

Maintaining Research Productivity While Chairing

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The pages of this publication are filled with evidence that suggests that being chair is both challenging and important. The impact of the job will be felt by faculty, students, and the institution. Doing well as chair tends to be such an ambitious goal that it tempts incumbents to forget that they are also scholars.

Maintaining research productivity while being chair seems like an impossible task. Chairing and doing research can be like full-time jobs, especially when either is added to teaching duties. Nonetheless, it is important not to let research stop in the furtherance of chair duties. Being a scholar produces immense psychic rewards that are as strong as those found in teaching or administration. Furthermore, your research career is likely to outlast your administrative appointment. For many, doing research is a part of the job that does not evaporate, even as other duties mount.

There exists no more powerful chairing strategy than leading by example. The chair who insists upon quality scholarship from faculty but exempts himself or herself from this dimension of the job by citing onerous administrative duties creates a caste system within the department. Those who observe the chair finding the time to write are less likely to make excuses or disavow the importance of research.

Preparation for research involvement has to precede an administrative life. If one has a "pipeline" of projects at various stages of completion, it is reasonable to manage the progress of these pieces while being chair. Often, projects have "front-loaded" time demands, and it is best if these have been met before alternative demands appear. Research readiness, therefore, should be a factor in the timing of the acceptance of the chair position.

To prevent the pipeline from running dry, chairs should leverage the time and talents of a progressively wider group of coauthors. Research projects that require more work than time available, can be farmed out to those who can invest in the next steps. Doctoral students can be used effectively, especially since they might benefit from possessing another iron in the fire. Assuming chairs are steeped in the wisdom of how research gets done suggests that they could be brought on to projects started by other faculty that are well underway, but for some reason stalled. Visiting scholars can be used to jump start the next generation of papers.

Being chair may also change one's definition of research. As an administrator, one becomes more predisposed toward facilitating the work of others. Likewise, a chair should make more contributions to the infrastructure of research. Activities such as reviewing papers, discussing papers at

conferences, organizing research events, and supervising dissertations keep the chair "in the game." Since the chair is an official of an educational organization, the idea of doing research about education presents itself. Ultimately, the objective is to persist in the habit of writing even if time constraints prevent that from occurring at the heart of the discipline or in its premier journals.

Accepting administrative responsibilities on top of a sustained research commitment necessitates the highly efficient use of time. One probably cannot do it without shaving down the time that one has not devoted to work. For example, vacation time can be given over to making sustained research pushes. Perhaps more importantly, however, is disciplining oneself to do research in the very short periods of time that exist between administrative responsibilities. When research is broken down to its mechanical elements, even five minutes can be used. If you can find the occasional day to work at home, one should try to avoid the chairing work that can more appropriately be done in the office.

Freeing up time for research also affects the way that the chair's responsibilities are executed. Above all, it is necessary to avoid tendencies to micromanage. Much of this work proves to be ineffective and unnecessary when viewed in the larger context. Being chair usually means that you cannot satisfy all of the people that want something from you all of the time. Therefore, the priorities that you establish should be those that leave you with enough time to maintain the research profile that you wish to have. Even though the many important things done by a chair require considerable time, and they must be done on a schedule that the chair cannot unilaterally determine, these attributes are not true of everything that the chair is asked to do.

E-mail and paper are two enemies of the chair who wants to do research. E-mail creates an artificial sense of urgency that becomes a sinkhole for time. For many chairs, it dictates the range and timing of their activities as if they were appendages of the software. Chairs are also at the center of many paper trails. Like e-mail, paper creates a logic and a time demand of its own. One wants to be something other than a filing clerk. Because the importance of e-mail and paper cannot be denied, they must be effectively and efficiently managed.

Since the chair's job is arguably the most important one on the campus, it is not surprising that many sacrifice much for its execution. Whether one wants to be chair for the short term or the long term, doing research should not be left to others or forgotten.

Timothy J. Fogarty is Chair, Department of Accountancy, Case Western Reserve University. E-mail: tjf@weatherhead.cwru.edu.