

## Encouraging Research Among Untenured Faculty: *One Library's Experience*

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**L**ibrary faculty must often meet research and publication requirements to be awarded tenure at their institutions. Unprepared, perhaps, by the library science degree program, librarians frequently find research and publication a daunting challenge. Such was the case for some untenured faculty in Academic Library Services at East Carolina University. We knew that we must engage in research and publish our results to achieve tenure, but we were apprehensive about this process. How could we overcome these fears? This article tells how we successfully met the challenge of research and publication while allaying our fears about the process. We describe here what approaches to research and publication encouraged us the most. We also describe what approaches to research and publication were not successful for us but could prove useful to other librarians. Although our experience is of particular value for academic librarians, we hope that public, school, and special librarians will find our experience useful in their careers.

### Background Information

East Carolina University, located in Greenville, North Carolina, is a state-supported university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina system. The third largest of the system's sixteen campuses, the University has a total enrollment of nearly 17,000 students and a faculty of more than 1,000 members. The University was recently granted Doctoral II status.

The information needs of East Carolina University are met by two independent administrative units, Academic Library Services and the Health Sciences Library. Academic Library Services, which consists of a main library and one branch library (J.Y. Joyner Library and the Music Library, respectively), supports the programs in the Division of Academic Affairs. Undergraduate and graduate programs in this division are offered through the College of Arts and Sciences and through the professional schools of Art, Business, Education, Health and Human Performance, Human Environmental Sci-

ences, Industry and Technology, and Music. Academic Library Services has over one million volumes in holdings and employs 28 librarians who have full faculty status with twelve-month appointments.

Before the 1980s, tenure for library faculty at East Carolina University was based largely on job performance, defined as public or technical services for the library patron, and services such as committee work within the library. Publication of research was not a tenure requirement. During the 1980s, tenure requirements for library faculty at the University were gradually brought in line with the requirements of the teaching faculty. In addition to job performance and services, the requirements for untenured library faculty now include research and publication.

### Approaching Research and Publication

During the early 1990s, about a dozen new librarians joined Academic Library Services. As a group of untenured faculty, we knew that we must engage in research and publication in order to be awarded tenure by the University. Unsure of how best to proceed in this endeavor, a number of us tried several different approaches to encourage ourselves in the research and publication process. These included attending Friday lunches, keeping research journals, meeting with the library's personnel committee, developing a mentoring program, creating a release-time policy, and learning more about research and publication. Each of these is described below.

#### *Friday lunches.*

Our first approach to encouraging research and publication

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was to hold Friday lunch meetings twice a month that would serve as a forum where faculty who were engaged in research could share their work with colleagues. During the lunches, faculty could receive feedback about their research, discuss possible research topics, suggest practical ways to incorporate research into our normal work routine, and serve as role models for others. Both tenured and untenured faculty attended the lunches on a voluntary basis. The entire faculty believed that by creating a collegial environment that focused on research, untenured faculty would become increasingly familiar with the procedures of research and publication. Advice on the process from some of the senior faculty who had successfully published would provide encouragement to those who had never before published.

Although the idea of the Friday lunches sounded good in theory, in practice the lunches did not work out well. Perhaps the major problem was that the atmosphere of the lunches quickly became too informal. While fostering camaraderie among the faculty of different departments within the library, discussions at the lunches all too often veered away from research to topics such as everyday library problems. Eventually, attendance at the Friday lunches dwindled.

#### **Research Journals:**

In a brainstorming session some of us decided to keep and share anonymous research journals. These journals would serve to record our research activities and our thoughts on the research process, from describing day-to-day research to submitting the research for publication and seeing the results in print. We believed that by sharing these journals among ourselves we could learn from one another's experiences in research and publication. Several of us kept journals for a short while, but soon found we could not maintain the journals and keep up with other library activities. Furthermore, communication could not be fostered anonymously. We decided that this approach was unsuited to our needs.

#### **Personnel Committee:**

To encourage us in our efforts, the library's personnel committee held meetings at which attendees discussed several topics: how to select an issue for research; how the journal review process works; how to select a journal in which to publish an article; how to become professionally active; and how to make professional contacts. The personnel committee chose to meet annually with each untenured faculty member to discuss research activity, professional development, and the member's progress toward tenure. The committee also persuaded the library administration to purchase copies of Robert Boice's *The New Faculty Member*<sup>1</sup> for untenured faculty to use as a guide in the research/publication process.

These meetings with the Personnel Committee were generally relaxed and informal. The greatest benefit of the meetings was for committee members to convey to us that the tenured faculty supported our efforts and were sincerely concerned with our progress. These meetings were a positive step in meeting the challenge of research and publication.

#### **Mentoring:**

As another way to encourage research among untenured faculty, the library's faculty-development committee proposed a mentoring program in conjunction with the University's mentoring program. The concept underlying the proposed program, though not novel, seemed logical and workable. It presumes the following conditions: that tenured faculty have research experience and ideas for research; that these faculty provide the time and effort needed to act as research advisors and role models — as mentors; that new faculty find tenured

professors with whom they work compatibly; and that the mentors offer critical guidance to their advisees' research, or even act as their joint researchers and co-authors. Fulfillment of these conditions should assure that the new faculty member will publish successfully. The entire faculty has found the mentoring program a good idea. Details of the proposed mentoring program have been worked out and are awaiting implementation.

#### **Release time:**

The library faculty, realizing that all have twelve-month contracts, leaving no summer months for research, instituted a release-time policy to provide time dedicated specifically to scholarly activity. The procedures are straightforward: a faculty member submits a proposal to the release-time committee detailing the research project, how much time is desired, and what will be accomplished. Since the policy's implementation, a few faculty have used release-time for research. The policy has been especially fruitful for release-time granted in blocks of time, such as a week, and requiring travel out of the area. This policy is potentially beneficial for both tenured and untenured faculty.

#### **Learning about Research and Publication:**

As another positive step, we each made a number of efforts to learn more about the process of research and publication. Two untenured faculty members participated in a day-long national preconference on research in cataloging and classification; others attended a university-sponsored writing workshop. The library's faculty staff development committee also offered several programs on the topics of research and writing. These programs, conducted by faculty members from outside the library, presented practical advice on incorporating research and writing into our daily schedule. The information we gathered proved helpful. Many of us began to include research in our regular workflow.

#### **Our Best Solution:**

##### **Creation of the Research Group**

Although a mentoring program had been developed, a release time policy created, and more had been learned about the publication process, we still believed we had not found the best way to encourage research among untenured faculty. We decided to revisit a discarded approach — the Friday lunches. We agreed that meeting twice a month to discuss research had been effective. This time, however, rather than meeting over lunch and with both tenured and untenured faculty in attendance, we decided to hold a meeting specifically for discussion of research, and to invite only untenured faculty to these meetings. In addition, we decided to make a firm commitment to the success of these meetings.

We soon began to meet as a group, and quickly realized that we had finally found an ideal forum for encouraging research. During these meetings, we discussed our research interests, suggested topics, read one another's drafts, exchanged advice, and, in general, cheered one another on. Although attendance was not mandatory, we soon had a core group of seven members. Since its inception, three new members have joined the group and one, granted tenure, has left the group. One other member, granted tenure two years after the group was formed, continued to attend meetings until moving to another state.

When we began our meetings, two group members were completing articles to submit for publication. Both discussed their articles with the group and allowed some group members to read their drafts. The two individuals then submitted



their articles to refereed journals. The articles were returned to each author with suggested revisions. Acting on the advice of the group, the authors revised their articles and resubmitted them. Both articles have since been published.

Encouraged, in part, by the success of these two faculty members, and, in part by our research meetings, other group members began working assiduously on various research topics. To date, five articles (counting the two mentioned above) and a substantial book review have been published. Four articles have been accepted for publication, and three have been submitted for publication.

During these meetings, discussion can turn in a number of directions about the research and publication process. Frequently, we brainstorm about potential research topics. We discuss the best journals for a particular subject or article. We recount our experiences with various editors. Above all, we report our progress on research projects to each other. These reports to our research peers have helped many of us to be more diligent in our work. Our sense of community and teamwork has grown as a result of our involvement in the research group. We have a stronger appreciation for each other as individuals and professionals than we did before we began this venture. Not only do we assist each other with our research endeavors, but we believe we have developed a more cooperative atmosphere in other aspects of our work.

In retrospect, we wish we could have created our research group earlier. We all agree, however, that our several false starts helped strengthen our commitment to the group. Given the success of the group, we plan to continue meeting and supporting each other's research endeavors. As we have become more accustomed to incorporating research into our work life, we are beginning to explore other ways we can support each other's academic pursuits. As the group gains experience in research, membership might encompass all library faculty engaged in research. Group members could rehearse presentations for professional conferences before a non-threatening audience. We also intend to implement the proposed mentoring program. As current members of the group become successful researchers, they could become mentors to new members. We even plan to support each other in grant writing endeavors. All in all, we have found that a research support group, composed of dedicated members, has had a positive influence on all of us.

### What Others May Learn from Our Experience

In our experience, the best way to encourage research and publication was to meet as an informal group to discuss our research endeavors. Some of our approaches, however, have worked well for others and may work for those in situations similar to ours. For instance, release-time policy, as well as brown bag lunches (comparable to our Friday lunches), proved successful for librarians at Auraria Library, University of Colorado, Denver.<sup>2</sup> Librarians at Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, followed a pattern similar to ours. They held a series of brown bag lunches that eventually developed into the Research Interest Group. In this case, the group received support from the organization's faculty development committee.<sup>3</sup> The mentoring process between senior and junior librarians is discussed by Cargill; although her focus is the mentorship of library leaders, the principles of the mentoring process she presents are applicable to mentoring in research.<sup>4</sup> Electronic mentoring, described by Echavarria et al., offers a new approach to the mentoring process in research and publication, and merits further exploration in the field of librarianship.<sup>5</sup>

In learning more about research and publication and in sharing that knowledge among ourselves in the research group, we have discovered a considerable amount of information others may find of value. For anyone interested in writing for publication, a series of articles by Pamela Palmer presents basic information about the process in an informal but engaging style.<sup>6</sup> Allyn and Cargill's *Librarian in Search of a Publisher* provides many practical tips for librarians about the research and publication process.<sup>7</sup> Finally, those librarians interested in publishing, but who consider writing a difficult task, may find many of the publications by Robert Boice helpful. His *Professors as Writers: A Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing* is useful for anyone, academic or non-academic, who is paralyzed by the thought of writing. In a friendly, non-scholarly manner, Boice provides invaluable techniques for overcoming the fear of writing.<sup>8</sup>

Although the chronicle of our experience is particularly useful for librarians within an academic setting, we by no means exclude those who work within public, special, or other libraries. Indeed, we would like to encourage all librarians to publish any information they may think is of value to others within the profession. From a scholarly article on citation use for librarians in research institutions to reports about children's summer programs in public libraries, all contribute to the library service we provide to our patrons. We hope that our experience will encourage others to publish within the field of librarianship.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Robert Boice, *The New Faculty Member: Supporting and Fostering Professional Development*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992). Chapter 7, "Encouraging Scholarly Productivity," discusses ways to encourage research among faculty.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Kenny, Linda D. Tietjen, and Rutherford W. Witthus, "Increasing Scholarly Productivity among Library Faculty: Strategies for a Medium-Sized Library," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 16 (November 1990): 276-79.

<sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Jenkins, M. Kathleen Cook, and Mary Anne Fox, "Research Development of Academic Librarians: One University's Approach," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 7 (May 1981): 83-86.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Cargill, "Developing Library Leaders: The Role of Mentorship," *Library Administration & Management* 3 (Winter 1989): 12-15.

<sup>5</sup> Tami Echavarria, et al., "Encouraging Research through Electronic Mentoring: a Case Study," *College and Research Libraries* 56 (July 1995): 352-361.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Palmer, "Librarians as Authors, Part I: Strategies for Success," *Southeastern Librarian* 45 (Spring 1995): 4-6; "Librarians as Authors, Part II: From the Beginning," *Southeastern Librarian* 45 (Summer 1995) 52-53; "Librarians as Authors, Part III: Motivations & Choices," *Southeastern Librarian* 45 (Fall/Winter 1995): 97-98; "Librarians as Authors, Part IV: Publishing Savvy," *Southeastern Librarian* 46 (Spring 1996): 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Alley and Jennifer Cargill, *Librarian in Search of a Publisher: How to Get Published*. (Phoenix, Arizona: Oryz Press, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Boice, *Professors as Writers: a Self-Help Guide to Productive Writing*. (Stillwater, Oklahoma: New Forums Press, 1990).