for both new and seasoned faculty members.

One of the most rewarding aspects of a career in academia is generating new knowledge. Graduate students learn the research process, and new faculty members begin a journey as researchers. While there is a great deal of leeway concerning what is studied and research methodologies used, faculty members are expected to engage in research, whether funded or unfunded.

Deciding where to begin is a challenge for new faculty members, a decision made much easier by outlining a research agenda early in the process.

A research agenda is the set of questions, issues, or problems you hope to explore during the next incremental period of your career. It serves as a tool to better manage your time and resources, as well as a dynamic road map for your research.

It is helpful for faculty members to outline tentative periodic goals at the outset of a faculty appointment; asking yourself where you see your research in 3 years, 5 years, 10 years? Creating a long-range research plan will help you make strategic decisions about pursuing funding opportunities while avoiding the trap of funding dictating your research.

While the goals may change over time, an early focus on an intended plan will help guide decisions made throughout a scholarly research career by asking the question, “Does this project enhance the goals of my research agenda?”

Peer review committees look for evidence of a clear, consistent and progressing research line of inquiry when considering whether a faculty member is ready for promotion and tenure. As a career progresses a body of research should build in scope, depth, and means of dissemination which should be accomplished through planning and setting goals.

A research agenda should be revisited frequently and updated annually. At the same time, any new endeavors or progress on existing ones should be regularly updated on the curriculum vitae. These updates serve as opportunities to reflect, redirect, revise or shift emphasis as needed.

A research agenda can:

* Increase productivity
* Enhance contributions to your discipline
* Focus your energy
* Supplement pedagogy
* Preserve your sanity
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Identifying Research Questions that Inspire
1. Identify questions you are compelled to explore answers to.
2. Which questions interest you most personally or are you most externally pressured to explore?

Defining a Compelling Problem
3. For your most appealing question, Identify the so what… at least three reasons why the question is important to society and your profession.
   a) Does something need attention?
   b) Are you focused on a specific target population?
   c) What is causing the population’s problem you aim to explore/address?
   d) Are external factors impacting severity of the need/problem?
   e) Is something missing?
   f) Do old ideas need revising?
   g) Do old methods need revising?
   h) Has something failed?
   i) Is there a program that needs revising?
   j) What public statistic, political trends, etc. are associated with your problem of focus?

Honing the Research Purpose and Question
4. What is your purpose in addressing the problem? Do you hope to:
   a) Further describe/explain problem—better understand or clarify relationships influencing the problem?
   b) Impact a problem—use existing knowledge to explore new solutions?
   c) Develop a program—demonstrate and measure effectiveness of a new solution s. current approaches?
   d) Other__________________________?

5. Write a sentence summarizing your understanding of the problem, the so what behind contributing a new solution and your unique purpose in addressing it.

6. Translate the above statement into a preliminary research question that captures the problem, the unique purpose in exploring the problem, the so what, and audience.
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Literature/Competitor Review
A research agenda contributes NEW knowledge. There is no funding to do what has already been done. The literature review helps assess what has been done to identify how to approach future, similar research and to identify gaps in literature pointing to areas where further research is needed.

7. What do the articles relevant to your problem, purpose and question indicate about the state of research?
   a. Summarize what has been done to date most relevant to your question.
   b. What prior interventions/studies have been a focus?
   c. What audiences have been a focus?
   d. What relevant theories have been examined?
   e. What research approaches have been used most commonly?
   f. What do research results indicate in terms of predictive variables and effective measures?
   g. Who are leading experts in the field?
   h. Do studies require research site partners? What type of partner?
   i. Where is existing research being published?
   j. What funding sources are supporting this research?

Strengths and Weaknesses:
8. Assess strengths and weaknesses in the areas below pertinent to advancing your research agenda; what skill building or support is needed and what strategies you have for your learning:
   a. Subject matter expertise
   b. Research design
   c. Particular methodologies
   d. Data analysis methods
   e. Research writing
   f. Partner and study site collaboration
   g. IRB protocol submission
   h. Budget development
   i. Data management
   j. Proposal writing
   k. Essential space, equipment or other infrastructure
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Collaborators

9. What collaborators—internal or external—augment your strengths and weaknesses and are key to successful implementation of your project or study?

10. What disciplines or experts are natural collaborators to enrich your plans and work? Do you work with any current collaborators? Any emergent collaborators?

11. What collaborators (organizational partners) are key to conducting your project? Why?

12. What strategy do you have to develop partnerships with essential collaborators?
   a. Does the University have relationships elsewhere to build on?
   b. Does the University have someone to help build your relationship?
Developing a Research Agenda
Drafting Your Plan

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<tr>
<th>Research Purpose or Question:</th>
<th>Drafting Your Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By __________________________ (date), __________________ will be accomplished for _______ (population) as evidenced by __________________________ (high level measure).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Action Step</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Resources (staff?)</th>
<th>Expected Results</th>
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<tr>
<td>Identify large bodies of work that must be accomplished (e.g., development of a stakeholder group, a curriculum, a set of professional competencies).</td>
<td>What key actions and milestones must be accomplished to fulfill each objective?</td>
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<td>What key changes, written in future tense, do you expect to result upon completion of the objective/actions that will be measurable, tangible, observable and verifiable? These should tie back to the need/problem.</td>
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Objective 1: 
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Objective 2: 
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Objective 3: 
1. 
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Developing a Research Agenda

Funding Prospects

13. Visit External Funding to review external funding databases provided by the University.

14. Sign up for accounts with COS Pivot (primarily sciences), Grant Forward (all federal, state & foundation funding), and grants.gov (federal funding opportunities) from the external funding pages.

15. Attend an ORSSP workshop held throughout the fall and spring or on-demand to learn more about funding searches.

16. Meet with your grant coordinator for assistance with searches.

Viable Funding Opportunities Worksheet

1. Funder Name

2. Deadline Funding Level

3. Funder Type: Foundation Professional Association Government Other

4. Specific Title of grant program announced (if applicable):

5. Are grants made to: Organizations Individuals

6. What stated organizational structure and/or individual credentials are required for eligibility?

7. What is the stated mission or purpose of the funder?

8. What is the stated purpose of the specific grant program aligned with your focus (if applicable)?

9. Based on the stated review criteria, summarize what is required to be competitive for the specific program.
# Developing a Research Agenda

## Documentation of Database Search

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<tr>
<th>Database Searched</th>
<th>Search Term(s) (single or combination)</th>
<th>Boolean Term for search combinations</th>
<th>Limiting Criteria or Filters</th>
<th># of Funding Opportunities</th>
<th># of Opportunities Eliminated</th>
<th>Opportunities Bookmarked</th>
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Keywords

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Filters

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Viable Opportunities Identified ________