Shaping your academic profile for influential success and increasing your research impact

Shalena Naidoo (PhD Candidate)

Division of Medical Virology
Stellenbosch University
Tools for improving your academic research profile

Tips for increasing your transferable skills set and expand your research career

Importance of selecting a research field and developing a sound research question

Selecting appropriate journals for your research

Using media (social) for developing a voice
Disclaimer

1. what you are doing when you don’t know what you are doing.
coll. *important research*, what you are doing when you don’t know what you are doing, and you’re being paid for it.
SHAPING YOUR ACADEMIC (RESEARCH) PROFILE
Start with Why...
Start with Why…

Why we do (or want to do) research:

- Build our knowledge and skills
- Facilitate learning
- Understand issues and increase public awareness – social responsibility
- Way to prove lies and support truths
- Way to find, gauge, engage and seize opportunity
- **Contribute meaningful and significant knowledge to the field**
- The love of reading, writing, analyzing and sharing of valuable information
- Nourish and energize your mind
Define (and refine) your purpose statement

- Your brand tells the world who you are, what you value and what you have to offer
- An expression of who you are and what you wish to achieve is critical in the “landscape of brand identity”
- A personal purpose statement takes the “why” of what you do and consolidates it to become an expression of your values
- Defines who you are. It reflects your passions and values. It provides clarity as you set goals. Your sense of purpose steers the direction of your life (academic career).
- A personal purpose statement simplifies your direction – your goals will either align with your definite major purpose or it doesn’t.
- Reminds yourself why you wake up every morning
- Display your purpose statement – CV, online profile, workspace – stay connected

“What a different story men would have to tell if only they would adopt a definite purpose and stand by that purpose until it had time to become an all-consuming obsession!”
Build your transferable skill set

- A transferable skill is an ability or expertise which may be used in a variety of roles or occupations.
- This is a specific set of skills that don’t belong to a particular niche, industry or job; they are general skills that can be transferred between jobs, departments and industries (hence the name).
- Benefits of developing a transferable skill set:
  - Flexibility
  - Diversity (dynamic)
  - Portability
  - Employability

- Transferable skills worth developing:
  - Leadership and Team Management
  - Problem solving – critical thinking
  - Project Management
  - Teamwork Ability
  - Data Analysis
  - Communication skills (Public Speaking)
  - Time Management
  - Work Ethic
  - Listening
  - Negotiation Skills
Get international exposure and establish relevant networks/collaborations

- Join international exchange programs or training initiatives (fellowships)
- Make attempts to “PUT YOURSELF ON THE MAP”
- Make an effort to place yourself on international platforms
- Engage in online discussions
- Attend international conferences
- Join groups (discussion groups)
- Maintain relationships with people you engage with
- Seek out forums
- Never say no to public speaking invitations
- Banish the silo habit of researchers – extend beyond
Get a Mentor/Coach

- A mentor is someone who offers **experience, wisdom, guidance and encouragement** and who also demonstrates superior leadership

- **Benefits of having a mentor/coach**
  - Accountability
  - Objective views
  - Support structure
  - Advice
  - Motivation
  - Guidance

- **Key qualities when selecting a mentor**
  - Ability and willingness to communicate what they know
  - Approachability, availability, and the ability to listen
  - Honesty with diplomacy
  - Inquisitiveness
  - Objectivity and fairness
  - Compassion and genuineness
  - Someone you aspire to be (model) – similar value systems
Develop Good Research Habits

- Always keep reading the literature – set up alerts. Set aside reading time for staying up to date. Keep an organized database.
- Keep a research journal and document your progress and journey
- Create summaries of you’re the data generated
- Update your CV regularly – with courses, publications, media mentions, conference abstracts
- Stay organized (mentally) and plan ahead
- Constantly revise your timelines – always give yourself more time than your best estimate
- Find an accountability partner
- Meticulously plan experiments in advance
- Do the hard tasks first
- Keep detailed notes on everything you do
- Always refer to your aims and objectives and make sure you are not deviating
- Take up teaching opportunities when possible
- Know that knowledge should be shared, not hoarded.
- Know when to stop persisting pays off - in 99.9% of cases, there's no point in beating a dead horse.
- Progress. Not perfection.
INCREASING THE IMPACT OF YOUR RESEARCH
Selecting a research field and define your research question

Considerations in Selecting a Topic

- Personal interest / Passion
- Importance / Contribution to the field
- Newness / Relevance
- Feasibility
  - Tradeoff between rigor and practicality
  - Time constraints
  - Ethical constraints
  - Organizational support
  - Economic factors
  - Availability of Subjects

“A research question is an answerable inquiry into a specific concern or issue. It is the initial step in a research project. The 'initial step' means after you have an idea of what you want to study, the research question is the first active step in the research project”
Publish Strategically

- Publish or Perish – important to communicate your work
- Choose the appropriate journal
  - Publishing is about joining a conversation – decide the level you are able to converse and select a journal accordingly
  - Where you publish is as important as what you publish – refer to the Impact Factor
  - Refer to your database and citations (authors)
  - Watch out for “predatory journals”
- Use appropriate key words – Does it contain “agreed terminology” of your research area that will be found by other researchers?
- Make your work Open Access
  - Work that is freely available is more likely to be used than work that is hidden
  - Making your research openly available gives you more opportunities to make an impact
Publish Strategically

- **Use ORCiD**
  - Provides researchers with a unique identifier and transparent method of linking research activities and outputs to these identifiers
  - ORCiD is unique in its ability to reach across disciplines, research sectors and national boundaries and it cooperates with other identifier systems

- **Use ResearchGate**
  - ResearchGate is a social networking site for scientists and researchers to share papers, ask and answer questions, and find collaborators.
Manage your research data

- Consider your file naming conventions
- Complete and data management plan – protection of data
- Share your data
  - Store your data in a repository and link it to research outputs
  - Allow other researchers to verify your work and build on your work
  - Enhances academic reputation
Promote Your Work

- Research promotion is all about driving as many eyes as possible to your research output
- Present at conferences
- Interviews with media
- Leverage social networking tools
- Update Wikipedia articles
- Write an article on LinkedIn
Use Social Media

- Consider disseminating your thoughts and findings using a blog (keywords important for maximum hits on search engines)
- Use hashtags effectively to help people find your tweets and broaden your network followers
- Twitter is a good way to create a platform to voice key research findings, thoughts and views
- Follow people within your field
- Have a kick-ass LinkedIn profile and page (consider Academia.edu) – keep it updated
- Remember to raise your profile retrospectively – don’t forget to mention work already done
- Engage in conversation – debate
In summary…

- Know your “Why”
- Define your purpose statement
- Build your transferable skill set
- Get international exposure and establish networks and collaborations
- Get a mentor/coach
- Develop good research habits
- Select a research field that you are passionate about – define your research question
- Publish strategically
- Manage your research data
- Promote your work
- Use social media platforms
WHEN EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT, NOTHING IS.

~ Courtney Carver of Be More with Less
Let your decisions today shape the way we will be living in the future.