

Visual Tracking Strategies to Move Scholarship Forward

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Abstract:

Moving from the doctoral student role to the faculty member role is a challenging transition. Strategies that motivate and help keep scholarship moving forward can be invaluable in helping make the transition successful. The authors discuss 2 visual tracking strategies to promote the forward movement of scholarship. A whiteboard (dry erase) and a publication trajectory table to track manuscript and research ideas through grant proposal and manuscript submission to publication are described.

Article:

When one has written a dissertation and completed a doctoral program, it seems as though the rough road has ended: one can now smoothly sail into a faculty position and carry out the work one has been prepared to do. Alas, nothing could be further from the truth. Taking a faculty position often means that one moves from a protected and supportive research-focused environment to a much more independent role with the multiple demands of teaching, research, and service. This requires self-motivation and the ability to pace and track progress. Even when the new environment is supportive, keeping oneself directed toward developing scholarship can be a challenge. However, a variety of strategies can help move scholarly work forward.

Moving Scholarship Forward

A variety of strategies have been proffered to help new faculty members be successful with their scholarship in an academic setting. Strategies like a Scholarly Activity Plan 1 have been recommended to help new faculty in the development of a research trajectory. Lewallen et al 2 suggest that a support group of untenured faculty where ideas about how to achieve success in scholarship are shared can be a useful strategy to promote success for individual faculty members. Jacelon et al 3 recommend a peer mentoring group for sharing ideas learned in different doctoral programs and mentoring relationships to help individual members improve their scholarship and research capabilities. Although these strategies are useful, visual strategies that the individual faculty member can use to self-motivate and keep track of projects can also promote success.

The Whiteboard

A whiteboard (dry erase) is a visual strategy used to track manuscript and research ideas through grant proposal and manuscript submission to publication. The whiteboard, displayed prominently in a workspace or office, promotes organization and provides ready access to information,

opportunities for collaboration/discussion with colleagues, and motivation (Figure 1). Sections on the whiteboard may include Ideas, Manuscripts in Progress, Manuscripts Under Review, Articles in Press, Pending Grant Proposal Due Dates, Funded Grant Applications, Research Assistants' Work Schedules, Promotion and Tenure Date, and Tally of Scholarly Products (Publications, Grants, etc).



Figure 1. Dry erase example.

Manuscript ideas that are not fully formed can be added to the whiteboard, making them readily accessible and ready for the next phase of development. Ideas displayed on the whiteboard remain in view, so they can be revisited deliberately or accidentally. With a return to the idea, it may be further developed and moved to the Manuscript in Progress section or simply left in the Idea section until ready to be dealt with or abandoned and thus erased.

In the Manuscripts in Progress section, the title of the manuscript, the names of coauthors (if any), the journal to which the article will be submitted, and target dates for manuscript completion are included. A subcategory under the Manuscripts in Progress section can list manuscripts nearly ready for submission, giving these manuscripts priority status. Manuscripts in Progress can also be prioritized by placing numbers next to them in a different-color marker to keep the focus on the priorities.

Manuscripts Under Review are the next important section on the board. The name of the manuscript and the journal where it was submitted are listed, along with the submission date and, in parentheses, authorship position on the manuscript, for example, if second author, place a (2) beside the entry. If a manuscript is returned for revision, this is indicated in this section, and then, when the manuscript is resubmitted, the resubmission date is added. Other information may include the date that the revised manuscript is due back to a journal (if known).

When a manuscript is moved to the Articles in Press section, this brings a sense of accomplishment. In this section, the name of the article, the date it was accepted, and the journal are noted. If there is a tentative publication date, that can also be included. This section serves as a reminder of individual progress, and it can be a reminder to follow up on manuscripts if long periods of time have elapsed since communication with an editor.

Once an article is published, it is removed from the board and added to the Tally of Scholarly Products section so that progress can be seen. The Tally of Scholarly Products section might include the number of published peer-reviewed journal articles (data based and non-data based), invited commentaries and editorials, book chapters, and book reviews. This tally provides information about scholarly progress at a glance. Although counts do not take into account quality or impact, they do provide one measure of productivity.

Pending Grant Proposal Due Dates, Funded Grants, and Research Assistants' Work Schedules are other sections that can be included on the whiteboard. A list of grant proposals currently being written and their due dates, the dates when grant proposals will be submitted to external reviewers, potential dates for their return from reviewers, and the final grant proposal submission date are helpful visual tracking strategies and motivators. It is also helpful to include funded grants that are in progress and grant progress report due dates. Finally, the anticipated Promotion and Tenure Date can motivate tenure-seeking faculty.

Having these things on the wall in one's office where they can be viewed daily is a great way to keep track of scholarly output, and it can also be a great motivator because one can visually track progress and experience the pleasure of moving items from location to location on the board.

The Publication Trajectory Table

Another visual tracking strategy is the publication trajectory table (Table 1). This table identifies, prioritizes, and notes the stage of development, progress, and status of manuscripts from conception to publication. The trajectory is a tool used to guide and concentrate writing efforts, yet it is flexible so that new manuscript ideas or collaborative writing projects can be added at the desired level of priority. The table helps faculty keep track of their productivity and follow each manuscript through the publication process. Once a manuscript has been submitted, the table shows the submission date and the journal it was submitted to, as well as the status of the review process. The table can also be used to track the manuscript through revision and resubmission to publication. This table also provides real-time data on length of time from conception to publication, allowing the faculty member to set realistic goals and plan for successful fulfillment of tenure or promotion publication requirements. Thus, the table is a way to not only monitor but also manage one's publication scholarship.

Year to Year (eg, 2007-2008)							
Priority	Manuscript/Book Chapter Title	Internal Review	Progress Notes	Journal	Submission Status	Date to Journal	Date Accepted
1	Women's Well-being After Relocation to Independent Living Communities Rossen and Knafel (data based)	Has/Back on 1/18	Revised and in review Accepted and will get few changes back by April 30 Discuss some of the items with internal editor 4/12.	<i>Western Journal of Nursing Research (WJNR)</i> , 29(2):183-199	Accepted	1/23 Back by 4/30 Not pub b/4 March 07/ WJNR	3/30/06 In Press Published

Table 1. Publication Trajectory Table Example

Summary

The simple visual strategies reported here have moved our scholarship forward by helping us

1. Remember ideas so that they are not lost or forgotten.
2. Communicate with peers about scholarly work (a dry erase board can be a focus of conversation).
3. Keep track of manuscripts in progress so that they can be moved along.
4. Remember how long a manuscript has been in review so that one can follow up on it after a reasonable amount of time.
5. Remember which and how many manuscripts are in press so that page proofs can be anticipated.

The strategies both motivate scholarly work and validate work. Great satisfaction can come from moving things from place to place on the board or on the table.

We have all used these strategies and have found them invaluable. We can often be found engaged in discussions with the dry erase board or publication trajectory table in front of us as we encourage and support each other in our work. In fact, this article was recently under the

Manuscripts in Progress section of our board or table and has now been moved to the Manuscripts in Review section. And, if you are reading this, it has been moved into the Tally of Scholarly Products section.

References

1. Peterson CA, Umphred DA. A structured faculty development process for scholarship in young faculty: a case report. *J Phys Ther Educ*. Winter 2005;19(3):86-88.
2. Lewallen LP, Crane PB, Letvak S, Jones E, Hu J. An innovative strategy to enhance new faculty success. *Nurs Educ Perspect*. 2003;24(5):257-260.
3. Jacelon CS, Zucker DM, Staccarini JM, Henneman EA. Peer mentoring for tenure-track faculty. *J Prof Nurs*. 2003;19(6):335-338.