Episode 40: Matt Bergman

# KL: Katie Linder

# MB: Matt Bergman KL: You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode forty.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to *Research in Action*, a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus.

On this episode, I am joined by Dr. Matt Bergman, an Assistant Professor at the University of Louisville in the College of Education and Human Development. He teaches adult students (25 and older) in the Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership and Learning program. Dr. Bergman’s research is focused on factors that impact adult learners in degree completion programs at four-year universities and he recently won a national competition for Innovation in Educational Attainment from the Gheen’s Foundation based upon local implementation of his research. Dr. Bergman has also served in several other capacities at Appalachian State University and Lees-McRae College in Western North Carolina working in Enrollment Management, Athletic Learning Assistance, and Admissions. Prior to his career in Higher Education, Matt played Arena Football in Charleston, SC for a total of three seasons. He received a B.S. in Sports Administration, Physical Education, and Health Education from Union College in Barbourville, KY. He received a Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC and a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development from the University of Louisville. He is a teacher, administrator, and ambassador of degree attainment at the local, regional, and national levels.

Thanks for joining me, Matt.

**MB:** Glad to be here, thank you for having me.

**KL**: So Matt, I actually asked you to come on this show today in response to a listener email that we received and the listener said, “Given that I’m about to embark on an academic career, I’d love to have an episode from someone who is maybe three or four years into an assistant professor appointment, talking about their experience in filling the research pipeline, hopefully getting somethings to hit publication-wise; balancing teaching, maybe new preps that they didn’t teach in graduate school; managing departmental and university service; and generally figuring out how to feel like a faculty member instead of a now well-paid doctoral student. Or they say, maybe it’s best to feel that way.” I thought that given where you are in your career, this would be a perfect episode to have you come on and talk a little bit about getting launched as a new faculty member, prepping for tenure review, and all of the things that, that entails. Let’s start out with some of the key things that helped you successfully launched your new career as a faculty member.

**MB**: Katie it’s really hard to believe that I’m coming up for my third year, half-way through tenure review. It feels like yesterday, I just graduated as a doc student and I’m actually a faculty member and I’ve been that way since 2012. It took me a while to get converted to the ten-year track but I thought immediately when I finished my dissertation that I better start filling the pipeline. I think I did a decent job of that but I don’t think one ever feels really comfortable with a job that you’ve done as a scholar from the outset of finishing a dissertation. It’s taken some time and I’m starting to get my steel legs a little bit and I’m almost half-way there but it is coming along and the pipeline is pretty full right now.

**KL**: So let’s talk about that, what does a full pipeline look like for you?

**MB**: I’ve gotten lots of advice along the way but specifically, the best advice I’ve gotten is the three-three-three. That is three ideas taking shape, three manuscripts in process and three either in review or in press. So that is pretty ambitious but I like to think that if you’ve got a really hot bid of items that really suits your long term goals, you are probably going to have no problem having that many manuscripts, chapters, books, op-eds, whatever it may be in the pipeline.

**KL**: When I first started out right after grad school and I was trying to film my own pipeline, I found it was really helpful to look to things like conference papers and even seminar papers that I have been writing as a graduate student and to see which of those things I might be able to push out to publication. Where there areas of that, that you were looking at as well? Where you primarily kind of looking to your dissertation to see what you could use from that? How are you kind of starting out trying to think about how to get that pipeline up and running?

**MB**: Well specifically, I guess technically—I started with the dissertation because one put so much effort into producing a really quality document; which after you’re done with it, you don’t feel like it’s still quality but you get to the point where you’re done and it’s been approved by your committee and you’ve got to take full advantage of that. That is the place to start filling your pipeline. Alongside that, of course conference, papers, and presentations; the ideas that have been bubbling up alongside the manuscripts, or the papers you’re starting to put together are key aspects but also the biggest key for me has been collaborating with current and future colleagues. Whether that be reaching out to my friend Katie at Oregon State or maybe finding a person right down the hallway. Those have been the true essence of what has gotten me to a place where I actually feel a little bit comfortable as a scholar, because I certainly didn’t feel that way after finishing my dissertation.

**KL**: Yeah and that’s actually—you know It’s interesting, this is how Matt and I met. Matt reached out via email because he was coming to Oregon and wanted to do some collaborative thinking about maybe moving forward with some research projects together and how we could maybe work together. And so, I happen to learn about where he is, what’s going on with his research and also invite him to be on the podcast. I think you are absolutely right. The early years are a really good time to start networking and maybe a slightly different way than what you did, when you were in graduate school because I think, especially towards the end of graduate school, you may be networking for the purpose of getting a job. You’re not necessarily networking for the purpose of your research and once you have a job, you can kind of start thinking toward, okay how can I connect with colleagues and think about that. So, that’s an excellent point.

**MB**: Thank you.

**KL**: Okay, so you’re just starting out, you’re trying to kind of glean and gather what you can from the stuff that you already have that’s maybe things that you’ve collected over time with grad school, you’re starting to maybe push some publications out the door but you’re also trying to balance this with other things that are going on in your academic role. Can you talk a little bit about strategies that you used, especially early on to balance out teaching new preps and working maybe with some service obligations in your department or at your school, as you’re trying to work towards moving these publications out the door?

**MB**: Well interestingly, I started as a term or clinical faculty member in my first role and was then moved forward into a ten-year track role after two years of work and that gave me a chance to kind of start the process of obviously doing some research but while I was doing that, I was teaching a four-four-two load. It was a pretty heavy load and a lot of new preps, and it was definitely challenging but I guess the best advice I would have for a new incoming faculty member would be, teach what has been taught previously. In other words, if a course is already built by a previous instructor, the first semester, you really have to dig into that content but don’t change a huge amount of that content for the sake of your own sanity. The reason I say that specifically is because I’ve had—I’ve been a program director, so I’ve had a variety of faculty that have taken on new preps and they’ve done it the other way. They’ve re-developed the class, they’ve re-done the curriculum, and they’ve re-done the hallmark assessment or the major project and it’s been a major pitfall. I like the idea of taking what someone else’s taught and going with it but also putting your own spin on that. Then, easing your way into maybe the second and or third semester re-development class into reflecting your own true identity but the first semester, my best advice is to don’t re-invent the wheel, teach the class that has been taught previously. There are various smart people that have developed these courses. No matter what discipline you are in, teach the class they taught, make it your own, but don’t re-create the wheel.

**KL**: Yeah, that is such excellent advice and I think that it kind of allows you to learn about whomever was teaching the course before; you get a sense of what they were prioritizing and you can rely a little bit on their expertise and what they’ve brought to the course and what they thought was important before you go ahead and make your own changes to it. Matt, I know you also have some pretty extensive service obligations; what were some things that you learned in your first several years about balancing things like committee work and maybe other kinds of requests that made of you regarding your service?

**MB**: Well the first word that comes to mind is not balance. That is probably going to be true for every new faculty member because you want to prove yourself and it’s obvious that you want to create a strong network with individuals that will support and push you forward through your tenure case or through your teaching evaluations, or through your network and your opportunities throughout your career. So you want to get a foot-hold on campus and beyond of course, to really feel good about where you’re headed. That flies in the face of balance. It totally flies in the face of balance because—I mean I’m just looking at my list here and it’s the standards and emissions committee. I’m a program director for a program of four-hundred students. I work with the military advisory board. I work with the online teaching network. I have a corporate partners award. I work with fifty-five thousand degrees which is a degree completion initiative and all of those things are probably too much. I don’t know that balance is a really easy thing to accomplish but what I would say is that every single service element that you get involved in, must somehow relate to research agenda and or your teaching practice. Because when those things overlap it starts to create a possibility of finding some sort of balance as you get really accustom to those particular boards, those particular service elements, those particular teaching, those courses, and that leads into connections as well as potential ideas for papers and manuscripts.

**KL**: That’s an excellent point. We are going to take a brief break, when we come back we’ll hear a little more from Matt about prepping for Tenure review, back in a moment.

# Segment 2:

**KL**: Matt I’m wondering if during your time, your early years as a faculty member, there were any significant shifts or just anything that happened that made you feel more like a faculty member and less like a graduate student?

**MB**: I would say that there are a number of things, including just the time factor and the idea of building yourself and your reputation as a scholar, and instructor, a teacher, and then a member of service-based components, your committees and your boards. But specifically, I would say sitting my name on a couple of pubs was very empowering. The idea of getting your name published somewhere made you—it’s very validating, very affirming but more than that, it gives you some credibility among your colleagues. That being said, I really think the analogy of baseball is really perfect here and what I mean by that is you got to hit a couple signals before you start hitting home runs and I really focused on that when I was really starting to fill the pipeline or to try and get a couple manuscripts accepted. I really wanted to get something out there, so whether it was a lower tier journal or some upstart journal, I was totally opened to that. Now, that doesn’t mean the pay to publish type journals, that means, those journals that are highly regarded but maybe not the career maker type journals.

**KL**: Well and I think, I remember back when I was first starting out and I had not published anything and I was advised and I took this advice to start with book reviews and to contact some journals editors of journals that were in my field and just to let them know I was available to review books. And there I think are three book reviews on my CV and I started out that way. And I know some other people think about more small wins’ kind of things, like encyclopedia, entries and just something where you’re just working with an editor, starting to get your name in print. Now, are these things going to count necessarily toward tenure? Probably not in most situations but it is a way to kind of get yourself professionalized a little bit. And I love that idea, your baseball analogy of really thinking about what are the small wins that you can do first before you really go after something that’s going to make a big difference for you. Let’s talk a little bit about as your kind of moving towards your third year review, because I know that this is something that’s coming up for you, how have you prepared for that?

**MB**: Well I will say that I’m pro0bably trembling a little bit on this side of the computer right now, thinking about coming up for third year review but I’m going to say that’s pretty common for most folks going into this phase. But I’m starting to build my box as it were. At the university a little what it used to be, a gigantic box full of documents, now it’s becoming an electronic submission—kind of a portfolio type submission and I’m basically putting items into categories and making sure those categories are very robust and they align specifically with the personnel committees review and I have the descriptions, criteria, and evidence for three year and ten year reviews based upon the College of Education Human Development Personnel Policies and Procedures, right here in front of me. And I keep it either on the board or in the file very close so that I’m reviewing that pretty frequently, so I know what’s expected. It’s got the element of teaching service and research on it and details connected to those. I think if anyone is going through that process it’s very important to find out what is expected of you, understand the expectations of the personnel committee at your particular respective institution and then go to the personnel policies and procedures document, which is—ours is called the red book. And then we have a university of global strategic plan score card and those are items for which we are judge by the state and our board of trustees to see if we are making progress. If you can find ways to find an alignment in all three of these type of documents, then it’s going to be hard for your case to be denied. I think that is the key is, and I hate the idea of conforming too much but you’ve got to conform a bit to these three in particular; the personnel policy procedures through your tenure review, documents from your respective department and or college, and then the strategic plan or the university score card.

**KL**: I’m so glad you’ve raised this as an issue about knowing what these documents say because I think this is actually one of the greatest challenges for people as they shift into an academic role, is confusion about what they need to do to achieve tenure or to earn tenure. And the first thing you pointed out is that usually there is some form of documentation. Sometimes also, there are workshops or other things that may be happening at your university that would help you to kind of go through and learn a little more from these documents. Matt I’m wondering, is there anyone—did you ask questions? Did you seek out a mentor to maybe help you think through some of these things or were the documents clear enough that you felt like you could just go based on that?

**MB**: Yes, yes and yes. I think that the documents where clear but so for a person that doesn’t feel as open to trying to go out to find mentors, or to seek a lot of guidance, it’s possible still. But you have to kind of put yourself in that situation of who’s going to be reviewing you and how can I form a relationship with them so they can understand who I am beyond just some linum on a cd and a big box of papers. And I think that one of the keys here specifically, is talking with the personal committee a bit and we are fortunate at the university global to have had a variety of short either webinars or a lunch and learn type session, where they sit down and they talk with new faculty and then folks that are going in or past their first or second year, and then people coming up for their third year. So they try and do a very good job of connecting with us in a variety of ways. I’m very thankful for that, both at the university level but also the college level. We’re really lucky to have some strong resources.

**KL**: That’s awesome, that’s so good to hear. So, what’s kind of interesting I think about third year review is that you get some feedback hopefully, and have a sense that things are on the right track, but you’re not done. I’m wondering if you can talk a little bit about how, what is this milestone for you in terms of, is it just a checkpoint? Are you just continuing on while you are waiting for that feedback to continue on the path that you set before you to make sure your kind of on the right track for tenure? Are you going to wait until you get some feedback and take a pause and kind of see where things are? How are you planning for kind of the second half of this part of your career that will get you to tenure?

**MB**: Katie, I think it’s a bad idea to wait, so I am not waiting at all. I’m trying to make sure that this is just a wave point or just a checkpoint along the way and I’m not putting a lot of eggs in this basket to tell me a whole lot. Now I think there is going to be incredibly valuable feedback that is going to shift my avenues. It’s going to help you really define my path where I go next but I’ve gotten some advice coming up to this year. I’ve gotten advice that I should do a solo author peer-reviewed publication and that was totally against my spirit. I just like the idea of collaboration. I want to have co-authors because I believe that enhances the manuscript and I love working with people. Not everybody feels that way but that is a main stay of my own personality but It was advised that I do that. You just suck it up and do it and I did that and I got my first solo that’s coming out in November. So that is a huge win for me even though it was really uncomfortable and I would compare this one to, I love analogies, to marathon running because when I think about training for a marathon, which I’ve done one, so don’t be impress but I’ve done one marathon and in that training there were many days where I didn’t want to train but I knew that I had the log miles to finish the marathon. And you know just like tenure, it is a marathon and if there are some days when you don’t want to run and I think the same thing has happened to me. There are some days I don’t want to write, there are some days that I don’t want to dig in but I’m just kind of forcing myself to do it and know that the quality might not be as high but it is progress and think that’s the key. And I don’t think waiting is a good idea for someone to tell you, you’re doing good or bad because they are probably not going to tell you, you are doing so good if you’re waiting for a feedback and not taking the opportunity to stay active.

**KL**: That’s great advice. We’re going to take another brief break, when we come back we’ll hear a little bit more from Matt, back in a moment.

# Segment 3:

**KL**: Matt you are at, you know, a very important milestone in your tenure journey. Which is your third year review that’s coming up soon and as you mentioned, this is kind of a scary time. And I think for many of us, the tenure journey or just you know, the hidden sort of milestones in our careers can be moments of real fear about what we’re doing, what we’re doing right, and what we’re doing wrong. I’m wondering if you can talk a little bit about that? You know, as you are at this point, what are you feeling? Is there some fear their kind of what you’ve done this far in your career to get you to this stage?

**MB**: Yeah and honestly, I’m a very privileged person. I’ve had a great upbringing. I’ve been an athlete in college, I’ve had a lot of success there but when I thought about becoming a faculty member, I legitimately started shaking in my boots. It was total fear factor and I felt pretty confident along the way but I’ve always felt kind of a bit like an imposter. I felt like a working class academic but you know, its honestly so scary to think that I would be side by side with my colleagues that I think so highly of them. When I think about their expertise, their intellect, I feel like a total imposter and I think that’s okay. I think embracing that is really the true key in all of this; Is that you’re going to feel that way but you’re still going to push forward and you’re going to strive for knowledge, and you’re going to be pushed by the people that you think highly of. Those are your role models, your mentors, and your colleagues and knowing that they are there to support you and you’ve got allies in that process, takes the imposter syndrome and kind of flushes it a bit but it always will rear its head. I mean I don’t—I was working on reviewing a set of eight articles today and I would almost rather drink a glass of broken glass because of what the content was and I’m just so scared of it and I feel like I’m not going to have much to offer here and I don’t know why they ask me to be in this project but you just got to power through, and jump in and do your best and know that sometimes it’s not going to be perfect but if you put that effort in the results will be very positive overall.

**KL**: Well I think too, as you go through moments, I think we all feel this imposter syndrome. I think it’s a very rare person who doesn’t feel this at some point in their academic career but also realizing that you’re learning as you go. And even when you’re in a situation where you feel a real lack of confidence in your abilities, you must be picking up some kind of skillset through that experience because you feel like you’re walking into it without a level of what you should have. And so I think that’s a really important point. One of the things that we talked a little bit about earlier was just kind of being motivated. You know, maybe you’re in this moment, you feel like, what do I really have to offer here but you need to go forward and I know that something you really rely on Matt is just have passion. Being passionate about your research and passion about what you can offer to the academic community. I’m wondering if you can talk a little bit about that and maybe tell us a little bit about your current projects as well.

**MB**: Yeah, I honestly think it’s really important to engage in that passion even though the details of the day can drag you down. I mean there is so much to do and you’re teaching in service component that is required to be done. You need to get back to students, you need to develop your curriculum, you need to show up for a certain meeting. And those things can overtake and can easily carve out the time that you needed to focus on that passion that those particular manuscripts are trying to develop and that can sit on the shelf. And I think it’s so important to carve out time and I don’t know that I’ve done the best job of that but I’ve tried very hard to carve that space and I feel like at this point, coming from my third year I’m finally getting a little better at that.

**KL**: That’s interesting you know. I mean that’s another thing that I think is really helpful to hear is that it takes some time to get into the groove of how do you balance these things and it might not be something that you figure out anymore in your first term.

**MB**: And I think that some people figure it out sooner than others. I’ve got colleagues that just come run circles around me with their publications. And honestly, I just feel like you are such a juggernaut, how can I kind of be like you? But comparison is the enemy of joy. So remember that, if you don’t remember anything else in the podcasts; comparison is the enemy of joy. Do not compare yourselves to your colleagues but you do want to use them as allies. But I try not to fall into the trap of, I want to be like doctor shuck. He’s world renown and he is the leading expert in the world at x, he’s an employee engagement researcher. And I would love to be that but it’s going to take some time. Like I mentioned about the baseball metaphor, I’ve got to hit some singles before I can start competing for the triple crown here. But I love the idea of having him to push me forward but not falling into the trap of wanting to be him. I got to be myself and I have finally found myself and found my niche in the literature and I’m really digging in now to a variety of things, including: prior learning assessment, and adult degree attainment—so kind of bridging the gap of national educational attainment. And then I’ve got a fun pet project related to returning athletes. So those big time division one athletes that didn’t necessarily focus on their academics but then went off and either competed professionally, or went off into the sunset but never finished. Now those folks have a pathway now to come back and institutions are welcoming them back and drove to try and help them complete that long hill dream of finishing a college degree.

**KL**: These sound fascinating and I’m wondering, you know, so talked about kind of the details of the day and then you have kind of these bigger picture projects that you are thinking about. How are you kind of balancing out, reminding yourself of kind of the larger vision of your research and what you are trying to do even when maybe you are kind of admired in the day to day emailing, data collection, analysis; you know, trying to get all those little pieces in place. How are you kind of balancing those things?

**MB**: Well I don’t know that I’m good at balancing them but I’m trying. I took great advice from my program chair Doctor Sulaske way back in the day where she said something very profound. And she said to me, “Matt you’ve got to be gentle with yourself.” And I thought, “Oh my god, that’s the thing I needed to hear.” I’ve never heard that in my life. I’ve never felt like I could be gentle with myself and I try to remind myself that, I cannot do all of this in one day and some days are going to be losses. I truly do not get the productivity that I want, especially in writing on some days and I try not to beat myself up and I think a very easy trap for us to call into as faculty, especially folks that have this kind of imposter syndrome. If you’re not experiencing that, if you feel very confident then I’m so impressed by you but many of us are feeling that. They’re feeling the pressure, we’re feeling the push of trying to be great, trying to get tenure, trying to be recognized, trying to be an authority in the field, and some days aren’t going to be great so I have to be gentle with myself when those days occur. But also challenge myself through that and say, “Don’t feel sorry for yourself, it’s time to get to work and there is work to do and it is much bigger than just me.” As you mentioned, you said it was fascinating. I think it’s really fascinating and I think that if we as faculty find our topics and our areas very fascinating, we’re going to be okay because it’s fun to do fascinating stuff. Or fun to do things that has meaning and value for us personally. And I think that is profound advice, to be gentle with yourself, but also find the things that have deep and long lasting meaning to you individually.

**KL**: I love that and I’ve tried to do that in my own academic work as well so that’s great. So you’ve mentioned Matt, you have mentors, you have people you are reaching out to, people who are offering you their sage advice. I’m wondering if you have also found a peer group to help you think through some of these things. Some people have called them near-peer mentors, people who maybe be at your same stage. Have you found a group like that? Is that helpful to you? Or are you mostly relying on a mentor community of people who are kind of beyond where you are now?

**MB**: Probably both and I think I’m very lucky in that I’ve not been turned away by a lot of groups that I try to join and not been turn away by my peers if I’ve exhibited some sort of interest in their particular research trainings or their groups. So first, the mentors; there’s a lot of research now. Doctor Rasheed goes at Drexel and talks about mentors as partners now. And we’ve found it through the academy for human resource development, a mentor partner program. So it partners senior scholars with junior scholars with graduate students and all together and they learn from one another. And it’s a partner framework, which really enhances, I believe that, the interaction to provide value on both ends of it. That’s been a huge blessing and was just recommended to me by a colleague and I’ve somehow find my way in with these really smart people and they accept me so it’s nice. But also, my peer groups, so the near peer scholars, we have form research labs or leadership labs and we have a couple of those where we actually include graduate students but also have people that are in the pre-tenure process, where we are talking about particular topics and we are farming out those for lead author opportunities and then we have second and third author opportunities there as well. So if someone leaves the project, and you just come along and for the ride and make it happen. And I think those are really fantastic, especially if you can do that at your own institution. If you have a group of scholars or colleagues that are interested in either similar topics or broad ranging topics that somehow connects, you can form a little research lab and make something happen. And the nice thing about being a faculty member, you know that can be out at the local pub or it can be in the conference room, or it can be at your home; wherever this group feels most comfortable and most productive, that’s where you get it done. And you find these people, connect with them, and you just put dates on the book, and you meet your goals and magic starts to happen.

**KL**: Well Matt, I wish you the best of luck with your third year review. I think you are going to be a rising star. You already are a rising star in your field. Thank you so much for taking the time to come on and share a little bit about your experience and respond to our listener question about, what do you do when you’re just embarking on your academic career.

**MB**: It’s been a great pleasure and good luck to all those folks that are graduate students and in the pre-tenure, and actually those people that are already tenure. Let’s stay active and let’s see the things that bigger than us and let’s make it happen.

**KL**: Absolutely. Thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of research in action. I’m Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

Show notes with information regarding topics discussed in each episode, as well as the transcript for each episode, can be found at the *Research in Action* website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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