Introduction to First (??) Mondays: Overview of Research-Related Faculty Development Resources at Northwestern and Planning an Academic Career

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Rick McGee, PhD and Bill Lowe, MD
First Mondays Faculty Development Series: Navigating a Research Career in Basic, Translational and Clinical Sciences

Faculty Affairs Office, FSM
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- Other FSM and Northwestern experts and resources
Logistics

• Typically first Monday of each month but this year room problems – see schedule!

• Slides and audio recording available at NUCATS website a few days after each session


• Tell your friends – all faculty, soon-to-be-faculty and postdocs welcome
Purpose and Intent

• Provide a lot of information that is very important for being successful, particularly in an academic career

• Especially focused on skills related to seeking funding from NIH – deep pockets – but much will translate to other sources

• May overlap with information you receive from mentors and colleagues but that’s ok – hearing different views is actually good!

• STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO ASK QUESTIONS – CLARIFY WHAT YOU HAVE HEARD FROM OTHERS TOO!

• Not designed to achieve the in-depth training required to write effective proposals…more on this later
Schedule of Sessions

• October 6, 2015 – Introduction to the First Mondays Faculty Development Series – An overview of research-related faculty development resources at Northwestern

• November 16, 2015 – Crafting your Career Advancement Plan (CAP) – getting beyond just ‘letting it happen’ – a real-time first step in creating the plan

• December 14, 2015 – Working with the Office for Sponsored Research (OSR)

• January 11, 2016 – NIH Funding – Deconstructing the NIH Alphabet Soup, finding important information on the NIH website, communicating with NIH officials, etc.
Schedule continued…

• February 8, 2016 – **The NIH Review Process** – an in-depth look at how NIH peer review works and how it impacts how you write proposals

• March 14, 2016 – **Strategies for Writing Effective NIH 'R' and 'K' Proposals: Part I** – an introduction to the overall strategy of writing NIH grants and video tools developed at Northwestern proven to be effective

• April 11, 2016 – **Strategies for Writing Effective NIH 'R' and 'K' Proposals: Part II** – This session will continue the February topic by walking through each section of NIH-style proposal to reveal what needs to be accomplished in each, and effective writing patterns/strategies.
Schedule continued…

• May 2, 2016 – Everything You Wanted to Know About The Office of Research Development (ORD), and The Electronic Data Warehouse (EDW) at Northwestern – An Invaluable Resource for Clinical, Translational and Outcomes Research

• June 6, 2016 – For Clinical Scientists: Designing a Strategy to Achieve the Level of Research that Fits Your Career – Consultant, Collaborator, Co-Investigator, or PI?
In-Depth Proposal Writing and Guidance

- NIH Grant Writers Groups
- New approach to development of sophisticated grant writing skills needed to succeed
- Model in use for >15 years – 7 years hear at FSM
- ~ 2-3 month long structured process
- First group of 10 junior faculty started June, 2008
- Since then 250+ faculty involved in one or more group at various levels of time – separate K and R writers groups
- At least 55 grants obtained by participants during this time, many testimonials and return visitors/referrals indicate value
- Groups formed every 4 months ahead of NIH cycles - next groups forming SOON so let me know if you would like to join or get on the email list for future announcements
In-Depth Proposal Writing and Guidance

• Need to be actively writing
• Format is real-time review and feedback on 1-2 pages of writing at a time within a group of 3-6 people
• Weekly meetings of ~90 minutes
• Initial and heavy focus on Specific Aims page
• Moves on to Significance and Innovation
• Career Development sections for K awards
• Less focus on Approach as this is more technical and the section mentors can help most on
• I am also available for individual review and comment
New – Pre-submission Peer Review

- Must have very good draft of Aims page at least 8-10 weeks before the deadline – sent to Dr. McGee to start process
- Must have very good complete draft of full proposal 6 weeks prior to the deadline – this alone is invaluable!
- Initial review of Aims page by Drs. McGee and Lowe
- Identification of appropriate NU reviewers and additional feedback on Aims page
- Full NIH-style review of full proposal by 2 reviewers
- In-person meeting as a group or individually
- Dean Nielson provides $250/reviewer as compensation for this important but time-demanding activity
- Started in August, 2013 and working well as long as schedule adhered to
Career Development Resources through NUCATS CECD

- http://www.nucats.northwestern.edu/

- Amanda Mozer from NUCATS
Career Progression in FSM

• Dr. Bill Lowe – not to be covered here but for all of the information see the following link:

http://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/faculty-staff/FAO/index.html
How do you plan and navigate a career?

• Assertively – You need to make things happen, not wait for them to happen

• Analytically – Think of it like a highly refined experiment you might plan, but realize results don’t always turn out as planned

• A series of Specific Aims – You have to have a series of objectives, preferably with branch points rather than a linear design with potential dead ends

• It’s ok to ‘keep my options open’ but you need to pick a direction and go for it even with a Plan B in your pocket

• Flexibly and with Guidance
It starts with a self-assessment

• What do you want to be and be doing 5-10 years from now?
• What are the steps along the way to achieve it?
• What necessary skills and background do you have?
• What skills and background do you NOT have?
• How will you acquire what you need?
• Can break it down into smaller bits… “CTSA Core Competences in Clinical and Translational Research”
• [https://www.ctsacentral.org/education_and_career_development/core-competencies-clinical-and-translational-research](https://www.ctsacentral.org/education_and_career_development/core-competencies-clinical-and-translational-research)
• Next month use tool to help create explicit plan
Are you and your department/division aligned?

• Do you agree on track and time split?
  • Did you even talk about it?
• Have you been given/did you negotiate necessary resources – e.g. non-clinical time, money, space, guidance?
  • Did you negotiate for mentoring?
• May need to go back and renegotiate…
• Think of it not as ‘asking’ for things but a realistic assessment of what is needed for the department to benefit from their investment in you!
Mentoring

• How many of you have been formally assigned a person in your department as your mentor?
• *What is your understanding of what they are expected to provide to you?*
• How many of you have found one yourself?
• How many of you have more than one?
• How many of you are confident the mentor(s) are going to provide what you need to grow professionally and excel?
• Overall, what do you expect/want a mentor(s) to provide for you vs. making it on your own
Making it work – your responsibilities

- Be proactive – you can’t afford to wait for someone to reach out to you
- Consciously and carefully think through what you want from mentors
- Be concrete and explicit – spell out what you would like from a mentor and what s/he expects or can provide to you
  - Best to actually write it down
  - Generally less productive to ask someone to “be your mentor” than to ask them, “Can you help me with…”
- Don’t hesitate to seek out multiple mentors for different pieces of what you need
Your responsibilities – continued…

• Think about how much the mentor will gain vs. only you
• relationships are easier to sustain if both get something – evolution to colleagues/collaborators
• if the mentor won’t get much other than seeing you succeed, be respectful of what you are asking for and make sure you put in the bulk of the effort
• be savvy about how busy s/he is at different times
• You will likely never outgrow your need for feedback from colleagues – and it is one of the hardest things to get – consider using peers as much as mentors
• Peer and group mentoring effective – today an example
• Communicate, communicate, communicate
Where do you find mentors and collaborators?

- Your division/department
- Other NU departments/divisions
- Professional organizations
- Random cocktail parties…
- Are any better than others?
  - Depends on what you are looking for…
Effective mentoring and being mentored is an acquired/developed skill

- Recent big surge in systematic approaches to teaching and developing skills of mentors
- RCT of new workshop training model conducting at 16 CTSA sites – led by U of Wisconsin and Mike Fleming (now in NU NUCATS)
- Will talk about more next month
The bottom lines...

If you sit back and wait for promotion/life to happen it very likely won’t, or won’t take the path you want...

If you approach it with tunnel vision it could be a long tunnel...

Approach it as a team sport as much as an individual marathon...
Questions?

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