

Research Tips

By Mary Kate Naatus, Business Administration

Tip 1: Engage your *students* and colleagues in the research process, and seek synergies across disciplinary boundaries. For the past 2 years I have worked with Alex Trillo in the Sociology and Latin-American/Latino Studies departments along with a number of student collaborators on a study of small business decision-making and success and immigrant entrepreneurship. While training the students to conduct interviews, collect data and other tasks can be difficult and time-consuming, it is worthwhile. Students become empowered, provide new and insightful perspectives and motivate faculty as well. Don't pass up the opportunity to advise an Honors thesis student, who may have similar interests and be a serious research collaborator.

Tip 2: Collect *documentation and evidence* of research efforts over time! Dropbox (www.dropbox.com) is a great tool for keeping track of your own research and also creating shared folders for various research projects from student-faculty collaborations or theses to co-authored papers or presentations. These not only help in the writing, data collection, proposal and journal submission processes but also in providing evidence for tenure and promotion. Physical files are also important to keep track of research-related activities and work products. For the small business project, we are using Dropbox to upload and store audio files of every business interview so they are accessible to all collaborators and are easier to transcribe. At any given time and from any location, any member of the team can access, upload and edit any files. (Dropbox is a free application that can be both private and shared. It is accessible from any computer with an internet connection.)

Tip 3: Explore and engage the *community* in the research and the learning process. Don't confine learning to the classroom. We are in a great location to expand beyond the walls of the classroom. Our experiences with service learning partners in the community and also with the small business owners that have participated as research subjects in the small business research project have been very valuable for all involved. The community-based research offers opportunities for real-world examples, exceptions and applications of course concepts and in addition to the research study, another goal is to help connect business owners with available resources and organizations and also form partnerships with businesses, which can foster internship, service-learning, and class project experiences, such as developing marketing plans or a social media strategies for a struggling small business that may lack this expertise. These types of experiences also better prepare our students for life after the university.

Tip 4: If undertaking a longer-term study while on the limited tenure-track timeline, figure out ways of using the process itself or very early findings in a publication. Some departments have revised their guidelines to include community-based learning as a legitimate measure for tenure and promotion. I am currently writing about the faculty-student small business research project from the perspective of the *community-based learning process* and the impact on *student learning and engagement*, which I am looking to submit to business education journals. Later, after compiling months of additional qualitative and quantitative survey data, we will look to publish these findings in business, sociology and cross-disciplinary journals.

Tip 5: A Kindle Fire or Nook (or any other tablet) is a great tool for keeping up with publications in the field and in compiling literature reviews. I don't like printing and carrying around bundles of printed journal articles, which are not very transportable. It took me a little time to learn how to use it and organize files, but now, I do most of my reading of academic articles on the Kindle. USB flash drives can work for digital storage and reading on a PC or laptop, but I like the portability of the small tablet because I always have it with me and can read while I'm waiting in line at Motor Vehicles or on the bus (plus I can't count the number of USB drives I've misplaced).

Tip 6: Use Google docs or another easily accessible location to jot down and compile research ideas, links, resources, etc., which sometimes come to us at strange times (I get a lot of ideas when jogging). When you go to a conference or workshop, write an informal reaction including how you will use new ideas in your research, and then months later when you may not recall your thoughts, it can serve as a sort of online journal. When I attended the NYU Faculty Research Network Seminar on educational technologies, I did this for the first time, and I refer back to my 3 pages of notes on a regular basis and I can access them from any computer or mobile device.

Tip 7: Meet and network with external (outside SPU) colleagues by attending conferences and giving presentations. Consider attending teaching-oriented conferences as well. I attended the Drexel Business Professor Teaching Summit in May, which gave me many good ideas for my classes, and I also met faculty from many different colleges, who can serve as research collaborators or even external reviewers during the promotion process. The Faculty Resource Network (FRN) hosted by NYU is another vehicle that many of our faculty have taken advantage of over the years. To learn more about FRN, go to our [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#) webpage.

Tip 8: This tip is something I find to be quite a challenge right now. Since quality research requires a lot of time, focus and energy, it is important to schedule blocks of uninterrupted time or even a whole day dedicated to your research. Academic research doesn't fit in nicely between classes or an hour here and an hour there. By being more strategic about grouping meetings, classes, advisement and other responsibilities together, it can free up the longer blocks of time necessary. Something that might help in this area, and follow some of the ideas suggested above is to see if your class can be meet once a week for a three hour slot. Some departments have done this, usually in the afternoon. As for balancing the family-work dichotomy, I haven't quite figured that out yet.