Episode 51: Sara Goldrick-Rab

# KL: Katie Linder

# SG: Sara Goldrick-Rab KL: You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode fifty-one.

# [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 Sara Goldrick-Rab, the author of *Paying the Price*, and the coauthor of *Reinventing Financial Aid: Charting a New Course to College Affordability*. She has written on education issues for the *New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and other publications. Goldrick-Rab is currently a Professor of Higher Education Policy and Sociology at Temple University in Philadelphia, and is a former professor of higher education policy and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.  She is the founding director of the Wisconsin HOPE Lab, the nation’s first laboratory aimed at improving equitable outcomes in postsecondary education. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* recently named her Twitter account (@saragoldrickrab) the most indispensable one to follow.

Thanks so much for joining me today, Sara.

**SG:** Thanks for having me.

**KL:** So, I want to start by talking about your book, *Paying the Price*, which has been getting so much media attention, but it’s really kind of longitudinal study that you worked on. So for people who may not be familiar with the book, let’s start there, what are some of the research questions you were really getting into?

**SG:** Well what I was interested in in the study that led to this book was this question of: why it is that so many students from low income families don’t finish college, despite the fact that we spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year on financial aid from all different forms of government, from private philanthropy? And I was particularly interested in whether that really meant that financial aid is ineffective or if it meant money really wasn’t the issue for students. And I had a hard time thinking that the money wasn’t the issue, because we kept hearing, and you know everybody always hears how money is really an issue. So wanting to dig in on that more, and at the same time I was approached by a group of philanthropists who were in fact about to give more money out to these low income students and they were creating a new program, and they were interested whether their program giving more scholarship money out would be effective. And so given those combination of interests basically decided that it would be a worthwhile study to examine the people that they were trying to help, and to watch over time as the program tried to change their lives. And that’s in fact what we did.

**KL:** So let’s talk a little about kind of the logistics of the study, so you followed is it three thousand students?

**SG:** Three thousand Pell grant recipients yes.

**KL:** Okay, so quite a large number of folks to wrangle. And I know you also conducted, was it fifty interviews, well a sample of fifty from the sample that you had interviews with. And then also had done some surveys work and tracking this cohort. And I know you had a team that was working on this, can you talk a little bit about kind of the logistics of this team and also just, a long term project like this, I mean six years is a huge investment, a necessary investment for this kind of project, but tell me about how this was structured in terms of working with people on your team and making sure you were getting the data you needed.

**SG:** Yeah, sure absolutely. Well first let me explain why we did such a large project, because I think there are lots of folk out there, particularly economists, who have studied the effects of financial aid over time and have done so in a particular way, in fact I think with no team and no research funding. What they have mainly done is turn to administrative data sets. Where you can see the students in there, and you can see the amount of aid that they got perhaps or the fact that they got aid at least, and you can see whether or not they finished college, and you can kind of crunch the numbers. So we could have done that, we could’ve done that, we could’ve simply done that, but I had a sense though that it would be more complicated than we would be able to unpack with just that. And in particular I thought well it’s entirely possible that we’re giving people money, but maybe the money isn’t going where it’s intended to go, or maybe the money is, maybe the way they’re spending the money isn’t the right way or you know, there’s a lot of possible things. And with my colleague Doug Harris, at the time we sat down and kind of mapped out all these hypotheses we had about how and why financial aid may or may not change your chances of finishing college. And then we mapped data collection onto those hypotheses. So we mapped hypotheses for example about how people spend their time. So does financial aid actually get you to work less and study more? Well to measure people’s time, you actually have to ask them about your time, so that’s how we ended up doing surveys. And another one, I was interested in the question, maybe some of those financial aid dollars that we give students actually end up going to their families, because they need to support their families. So that’s a question that you have to ask people and frankly it’s not even a question that you can get out on surveys, it’s a pretty personal question. So for many reasons, we also ended up wanting to do interviews. Now there’s what researchers want to do, and there’s what researchers get to do right? And within probably six months, we had laid out a very ambitious plan, and I want to be clear about timeline here: I had only learned I would be doing this project in January of 2008 and the project had to begin in September 2008, okay?

[*laughs*]

So we mapped out a mixed methods large study across the entire state of Wisconsin, with 42 public colleges and universities and 3000 students, and we frankly had all of the plans in place within six months and we had to fundraise for that. And so, I had had prior experience working on a large study, one of my projects in graduate school was a six state study of the effects of welfare reform on community colleges. We did interviews, I crunched numbers, right, I had some experience working on a large team, and I really liked it by the way. I had in the first part of my tenure track, had to do a lot of work by myself just crunching numbers and I really didn’t love that. I had gradually started to build teams to do surveys and things, so this presented a great opportunity. Logistics number one, right: money, cash. The good news was I am a very entrepreneurial person who actually likes fundraising. And I had focused my efforts primarily on private foundations. So I knew some folks, because for example I had received the Spencer Dissertation Fellowship and the Spencer Post-Doctoral Fellowship by that point and so I figured I could go to the Spencer Foundation right? So it was things like that, we got some initial funding from the Spencer Foundation, we then went and got a very large grant from the William T Grant Foundation, which was something I would never had applied for if the president of the foundation hadn’t happened to visit my campus while I was looking for resources. And then of course came staff. And then there was this question of okay, how are we going to staff this thing? And my initial thinking was that we would staff it with graduate students, because that’s what we do in academia. So we went out there and searched for people who would want to come to Madison to study with us and begin this project, in other words we were thinking we’d have new graduate students who would kind of advance along with this project. And in some cases that worked out beautifully, and in other cases it didn’t work out because they were too green. One of those people, Peter Kinsley, is mentioned several times in the book because he has been with me since that day. Since the day we went out to recruit him, he came to Wisconsin and he has been part of my lab and part of my studies ever since then. Lots of staffing questions arose, like so for instance we wanted to do these interviews, right and we got this wonderful, we’re talking $450,000 worth of funding to make sure we got to do interviews. And these interviews were with 50 students who were at 6 colleges and universities across southeastern Wisconsin. And to be clear, we were not interested in interviewing them once, we were interested in interviewing them every semester for years. Now if you have a student doing that, they may not be available to go out and keep interviewing people, so over time I had to figure out what to do with a student that was developing a relationship with my graduate student, but my graduate student was no longer available to be doing those interviews. So that was a growing pain. I also thought a lot about and came to learn a lot about the importance of project management, and I think that this is a highly underrated skill, and I’m so glad that by the second year of the project I was able to find and see real talent in a woman named Allison Bowman. And when I brought her in she had a masters degree in public policy and some prior experience though not doing this. She’s just a great people person and extremely detail oriented and eight years later, Allison is the assistant director of my lab. Something I feel great about because of the relationship, also because Allison, and this is so important for hiring, Allison gets this work. Allison is Native American, Allison doesn’t come from money, she very much understands the issues these students are going through and she understands why it is that sometimes we have to work crazy hours or do certain things in order to make this happen. So the commitment of the staff was so important. When I sat down to write the concluding chapters of the book, in particular the acknowledgements, I wanted to make sure that we thanked everybody that had been involved. And Allison made her list, and I went over her list, and at first I could believe the size of the list. And I went over it again and added more people, I think we had almost 200 people in six years involved in this thing and they were not the people in the study. I am so grateful, there wouldn’t be any of this happening right now if they hadn’t stepped up to make this possible, but at the time I don’t think I ever realized how many people were involved.

**KL:**  Well Sara, I’m fascinated by these logistics, we’re going to take a brief break, when we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more from Sara about some of the media attention for *Paying the Price*. Back in a moment.

[*music plays*]

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Sara, one of the things I think is going to be of real interest of our listeners is the engagement you’ve had with the media around the research that you describe in *Paying the Price,* so I’m wondering if we can start out, again for folks who may not know, with sharing some of the opportunities that you’ve had to talk about this research with more broad audiences.

**SG:** Okay, so in order to answer that, I need to take one step back a little bit to talk briefly about the Wisconsin Hope Lab. So the Wisconsin Hope Lab is the organization that I created following on this study, the study that is part of the book is something we call the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, and by the time we got to year three or four, it was pretty clear that my research portfolio was going to expand around college affordability and I wanted to kind of put that all under one umbrella and have one team that handled multiple studies. The way that the Wisconsin Research Lab is set up is that it’s a translational research study. And the reason that I emphasize that is what is so important to this work is the translation. So we’re interested in exploring topics we don’t understand very well, digging in deeper, doing the research, figuring out what needs to be done and then what actually works and disseminating it. And the disseminating part is very hard work and I think oftentimes the way academia approach dissemination is it’s the last part and it’s an add on. If there’s anything left in your budget well then you go to give a few talks and talks are very expensive, you might write an op-ed. I think about dissemination and the communication strategy from the beginning because my interest in any research project has to do with a problem that has to be addressed. So what’s the point, as far as I’m concerned, of doing research that I’m not going to being able to effectively communicate later. So I have been doing this for years now, so that’s very important because it means I and my lab have an extensive list of contacts and experience doing things like radio and writing op-eds and whatever. So I had a lot already going into this. Now, watching the book being ready to come out, I could see a lot of things right? First of all, it’s not a coincidence that college affordability is on the political agenda right now, and I played a role in that. So it’s not surprising to me that political camping would be talking about it when my book would be coming out. I actually was a little worried that my book was coming out too late, and in one sense I really do think that it’s too bad that when the book was released, the Sanders campaign was over. Because Bernie Sanders’ was talking more about what I was talking about than Hilary Clinton. But so looking at that, and looking at my existing portfolio in which I already, I want to give your listeners a sense of this okay? Any given month before this book came out, I already field 2-3 media calls every week okay? I already do active engagement, I already had a busy travel schedule. So I could’ve just said, alright well that will just lead to the book being effectively communicated, but that kind of stuff is not the same as communicating a book. Books get communicated in different ways, for example radio really is fabulous for selling books apparently. And also, I want to be clear that my job here is not to sell books, my job was to get the message out there, I even debated pdf-ing and tweeting it if that would be the most effective way. Except I knew it wasn’t, because really important people, like RIPS, really important people read books. It continues to be the case. So I sat down with my team and had a conversation about how we were going to handle this. Because frankly, we were about to get hit, like a hurricane amount of attention and publicity even if we did almost nothing, and I wasn’t sure any staff member could handle that. But also, I have to admit, that while I know how to do certain things, like I know how to get an op-ed in my state newspaper, I’m not that well versed in how to get the New York Times to review my book, I have no experience getting on television. You know, maybe the PBS Newshour has called once or twice, but nothing major. So I was thinking to myself, so what would be the point of getting some professional help to do that? Well the point would be to get to regular people. The kinds of people who do not read academic news articles or journals and who frankly don’t watch the PBS Newshour, they watch regular shows, like the Daily Show. And so I asked around to some colleagues, and a few people, especially people that I admired on their communication strategy, are using professional help. So at the end of the day, I worked with the team to figure out what a publicist would cost and we hired one. And to give people a sense, it cost me as much to hire one publicist for an entire year of work as it would have to hire one graduate student at fifty percent time. It is not that expensive, if we had planned going back to when the research was being done, to put this into our budget for dissemination, this would not have been a big deal. Now, the University of Wisconsin did not want me to have a publicist. The University of Wisconsin told me that their communications office could handle this for me. Well, I know there are people laughing now because anybody who knows me knows that UW-Madison was not going to do communications for me, and they couldn’t frankly. So I did a lot of vetting of publicity firms, and to be clear you don’t choose them, they choose you, so it mattered that I had an existing portfolio. And then we began a year in advance in talking about what the rollout of this book would look like. And it has been largely what I expected, what I didn’t expect was that the press, so I’m with the University of Chicago press on this one, it’s an academic press which means it doesn’t have a huge operation for pushing the book out. That was another thing I had learned from colleagues, do not expect Chicago to do a lot for you here, they just don’t have the money. But that does depend on where you are in their priority list. Now, I’ll be honest with you, it’s an education book, I thought I’d be pretty low on their totem pole, as it turns out, I’m on the front page of their catalog. I couldn’t have known that, and so I wouldn’t have known that Levi Stall from the University of Chicago Press would also be helping. So the situation now, is I have a publicist in New York City, I have Levi Stall at the University of Chicago who is my publisher, and I have a speakers bureau, where what he does, if I get asked to give a talk, I toss it to him immediately. And he vets it for me, he figures out what the speaking fee is going to be and he handles the travel, that is a huge relief to my team. My team needs to be focused on research, not on scheduling me. So what all of that means is that my publicist Angelo spends all his time trying to cultivate unusually great opportunities, and she got the Daily Show interested in this book back in May. So I had known for a very long time that I was going to appear on the Daily Show, although I have to admit that I didn’t believe it. I thought it would fall apart, I thought they would lose interest, you know, why would they want me on the Daily Show, it was something I couldn’t see happening. But it was an opportunity she created by, you know this is a hot issue, and she able to also show them videos that show that I can talk, I’m a little bit entertaining, right, although they told me not to be funny by the way, which is really interesting. So the kind of opportunities, she and Levi both made sure that the book made it to the New York list of books, it got a minor mention, but still the New York lists of book, oh my gosh! I think one of the strangest things is I just appeared in Glamour. And I spoke to Cosmo as well, and these are things I never imagined I’d be doing right? But I am so glad, because these are the types of places that you know, parents will see stuff, and teenagers will see things, and that’s who we’re not reaching with this conversation. So I have had to learn to do TV, which I find very unnerving, and most important, I have to sit up straighter than I ever have sat in my life, and I mean I’ll tell you honestly, the Daily Show, there were no words for how scared I was. I might have been less scared when I was going into labor, which I did not find to be a fun experience let’s be clear.

[*laughs*]

I was backstage at the Daily Show having to pee every ten minutes. I had friends there, you’re allowed to bring some support, by the time I was about to walk on the stage, I turned to the stage manager and asked if there was anybody else who could go on for me. I didn’t want to do this anymore, I honestly thought I was going to lose it. So this looks like fun to folks, to me this is the work. I mean, I’m sitting here with you and given maybe six or seven lectures since Monday morning, and now this is my third city in three days. I haven’t paused to do almost anything. And yes, it’s been very rewarding, I’ve been getting a lot of time with students, and I love that, but I’m not at Temple with my actual students, I’m not at home with my family, and I’m not going to be for some time. So there are trade-offs.

**KL**: Well I think you’ve raised this incredibly important point about the tradeoffs that you’re making to get the message of the book out to the broad audience of what you’re hoping to do, and also I think one of the things certainly that came up on the Daily Show, but I think that a lot of people will find helpful about the book, is that you propose solutions. Which is another reason to get it in front of broad audiences, so that they can understand what we should be doing to fix some of the problems that the book highlights. Thank you for your honesty on this, I think that is so important for researchers to hear. We’re going to take another brief break, when we come back we’re going to talk a little more with Sara about the cost of media attention. Back in a moment.

[*music plays*]

# Segment 3:

**KL:** Sarah, one of the things that I’ve really been wanting to ask you about is you mentioned on Twitter, and we will make sure to link to your twitter in the show notes so people can follow you there. But you shared a little bit about the various costs of media attention, including different outfits that you’ve needed for different appearance, hair, makeup for appearances you’ve had and this is something that I think people just don’t think about, and I am wondering if you can share a little bit about that, cause I’m assuming this may not be built into the budget of the research you’re working on. So have you encountered this, what has been unexpected about it or what are things you’ve found to be particularly interesting?

**SG:** Yeah. This has been the tough part, and it’s weird in a year in which we’re watching a woman run for president. I have never had so many thoughts that I’ve had in the past few months kind of wishing I was a man. Maybe I’m missing something, but I’m pretty sure that if a man is asked to give a talk or to go on television, then he picks out a suit and a tie, and he brushes his hair, and he shaves and he goes on television. I am going to turn 40 in January, I have two children, so I’ve given birth twice. I am not a size 2 or 6 anymore, and television is not kind to people who aren’t. I have been in the public eye quite a bit over the last several years and last summer I attracted a lot of negative attention. And when I watched it happen, I watched people take down my ideas using my appearance. So they commented that I looked like something not nice, that my short haircut meant that I was somebody not cool. It became clear that my sharp message was not being heard by some, because it was delivered by a sharp appearance. Now, I was counseled by some folks at that time to put on a flowery dress instead, grow my hair longer and rethink. I didn’t really wear makeup in Madison, Wisconsin, we don’t! And frankly I never have, my mom’s not into that, I’m not into that. And I have always been somebody who would rather read a book than go shopping. But as I thought about this book tour, and I looked at how academics tend to look when we’re being portrayed up there, we look frumpy. We do not look like we care about that part and people care. For better or for worse people watching you judge you. And what I wanted was not to be clear, for me to go on stage and have people say “Oh my God, she’s hot.” No, I just wanted people to not comment on my appearance. I wanted to look appropriate enough that I didn’t attract any attention. So I thought about this quite a bit over the past year – the number one thing I thought about was, “I wanted to lose some weight.” Look, let me tell you, this is not a profession that lends to losing weight okay we have very unhealthy habits – I sit in a chair all day long. Luckily, for me, moving to Philadelphia out of Wisconsin and getting out of the stressful environment in which I was employed, caused me to become a happier individual, and somehow weight just fell away. And that was wonderful, I mean frankly it was like a gift, it was a bit of luck. There were also more stairs in my new house, kind of a good thing. So then I really had to think about image a bit. And there my thinking was that I wanted to make sure that I had makeup carefully applied in a fairly natural manner. I don’t know how to do that! So I took one lesson and I still didn’t know what I was doing, so all I did was just decide that before any major appearances, I would go ahead and get somebody to help me with that. And the world has changed quite a bit, there’s this thing called Glam Squad. And Glam Squad will come to your hotel room, wherever you are, in the cities that they are existent, and they will come and do your hair and makeup. They will come to you, and I tell you, hair and makeup for 150 bucks for a major television appearance or frankly anything that you’re going to have to live with for a while, that’s important to me, it never disappears and now people are tweeting it. That has turned out to feel very worthwhile to me. And interestingly, during the course of all of this, of having all these professionals do my hair and makeup, one of them said to me, “You do know you’ve been parting your hair on the wrong side?” And I said, “Excuse me?” And she showed me what she meant, I was parting my hair too far over to one side, and now I part it in the middle, and she taught me how to curl it. And I have never gotten so many compliments in my life. My friends are stunned, everybody thinks I’ve gone and gotten a full makeover. All I did was change my hair, a little bit. But what I think has happened is that I look friendlier. I look a little more heart shaped in my face, I seem a little less frightening. Okay, and men are flirting with me. This is bizarre, because I am delivering exactly the same message. I am the same person, I am not softening what I am saying, and I didn’t accept the advice to wear the flowery dresses. My wardrobe for this tour, and I did get a wardrobe, because it was very important that I didn’t have to obsess about what I was wearing on stage, and that I always felt that I looked at least confident, that I felt good about what I was wearing, I just went for a range of things in navy and grey and black. And things that I can wear comfortably and pack in a suitcase right? Yes, I had to make that investment. No, none of that money was in the research budget, none of that money can come from the university, but I am fortunate enough that I finally get paid like an adult by Temple, and I have inherited some money. And that has enabled me to not feel awful frankly, about spending some money, so that when I’m speaking I’m not worried about how I look, but I look the part. And that was never so important as it was for the Daily Show. Look, we were talking about HD TV. Every last thing could be seen on my face through that and Jada Pink Smith was the guest last week for goodness sake, I’m not Jada. The decision about what to wear on that show, that was several weeks of discussing with friends, one of whom, I basically asked a mentor of mine to take me shopping. Because she’s cool, she’s classy, and she doesn’t bring attention to herself and we went shopping and we found, well I wore a black dress. That is what I wore, a three quarter sleeve v-neck dress that I did get tailored to make sure it fit me properly. End of story, that’s it. Again, if I were a man, I really think that by now I would have saved a couple thousand bucks by now. At the end of the day though, I’m not, I am who I am, and I’m just trying to present the best possible version of myself. I think that’s a form of self care. It’s funny, it’d be better to get massages and go to the gym and be less stressed out, but I think it has reduced my stress immensely to be able to walk out on stage, whether it’s a local broadcast or whatever or a talk that I’m giving. And know that people are snapping my pictures, and they’re going out on the internet, that I don’t think that they’re going to be commenting negatively on my appearance, and that will not be a distraction.

**KL:** Well I have to say Sara, the Women and Gender Studies PhD part of me, that is my background, certainly hears clearly some of the gendered issues you’re talking about here and I think they’ll be fascinating for our listeners as well. As we’re kind of closing out today, I think some of the people that are going to be listening to this sometimes dream of the media attention, some of them are probably scared out of their minds that they might attract this media attention, too. I’m wondering what you would tell researchers who just don’t know the realities of this. I mean clearly your schedule is packed, you’re traveling quite a bit, you’re speaking all the time, and you’re getting calls from the media several times a week, I mean that’s a pretty significant load. What would you share with researchers that maybe haven’t experienced that.

**SG:** Yeah, well the first thing is, there is good reason to dream of it, because doing this work and being heard about what you have found, that’s what we all want. I mean nobody I think is writing a book and thinking, “I hope nobody reads it!” So I mean there is that. But I mean, we all make tradeoffs, and we all have things that we fail. I, well I’ll tell you something that I haven’t said publicly. So I have two kids, and I am very proud of that and have been very vocal about fighting for tenure and fighting to keep the tenure you’ve already earned and doing these jobs while that fact that you do have these children isn’t accounted for, none of these grants pay for childcare. So I have two kids, and they’re great kids, and I don’t get to spend the amount of time that I would like with them although I will say that I think this is pretty under control at this point, because we’re very, we spend quality time together. And the reason that’s made possible is I have enough flexibility in my schedule, that if there is a day I can take off in the week, I can spend a day, I can spend Wednesday with them. Even if I have to be away on the weekend. But what people may not fully know is that this year I also got divorced. And that was a good thing, in my opinion, but it was mainly a good thing because I’m not a very good partner. And I say that like fully knowing this, I have my work and I have my kids, I’m frankly not even a very good friend. I have wonderful friends and I would do anything for them, but am I a friend that calls regularly to see how you are and to help you? No. I have cut out all of those kinds of things in my life. And so, in the middle of moving across the country this year, and launching a book, I got divorced after 10 years. And I have to say, in many ways it’s a relief, because if you want to work like this and you come home at the end of the day, you don’t want to talk to anybody else. And that’s my form of self care, I watch shows I shouldn’t watch.

[*laughs*]

You know, I watch trashy TV. And I sit in my bed you know and I will be a total hermit for hours on end to recover from jags like this. I have to admit I really wouldn’t have it any other way though. So this is the thing, we really have to weigh what we want. And you don’t get this without some form of that. I don’t know people, I really don’t know people who are having enormously successful careers and children who can also claim to have a great relationship. Most of the ones I have known have sacrificing their careers, or part of them in order to maintain that other thing that they chose. So I wish that there was more supports out there so that you know, for example, somebody said to me, look when you get a grant, is there money in there so that your kids can go with you when you travel? No. Is there money in there for vacation? No. Is there money in there; I mean if I worked at Google, and I was the CEO which I actually think I could have done, they would send me on vacation, they would take my cell from me, they would make sure I get massages, they would have my meals ordered in to increase my productivity. None of those things happen for me. And so yet, I’m still expected to perform at the level of a CEO. The other thing I did do, which I don’t know if people fully recognize, and somebody, a reporter asked me today, he said, “I called to set up an appointment with you and your assistant called me back.” He said, “You have an assistant? Temple University gave you an assistant?” No, Temple University didn’t give me an assistant, I negotiated for the funds to pay for one to support my research program and I fund it mainly through my grant funds. And that’s because it helps me to do all these things, Temple doesn’t get their name in the news automatically, Temple doesn’t get all the grant funds automatically. The assistant is the one thing that I can make happen for myself, and I have hired wonderful people that make this kind of thing possible. So yeah, it looks exciting. Just be ready for what you want.

**KL:** I think, I would imagine that, Sara, just given your book and the work that you do, that other people have probably called you a truth-teller. I’ve not read it, but I would imagine it’s true, I think certainly that’s what you’ve done here is talk about the truth of the sacrifices you have to make to do this work, and the incredible value that comes from it as well. I know your schedule is incredibly busy Sara, thank you so much for taking the time to come on the show and share with *Research in Action* listeners what your experience has been and your research.

**SG:** Thanks for having me.

**KL:** And thanks so much *Research in Action* listeners for hanging out with us this week. I’m Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

[*music plays*]

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# Bonus Clip

In this bonus clip for episode 51 of the *Research in Action* podcast, Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab discussing creating your own luck with research. Take a listen.

**KL:** I think one of the things you’ve talked about, and I completely believe people are engaged in this, I think even when you write a big grant proposal, you can have up to 30 people contributing something to those. But one of the things you’ve talked about is you had a plan certainly, and you were thinking through this and being methodical, but then also some things kind of fell into your lap it sounds like, especially in terms of funding and people that came across your path and affected your research. I’m wondering if you could just speak to that a little bit. I mean there are these unplanned surprises that you can’t plan for.

**SG:** That’s absolutely right, and I know we’re all planners. I mean PhDs are planners, we don’t like surprises. One of the things I learned in this study was roll with punches of things I had never taken before. I mean there were pleasant surprises, and horrible surprises. I think luck plays a huge role in our lives, I’ve always thought so, and I think the fact that it does doesn’t diminish us, it doesn’t mean we work any less hard. I do, I think, when I’ve thought back on these things that do happen for me, I do try to create opportunities for luck to affect me. Right, so I say yes to a lot more things than I think my colleagues actually have, I have a few colleagues that will pretty readily say yes to almost anything, but I’ve taken opportunities and I had taken opportunities to go all over Wisconsin to attend all sorts of meetings that might have something to do with my research, and might not. And I couldn’t see the connections at the time, but when it came time to ask for data connection and stuff, I already had relationships. You know, we get invited to talks all the time, it’s not as if the President of the Williams T Grant Foundation came to campus and said, “I’d like to meet with Sara Goldrick-Rab.” He totally didn’t. He was in another unit on campus, and I happened to go to his talk. And I happened to have taken the opportunity to sign up for time to talk to him. Which was open to anybody. And when I was talking to him, I didn’t hit him up money. Instead I talked about my project with him, and I said, I understand this isn’t what you all do, and he said, no, it is, but then he restated for me my project in a way that made sense for the foundation, and he mentored me through the next part. I had to let him do that! And sometimes I fought him by the way. That’s the other thing, you know I have an ego, and I want to think even as a untenured faculty member, I know how to do this stuff! And at one point, I received some feedback that said if you want to do something this ambitious, you need a pair of adult suspenders, meaning get a senior faculty member on your project. I never did. I was offended, they were right by the way, they were right, there were a lot of things later that went wrong that could’ve been avoided if I had had somebody on there who knew the things that might happen. And I know so much more now, that I could head off, but I wouldn’t do it. I absolutely wouldn’t do it, I took the risk that we wouldn’t get the money, a risk that I probably shouldn’t have taken, because of how important this turned out to be. So I think, there’s also this thing about making lemonade right? And any time that something went wrong, could I find a better way out of it? The hardest thing that went wrong in this study, was that my co-PI and I did not get along. And ultimately we parted ways, and we parted ways in the midst of a big study with a research team. And I think for a lot of folks, you probably would’ve just watched the research study fall apart. I loved this study. What I basically said was, I will do anything to get out of this partnership and in exchange I’ll give you want you want, and he wanted another study we were working on, and we found a way. It was a very painful chapter, but it was necessary. And I’m confident that I wouldn’t have the set of studies that I have today, and the team together in the way that I have now if I hadn’t worked to address this issue.

[*music plays*]

You’ve just heard a bonus clip from episode 51 of the *Research in Action* podcast with Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab discussing creating your own luck with research. Thanks for listening!