**Key Considerations: Research Agenda**

DANIEL SALTER: Hello, I’m uh. Daniel Salter. And I’m the director of strategic research initiatives in the Center for Research Support. And I’m also a member of the faculty in the Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership.

As a new scholar, I had a process for developing my research agenda. Uh.. like most new researchers, my interest and thinking actually started pretty broad. But then after I finished my dissertation, I realized that I’d worked really hard to get focused on uh.. that simple, doable project. So, you know, the beginning part of this I think was kinda stepping back and getting in touch with those larger goals I had for myself. We often tell new researchers not to plan on changing the world with their dissertation, but there’s really no reason why the dissertation can’t be the beginning of that journey.

Even with a research plan, it’s easy to get distracted because so much research really needs to be done and there’s so many interesting projects in which to get involved. But, you know, if you don’t have a plan, it can quickly all become kinda random. After I did that kinda step back and look, I saw that there were several aspects that needed to be addressed in strengthening the overall premise of the work that I wanted to accomplish in my career. I kind of considered two different aspects I guess, first, where did I want this research to be in 20 years, asking myself what do I want them to be saying about my body of research at my retirement party, the second is really who needs to hear it. Then I made a list of ten articles that I wanted to get published and presentations I wanted to give. And I started working on it. I was a new professor at the time, and I kept that list on my bulletin board right up over my desk. So I saw it every day. And I found that some parts of the plan took longer than I expected, and others needed to be fine-tuned. Actually, probably, all pieces took longer than I expected and all pieces needed to be fine-tuned in some way. But after I was done with that list, I started on my next list of ten and then the next one after that. I found it actually became a lot easier, after I had some published pieces out there. Because your work becomes part of your own literature review, you can write your discussion section to set yourself up for the next article.

I considered a number of questions over time as my plan kind of changed and evolved. My research involves instrument design. So there’s always another validity study that can be run. But I also tried to look at the practical aspects of my research. I think a big challenge that researchers have is how to package the research they’ve conducted. I’ve found that focusing on each piece as a single bit of information strengthen all the pieces and thus the whole body of research. So maybe the biggest question I considered over time was, you know, in working my plan, was what belongs in this particular article or presentation. My research has certainly evolved and changed over the years with, peaks and valleys tied directly to the choices that I’ve made in my professional career.

One pivotal moment for me was when one of the senior scholars in my area pulled me aside after a professional presentation and said, “Daniel, you need to talk to us like we are second graders.” You know, her point was to kinda subtly remind me that it’s easy to get lost in what we might call the navel-gazing of research and to forget about the importance of the end-users of the products that we produce. So, you know, at that point, I’d started to reframe some of the items on my list as more practitioner-oriented pieces. And it was then I began to see aspects of my research that others thought
were important, that I only kinda saw as trivial. And I’ve actually published a couple pieces just on methodologies that I’ve used over the years.

You know, looking back on the process of developing my research agenda over the years, there are a couple things I might’ve done differently. One regret that I had was I did not see the value of collaboration early enough in the process. In some circles, the single-author research article is, you know, very highly valued, perhaps overvalued in some ways. I found that the best pieces are the ones on which I collaborated. And as a result, I’d begun looking at my items on my research agenda in little different ways to see how it might y-- overlap or intersect with other researchers’ efforts. And in doing that, I think they have also challenged me to look at my own thinking and my approach differently.

Research is very challenging as it should be. And another thing that I wish I’d seen earlier was the value in keeping myself educated, which I tried to do, not only on the new research that was coming out but also on different approaches to conducting it.

For myself, I found a few best practices that I could recommend to new scholars trying to shape their research agenda. You know, research is a very individual process where a person has to balance the quality and the quantity of the work they do. Part of the preparation of scholars concerns exploring your strengths and weaknesses, so as trite as it might sound, the best practice I think at the beginning here, is to just be true to yourself and play to your strengths in doing your research. Within the framework of this tutorial, you know, I think it’s very important to get your research out there in all the different venues and for all the different audiences. When I started talking to variety of people and adding non-research journal items to my list, I feel like my research got a lot stronger. The other piece I would offer is to not give up. For every published article I have, I probably have three or four rejection letters to go with it. These pieces, these articles, they’re a bit like children. When they’re born you don’t know what they’re gonna be when they grow up, so you have to spend a lotta time kinda nurturing them and letting them follow their own path.

I hope this information has been helpful and will help you develop your own agenda. Research is a lot of hard work but so worth it in the end. Best wishes on your continued success.