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Faculty Success: Developing a Research and Publication Agenda

Kathleen P. King
University of South Florida, drkpking@gmail.com

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by Dr. Kathleen P. King

Anyone associated with higher education will acknowledge that tenure track faculty have to perform a fantastic balancing act. Compared to an administrative or line role in an organization, higher education faculty have tremendous autonomy and freedom. However, they face competing demands of many different (and good) opportunities, and for them the stakes are always high. Help is here! This article introduces a powerful strategy for staying on track in the research strand of this competitive journey.

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Building a Research Agenda

Strangely enough, when entering their first tenure track position, often the only research faculty has pursued is their one dissertation. Yes, that is one project over the course of years, with one massive "publication". Nonetheless, once on the tenure track, faculty have the demand looming over them to publish or perish- and they are solely responsible for their success or failure.

Research Topics
The first step in taming this unruly situation is to consider the natural extensions or additions to your prior research. Or, if your research is not directly related to your department, the first step is to access a topic which bridges the two and will be respected by your colleagues.

I like to use a large piece of paper and start writing topics in various areas of the sheet. This activity becomes the process of throwing your research ideas down on paper and seeing if there is a logical concept map among your prospective endeavors. Alternatively, one might have a pattern in mind from the start. If so, begin the concept map as a base structure and see how more activities would be connected to this established core or set.

Publication Goals
Many faculty think that each research project results in a single publication: but seasoned researchers realize there are, in fact, many publishing opportunities to be extracted from each project. Hopefully the pre-tenured faculty learned to present at professional conferences during their doctoral studies. As an extension of this experience, faculty can use conference opportunities to field test and gain feedback on their evolving manuscripts. While conference presentations might not be as highly esteemed in tenure and promotion as refereed journals, they can be a powerful proving ground for young academics of theory, model building, data analysis and interpretation.

It is important that once faculty identify what they will research and what they will publish that they also begin looking at highly reputable peer reviewed journals. I suggest my faculty clients identify 2-3 potential journals as primary and backup journals for each writing project. The reason is, regardless of how brilliant the scholar, sometimes our work will be rejected. Having the next destination on deck minimizes the delay of having that published article listed in your vita. In fact, we use manila folders to write the name of the

topic, article and three journals on the front and keep all the related documents inside.

Putting It All Together
Now that the topics and publications have been identified, we begin to develop a timeline which will assign them to appropriate time slots. I suggest using a Gantt chart which you can make in Microsoft Excel®, on graph paper or plain paper.

Columns. At the top of the columns write the months, beginning with the current one. Leave 4 columns empty and then write in the next month to label that column. Following this sequence continue across the page.

Rows. The name of the research activity goes on the row in sequence where they are allocated. That would mean labeling a row Project A and then placing an "R" in all 4 boxes in September to allocate time to work on its research. Then in the next 3 boxes, which represent 3 weeks, write in a "W" for "Writing." Next mark the estimated dates (spread across 4 weeks) where you should receive the results of the review, edits and moving to the In Press status and mark them "P" for publishing.

As one works down the page in this fashion, it becomes apparent that while one cannot work on too many projects at once, there are different phases of activities. This pattern can be maximized by alternating work across the projects. Therefore while conducting research on one project, one can be writing another, and/or beginning new research while waiting for reviews.

One of the tricks for maximizing success in research and publications is to have a constant flow of organized activity. Two major benefits of this approach to research and publication agenda mapping which my faculty clients discover are welcomed by most pre-tenured faculty:

1. The tracking system reduces the sense of overwhelming commitments as faculty tame their schedule.

2. It also allow faculty to be accountable for their time and see if they need to make different choices, or change their expectations.

3. It helps faculty realize they need to schedule time to get their research and writing accomplished. Neither of these are discrete tasks, they are processes.

There is an adage which says "If you want to get something done, find a busy person."
But it is not *always* true that such busy people earn tenure: sometimes, they are just "used up" with many good and great opportunities and burn out before anything truly becomes accomplished. Don't let his be your future: take control of your research and publication agenda with the simple strategies shared above.

Wishing you all success in your quest for tenure, promotion, and beyond.

Dr. Kathleen P. King (EdD), Certified Coach, Author, Keynote Speaker, Professor of Education (http://www.facultyspeaker.com) is an award-winning author of 17 books (3 more in process at this time) and a dynamic, interactive keynoter, and author who invigorates audiences on a variety of professional topics.