

Preparing Future Faculty (PFF) Conference
October 5, 2011
Starting and Running a Research Lab

General Principles For Setting Up Your Lab and Beginning Your Program of Research:*

- **Make the most of what you have:** Identify and secure the critical resources (e.g., equipment and personnel) you need to pursue your scientific objectives. At the same time, be opportunistic in taking advantage of the facilities and people that distinguish your college or university. Keep an eye out for the resources that are available that allow you to answer your scientific questions.
- **Invest your resources:** It can be hard to let go of your first infusion of research funding and it can be hard to resist watching every penny. However, senior faculty members often note that junior faculty slow their research careers by hoarding their resources. Equipment, supplies, and travel costs for students and staff are a wise investment of resources. One of the responsibilities of a principal investigator is to provide an environment where students and staff flourish. Doing so increases their ability to focus on creative and productive research.
- **Invest your time wisely:** As a new assistant professor, you will need to make strategic choices about how to spend your time. When considering a potential research project, ask yourself three questions: Are you excited by the research question? Is the research question related to the big issues you care about? Is the research question *important*? If you answer all these questions in the affirmative, you will need to work out exactly what sort of involvement you are going to have (e.g., primarily discussion and writing? Hands on technical assistance? Substantial supervising? Commitment of fiscal resources?). Once you decide a project is exciting, relevant to your larger research program, and important, you may need to make a tough decision about whether you can afford the commitment of your time and resources to carry it out.
- **Collaborate:** Two heads really are better than one. Collaboration allows you to multiply your effectiveness, solve problems that require multiple sources of expertise, stimulates new thinking, allows the creation of collegial relationships, and is strategic. Collaborating with other junior colleagues builds a strong cohort. Collaborating with senior faculty strengthens your ties to the department and makes it easier for the senior faculty to know how your research is going when it comes time for evaluations and an eventual tenure decision. Collaborating with colleagues at other institutions integrates you into the broader research community and may provide access to resources or expertise not available at your institution.

*Summarized from Darley, J.M., Zanna, M.P., & Roediger, H.L., III (Eds.). (2004). *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2nd ed.) (pp. 135-152). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Further Resources for Starting and Running a Research Lab

All items are available through the University Library at www.lib.umich.edu

Barker, K. (2002). *At the helm: A laboratory navigator*. Cold Spring Harbor, NY: Cold Spring Laboratory Press.

Burroughs Wellcome Fund and Howard Hughes Medical Institute (2006). *Making the right moves: A practical guide to scientific management for postdocs and new faculty* (2nd ed.). Research Triangle Park, NC: Author.

Darley, J.M., Zanna, M.P., & Roediger, H.L., III (Eds.). (2004). *The compleat academic: A career guide* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.