

## **ISSUE III: RAISING THE BOTTOM LINE**

### **How To Encourage And Improve Extramural Funding In A Communicative Sciences And Disorders Department**

Anne Smith, Ph.D.

Purdue University

#### **Introduction**

This talk is based on my experience. I am not an expert on extramural funding and have not done broader research on this topic. My experience includes six years as head of Department of Audiology and Speech Sciences at Purdue and 23 years of applying for grant funding and doing the funded work. I have also mentored a number of Ph.D. students and served as a grant reviewer for many types of NIH grants.

I. The first question I would like to consider is this: Is it realistic to expect researchers in our discipline to be funded? I would say the answer is definitely yes. The funding is there from NIH and NSF and from many other sources with which I am less familiar. Compared with other departments, especially if your school is in Liberal Arts as ours is, we have a real advantage. We do not have to spend a lot of time looking for likely funding sources.

II. The next question one might ask is this: What can we do to cultivate and inspire a culture of grant getting, from graduate students all the way up to full professors? I will consider this question from a “career span” perspective.

## **Graduate Students**

I believe you must start with graduate students while they are in your program. They must start growing up in a “culture” of grant activities. Their mentors should involve them in grant preparation. They can help collect pilot data, analyze results, and they can read drafts of the grant as it is prepared. This helps them to understand the model of grant oriented research. In the grant model, there is a team of people working on the project. It is not just one person sitting in front of a computer analyzing data. This is a very positive aspect of research to share with students, who often worry that doing research is a lonely activity. As a course assignment, doctoral students should write short grant proposals. If there are not a lot of funded advisers in your program, you may want to arrange for your students to spend some time in laboratories in other programs where they can see such a model at work.

## **Development Of Faculty**

### **Assistant Professors**

One should start encouraging faculty toward the goal of obtaining extramural funding in the hiring process. The interview should include assessment of the candidate’s ability to write a research plan. When we interview candidates, we ask them to provide a short (2-3 pages) five-year plan. You need to make it clear in the interview that obtaining grants is expected. I think it is critical to provide a good startup package, so that the person is ready to be productive right away. In recent years, we have found that \$50-100k is approximately what is needed. That is right; \$100k startup packages are not unusual these days. If you want to be competitive for the best candidates, you must convince your upper administration to support these levels of startup packages. As part of the startup offer, I think it is a good idea to find a mechanism to provide summer salary for the first year that the faculty member is in your program and clearly indicate to the candidate that he or she will be expected to write a grant. Another issue that has come up recently is that we have a new, more extensive

concept of startup funds. These are not just funds for equipment. I encourage applicants to think of startup funds as everything he or she will need for their research program for the first two years (including human subjects payments, programming support, research assistants, outside facility fees, for example, for neuroimaging). We assume that it will be two years before candidates have their own funding, so they must have everything they need to get a good, fast start.

Another extremely important factor is giving the assistant professor time to be productive. I find that this is the most frequent roadblock for junior people. They should have no or minimal committee work. They should have reduced teaching loads; researchers running labs should not be expected to teach four courses per year. We give starting assistant professors one course the semester they start. Then typically they are released a full semester during their probationary period for tenure.

In our experience, the most frequent type of funding obtained by assistant professors is the RO3 from NIH. These are small, 3-year grants. These do not provide enough funding for the investigators to buy out of teaching. Chairs must consider other means of obtaining releases for the junior people funded on the RO3s. This is necessary because if you want the junior people to move from the smaller RO3 awards to the larger RO1 grants (typically around \$200,000 a year for three to five years), they will need the time to make enough progress and to write the larger proposal. Another point I would make is that there seems to be a misperception that new grant writers must start with the R03. This is not true. If they are scientifically ready to write the larger scale plan, they may submit an RO1, without ever having done the smaller grant.

I would encourage you to mentor the assistant professors in terms of extramural funding. Have meetings of the faculty to talk about grants. Let senior faculty share their secrets for success. Encourage senior faculty to read and give feedback on grants and publications. Strongly encourage assistant professors to attend grant writing workshops, both locally and nationally, and provide travel support if they need it.

## **Senior Faculty**

Many of the same strategies outlined above for assistant professors are relevant for people who are more senior. In fact, in our department, the full professors are the most productive in terms of obtaining extramural funds. A key focus should be on the associate professors and getting them to obtain the larger individual investigator grants. I think it is important to support changes in direction, if faculty indicate they want to work in a new area or with a new method. I have seen full professors make radical changes in their research programs and become much more successful in obtaining funding, because the old paradigms they were using simply had been exhausted.

Another thing that chairs can do is to help faculty when they have interim periods without funding. Our department does not get much of our fiscal and administrative fees and salary savings from grants back, but I know many of you do get large amounts returned to you. Use these funds to help senior faculty in those “in between” periods or to help them go in a new direction.

## **Departmental Infrastructure**

Something you might not think about, but which is very important to the grant getting process, is the departmental infrastructure. It is essential to have excellent clerical and business support. Faculty write the proposals and will do the science; they should not have to do the budget or the clerical aspects. The chair must send a very strong message to all faculty, clerical staff, and business staff of the high priority of grants. The idea of the “grant culture” should be pervasive at every level in the department. Clinical supervisors in your departments may feel that the extramural funding process for research is not relevant to them. You need to help them understand that all requests to the Dean, whether for a new clinical supervisor or a new piece of equipment for the clinic, are looked upon in certain light, based on the general success of the overall unit. Whether or not the Dean approves your \$20,000 request for clinical

teaching equipment is directly related to the success of the unit in obtaining extramural funds. By helping everyone to understand this, you can help to diminish the research/clinical divide that often develops in our departments. Make clear how resources flow from both sides to each other, how extramural funding can greatly enhance clinical activities, and how clinical activities can enhance extramural funding.

### **Strategic Planning**

Anyone who has been in administration over the past several years has probably been doing strategic planning. Deans (and everyone above) love strategic plans. I would recommend that you write a five-year plan that sets clear goals for increasing extramural funding (e.g., the total dollar amount you expect to have, the number of funded investigators in the department, etc.). In your strategic plan, envision the future of your department in relation to the directions of future research in the field. How can you position yourself to best take advantage of your strengths? How should your unit expand to link with other areas? Include increasing extramural funding as part of your justification in your plan for adding additional faculty to your program. Ask this question: how does your department funding portfolio match that of NIH?

### **Conclusion**

I feel that we are very lucky to be in communicative sciences and disorders programs. Not only are there truly compelling scientific and clinical questions to ask, we are able to ask for and often obtain the resources to explore these questions in the optimal ways available to us.