Episode 93: Katie Linder

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# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode ninety-three.

# [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. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

**KL:** In this solo episode, I'm really excited to talk about setting effective research goals. January is the perfect time, along with all the other resolutions you might be thinking about to be thinking about, what are the kind of research goals you might have for 2018, or if it's in future years, for that particular year. And so in this episode, I want to talk about first—what makes a good research goal? In the second segment, I'm going to talk a little bit about setting yourself up for success, and then in the third segment, some strategies for staying accountable to your goals throughout the year.

So let's dive in with what makes a good research goal. So the first thing that I think about when setting goals for research is what do I consider to be reasonable? What can I actually accomplish in a year's time at or make significant progress on in a year's time? And also, is the goal that I'm setting something that I can pretty much accomplished without major help from someone else? So it's not that I don't have goals that are collaborative—certainly I collaboratively write and I work with lots of other people on different projects—but I want to make sure that I have a lot of control over achieving the goal that I'm writing for myself. So a good example that I think I might have used in the past is if you decide in 2018 that you want to pursue a book contract. You might not say that you want your goal to be getting a book contract because that means that someone else has to offer you the contract. So that goal is in some ways in the hands of someone else. But you could say that you want to draft your book proposal and submit it to a publisher. Those are things that are completely in your control and that you can definitely accomplished in the timeframe that you've set in front of you. So the first question is really, is your goal that you have reasonable?

I also think it's really important to set research goals that are appropriately challenging for you. You want to thank that you want to think about whether your goals will help to stretch you this year in terms of your own professional development. So you might not want all of your goals to be stretched goals, but definitely think about are there certain things that you want to be working toward that will help you to learn something new or try something different than maybe you haven't done before? I also think it's really useful when you have your research goals be tied to a larger vision. So for some of the people who are listening the show that larger vision might be achieving tenure. But for those of us who are not on the tenure track, we might want to think about where do we want to be at the end of 2018? Or maybe even in a few years from now, what does that look like? And then what are the steps that you can take this year within your research to move your career forward? And for some of us that might be finishing a dissertation, learning a new research methodology getting more experience with a certain kind of procedure that we're doing in a lab, maybe a kind of sort of vacation that we want to add to our CV. So there could be lots of different things that fall into this category that are going to progress your career beyond just the specific project that you're working on.

Now, always, you want to be thinking about whether or not your research goals are measurable. And the most important part of that is knowing whether or not the goal has been accomplished. How will you know that you can kind of check it off your list and move past that goal onto the other ones that you want to complete? So it's helpful, I think, if you can identify smaller milestones within a larger goal that will allow you to recognize your small wins along the way, and you can have smaller celebrations of the things that you're able to get accomplished. We want to make sure that you're not setting a goal that it's really going to be difficult to know if it's finished. So, for example, you might say that you want to learn more about a particular research methodology, like autoethnography, but it might be difficult to know when you feel like you've learned enough. So a goal for the year might be you want to read a book on it, or you want to read more studies, or you want to subscribe to a journal that is really going to give you something a little bit more concrete that you can move forward with in terms of achieving your goal.

And then the other piece, I think, about making a good research goal is that there are lots of different ways to categorize our research goals and to help us to think about them within larger frameworks. So one model for this is a pipeline model you might think about what kind of research do you want to design this year? What are your goals around maybe new projects that you want to get started with that you want to launch? What amount or what kind of data do you plan to collect this year? So that would be kind of the second part of your pipeline. Data collection, what kind of data or what amount of data do you need to analyze this year? And if you don't have kind of a clear pipeline in front of you. Some of these might be a little bit difficult to answer if you don't know, like six months from now what kind of project you're going to have in front of you, so you can think just about the immediate future and kind of update this as you go throughout the year.

As part of that pipeline you might also want to think about what kind of outcomes would be created from your data. And then also where and what you want to disseminate. So if you're planning to create articles or hear in the Research Unit we do a lot of webinars, we do posters for different conference presentations, and things like that. Sometimes we make videos that we post on YouTube. What are all the different kinds of things that you might want to have come out of the research that you're completing throughout the year? So one way is to kind of think through your pipeline and assign different goals to research design, data collection, data analysis, the outcomes you're creating and then how your disseminating them.

Another category for your research goals is around professional development. If there are specific books you want to read, classes that you want to take, people that you want to collaborate with or other ways that you're planning to learn more about your particular research area, or your research method that would be something that you would want to look at here.

And then I think there's all kinds of other categories for research goals like you might have collaborative projects that you're working on that you have to set goals with other people, and you want to kind of think about what are some of the things that you want to learn from them, or be able to do together that you wouldn't be able to do alone.

So I thought it might be helpful if I share some of my research goals for 2018. These are research goals that are tied specifically to the work here that I do at Oregon State University Ecampus and many of these things are kind of shared out on our website, which I can link to in the show notes if you want to hear more about the current projects that we're working on.

So one of the research goals I have is to complete an edited collection, and we're currently working on two edited collections—one got turned in in 2017 and one is going to be turned in an early 2018 on the business of innovating online—so completing that and kind of getting it into production is one of the research goals for the year.

We also have a survey that was completed in 2017, but we haven't yet analyzed the data, and we are also planning to release a report based on that data. So one of the research goals for the year is to get that kind of wrapped up and put out into the world. We're currently working on a white paper on augmented reality, so completing and submitting that white paper, which is a team-based project that we're doing here between our Research Unit and our multimedia team. That's something that I'd like to get completed and turned in in 2018. We have a couple new studies that were planning to design. One is a qualitative study on long-term online instructors that we need to get IRB approval for, hopefully in early 2018 to start collecting data throughout the year, so that is definitely a goal in the research design and data collection parts of our pipeline. And then there's a second survey study that we're putting together on author demographics for distance education journals that we also need to get IRB approval for in early 2018 to start collecting data throughout the year. And then we are also releasing a white paper series on research methods and design and online teaching and learning research, and this is something we've been working on throughout 2017 with research fellows that are affiliated with the Research Unit here at Ecampus. So, getting that kind of finalized, copy edited and launched is going to be definitely a goal for 2018.

And then a couple more goals that we have one is to develop marketing plans for the two edited collections that we have coming out in 2018—one is the one we turned in 2017 the other one is the one we're completing an early 2018—so thinking about how we want to share out those books and work with all of the author contributors that we've been partnering with for those books—going to different conferences, maybe doing some virtual speaking through webinars and things like that. All of that will need to be planned in 2018. And lastly we've got some final presentations for our latest study on instructional designers, and also on our new research database that we launched in 2017. Some of those are conference presentations this year and a webinar coming up in early 2018, so we're also kind of just wrapping up some of the dissemination from 2017.

So one of the things I think that's pretty clear from some of the research goals for the unit this year—and these are goals that are not just for me, but for my team that we're going to be accomplishing together—is that many of them are carried over from projects from 2017. So you might have things that you're trying to wrap up, other things that you're trying to move forward, and then another category of things that you're just trying to get started and off the ground, so that might be another kind of categorizing that you can put together for your goals as well. What are the things that are new, maybe things that have been around for a while that are going to continue, and then other things that you are trying to close out and complete.

Alright, so those are some of the things that make a good research goal or a set of goals as you're moving forward and thinking about your own goals keep some of those questions in mind. I'm going to take a brief break when I come back in segment two. I'm going to talk a little bit about how do you set yourself up for success with your goals in the New Year? Back in a moment.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** In the first segment, I talked about what makes a good research goal. And some of the things that I said was that it would be reasonable, it would be appropriately challenging, tied to a larger vision, measurable, and that you'd be able to kind of categorize it in some different ways that allow you to make sure you have a holistic plan for the different kinds of goals you have throughout the year. In this segment I want to talk about how do you set yourself up for success? Because we definitely know that setting New Year's resolutions or setting goals at the beginning of the year, it doesn't always mean that they get accomplished in the ways that we would want, and also all kinds of things can come up throughout the year that might impede us from achieving our goals or maybe change our goals as the year progresses. So the first thing that I have to kind of recommend to kind of set yourself up for success is to look at each of your goals separately and ask yourself what will help you to accomplish it. So this is when you might say, “Is there something that you need from someone else?” Like maybe you have a collaborator that you're going to be working with, or you know you're going to need some mentoring with this particular project that you're working on. If there's something new that you need to learn in order to really achieve that goal. Maybe you need to read some more articles using a particular methodology, or you really want to strengthen your use of a particular statistical analysis or something along those lines. Is there something that you need to learn that is new that will help you accomplish your goal? And then also I think it's useful to think if there are parts that will be particularly challenging for you that you know moving forward with a goal it's going to be especially hard to do a particular piece of it, and then you'll want to think about if there are ways that you can prepare yourself for those challenging parts.

So I think with some of the projects that we have coming up in this coming year one of the things that I think is really useful is that I do have a team. And I have a collaborative researcher that I work with here at Ecampus that we can kind of go back and forth we can share ideas, so it can be really useful to think about, “who are your partners in terms of achieving your goals?” And it may be that you have to seek out some people who could be useful for you.

The second recommendation I have is to break down your goals into what you consider to be manageable pieces. So you want to look at each individual goal and think about if you can break them down into a small or a medium sized piece, and this is helpful in terms of managing your time and thinking about when you can achieve certain things.

But also, I think, it just helps to not make your goals feel so overwhelming and really challenging if you can kind of break them down into smaller pieces. Once you break down your goal into the smaller pieces the other question is if you can map it throughout the year. So if you divide the year up in two months or even quarters, can you take pieces of that larger goal and start to set milestones throughout the year and maybe even deadlines of when you want to have certain pieces completed. And if you are working on things with collaborators or partners, you can share this and kind of talk with them about it to see if they agree with you about the timeline and kind of get some shared expectations of when things might be done.

When you start to map your goals throughout the year and, especially if you have a lot of them, you can start to see where certain parts of the year might get really busy, or you might decide to shift some of your goals around in terms of deadlines because you want to make sure that you're actually able to get everything done that you want to get done in the time that you have. So mapping it out can be really useful.

The third recommendation I have for you to set yourself up for success is to know yourself and the first thing about this is just to be honest with yourself about what you know you do well, the things that you know you are challenged by—especially in terms of things like productivity. And I think the honesty to is that your goals don't have to be lofty they can actually be very reasonable if you know that maybe you're going to have a really busy year with other parts of your life, and you want to make sure that you're setting goals that are reasonable that you can actually get done in the time that you're going to have. The other tool that I think is really useful for getting to know yourself—one of my favorites—are a couple of books by Gretchen Rubin about accountability and habit building. The first one is her book, *Better than Before*, and the second is a recent book called *The Four Tendencies*. I will link to both of these in the show notes, but these are books that allow you to kind of dig in and think about what are the kinds of things that you can learn about yourself so that you're working kind of with your tendencies instead of pushing against your tendencies. You don't want to be kind of fighting with yourself all year to try to get something done if it's really not going to work for you. So a great example is Gretchen Rubin talks about whether you are an early morning person or a night person. And let's say you're a night person, but you want to be in early morning person. What she recommends is not necessarily fighting your tendency trying to match your schedule with your night tendency so that you can be as productive as possible on the timeframe that really works for you, and not trying to fight that and kind of waste energy trying to do something that really just doesn't fit your personality. So I think that her books are a great way—*Better than Before* in particular—I think has like twenty-one different things to help you learn a little bit more about yourself and what you prefer in terms of accountability and habit building.

The fourth recommendation I have is to plan for contingencies and there are always things that come up throughout the year a year is a long time, so there will probably be some kind of illness may be a cold or flu. There may be a need to kind of buffer your deadlines so that you're not getting yourself painted into a corner in terms of really trying to get something done, and you're feeling kind of trapped, that you don't have the time you need to complete it.

So you want to be thinking about how you build in flexibility and allowing yourself to kind of change your goals if you need to put something off, move something kind of to the front burner to make sure that you can get everything done. One of the things that I think is really useful in terms of planning for contingencies is when someone says that they can give you more time for a certain project or a deadline; take it. Rather than say, “Oh, no, I can get it done” in you know an earlier amount of time. Give yourself as much of a buffer under calendar as possible, and I think that it's a little bit of kind of intentional procrastination to make sure that you have room around your projects and also things like around your meetings so that you're not kind of back-to-back-to-back all the time so building in those buffers can be really useful to help you plan for those contingencies.

The fifth recommendation for setting yourself up for success is to look at your whole year as a kind of a whole before you set goals. So you want to look at what is going on in your life this year. Maybe you have a big life event like, you're having a baby, or you're moving, or you're starting a new job or something along those lines. You want to kind of look at the year, and maybe even break it down to each quarter to see, what is your teaching load? What's your travel schedule? Do you have other professional commitments that are going to be impeding your ability to get your goals done? And this will allow you to kind of see how much bandwidth you have to really put toward your goals and accomplishing the kinds of research that you might want to complete. So looking at your year as a whole before setting your goals can really be useful to identify “what are the parts of your year where you're going to be able to be the most productive?”

And then the final recommendation I have the sixth recommendation for setting yourself up for success is to carve out the time you need to be successful. And I think there are a lot of fun ways to do this. We've talked about some of them on the show, one of them that I know came up in an earlier episode, which we willing to in the show notes, is the idea of writing retreats. Jennifer Herman talked about this, and this is something that doesn't have to be a huge amount of time, even if you carve out a couple of days a week end a long weekend. Every winter I usually do a ten-day writing retreat to move forward some of my research and writing goals finding the time to kind of really have dedicated brain space for your research can be very useful. Another way to carve out your time is to think about if there are things you want to be working on daily, or even every work day. Do you want to try to build those in the very beginning of the day, so you can kind of get it done make progress on a particular project or goal that you have throughout the year and build a routine around that so that you're getting things done on a regular basis? You'll also want to make sure that you carve out some time for check-ins. And whether or not you decide these will be weekly monthly quarterly. I'm going to talk a little bit more about this and segment 3 putting it on your calendar is really important to make sure that you are giving yourself time to see what's working, what's not working, what are you progressing with your goals are there any goals that need to be changed or shifted and making sure you have that time to check in is going to be really useful.

And then the final amount of time that you're going to want to carve out is if you have time that you need to learn new skills or new information to make sure that you're going to be able to achieve the goals that you want to achieve. And learning, as we all know, does take time. And especially if it's that learning is coming through experience, or if we decide that we're going to take a course or do something that's a little bit more long-term to really achieve the goal that we have you definitely want to make sure that you have the time carved out in your schedule for that as well. So those are some strategies for setting yourself up for success with achieving your research goals in the next segment I'm going to talk a little bit more about strategies for staying accountable to your goals throughout the year back in a moment.

# Segment 3:

**KL:** So in segment one, I talked about what makes a good research goal. And in segment two. I talked about setting yourself up for success to make sure you can achieve your goals throughout the year. In this final segment, I want to talk about some strategies for staying accountable to your goals, and I think this is one of those things where there is a magic in writing your goals down somewhere, but there's also a magic in seeing them on a regular basis and kind of being honest with yourself assessing how are things going, and how can you maybe change some things if you feel like you're not achieving the goals in the way that you want at certain parts throughout the year.

So the first thing is definitely to write your goals down where can see them, and there's so many different possibilities for how to do this. I think you all know I'm a huge whiteboard fan. I have them in all of my offices—home and at work—and I think white boards are a great way to write your goals down because you can write them down, you can erase them, you can move them around. This is and it's shareable other people can see your goals, so I think that white boards are definitely a possibility for this.

If you are someone who has some kind of paper planner dedicating a page in the front of your planner or something where you are using a page like a bookmark in your planner that you move from week to week that have your goals on them that you're seeing them on a regular basis, can be really useful. Sticky notes, of course, Post-it notes are perfect places to put different goals, and you can especially you know color code them. You could take sticky notes and put them on your whiteboard, lots of different ways to do that. If you have a computer file or a note on your phone where you have your goals in a regular place, where you can see them, that's great as well.

Now one thing you want to think about is how you can have your goals be in a regular space where you see them all the time, but where you don't just kind of glazed over them. I think sometimes if we see something too regularly, we don't always take time to process it. So you'll definitely want to think about setting regular check-ins on your calendar where you are working through each goal and the different action items that you might have for that goal, and how you can make sure you're moving them forward.

So if you want to do kind of weekly check-ins you might think about at the beginning of the week, what parts of your goals do you want to accomplish over the coming week, and then maybe at the end of the week, you can see what was accomplished, and what needs to be moved to the following week if something didn't make it on your list. And this is actually something that I color code. I have a paper planner—I'm kind of old school that way—where everything that gets accomplished in a week, I mark it off in a pink highlighter, and anything that I don't accomplish on a given day or in a given week, I mark in yellow. So I can see right away what I'm glancing in a week, what do I need to transfer to the following week because it didn't get done? So there's definitely some visual cues you can give to yourself that can be useful.

If you decide to do your check-ins on a more monthly basis, than you might want to write down all of your accomplishments towards your goals for the month as you're doing them, or maybe during those weekly check ins, and then look ahead to see what you're hoping to accomplish in the following month. I think that we definitely want to write something down because the longer we go I think our brains play a little bit of a trick on us, and we feel like we haven't really done much, when in reality, we could have been making a lot of progress toward our goal, but sometimes it just never feels like enough. And I think this is particularly true in academia. So this weekly or monthly check-in time period is a great way to actually be like writing some things down, making sure that you're making the progress that you want to be making.

You can also do quarterly check-ins, and this is something that you would definitely want to calendar in so you don't forget to do it, but you can write down all of your accomplishments toward your goals from the quarter, and maybe this is compiled from your monthly and your weekly check-ins, and then look ahead to see what you hope to accomplish in the following quarter. And quarterly check-ins are especially helpful, I think, for people who are on teaching schedules or they have schedules that change from term to term, because it allows you to readjust and maybe, you know, that that 7 a.m. morning writing time isn't going to work for you anymore when you have an 8 o'clock class that your teaching. So every quarter you can kind of check-in, readjust, see what's working and what's not working, and you can also take away some goals at those quarterly check-ins, or add other goals depending on how your year is looking and what becomes a priority for you over time.

So setting those regular check-ins on your calendar, I think, is really useful—certainly you could do those check-ins with another person if you wanted to have some kind of accountability buddy. Finding someone at your institution or someone outside of your institution whose may be in your same discipline or a different discipline depending on what you're trying to accomplish with your research goals this year. Another model that I think is really useful that we've definitely talked about before are writing groups, so we can link to those episodes in the show notes. Or something that is called a mastermind group, which is basically a group of people who are coming around, coming together, around a particular issue and helping each other to troubleshoot any areas that they might have so writing groups can sometimes work in this way, or if you have maybe a lab group that you're trying to meet with or a set of peers where you're all working on a similar topic or issue, or question, or challenge, a mastermind group might be something to look into as well.

For accountability there are certainly places that you can pay to help you stay accountable. We’ll link to a couple in the show notes. A good example of this is Academic Ladder, which helps people with writing accountability and setting you up and writing groups and with writing buddies, so that's definitely something to consider. And also the concept of a writing coach someone who is really personalized to you, and is really dedicated to making sure that you can achieve your goals. And this is also something that was discussed in Jennifer Herman's episode as well, so we will link to in the show notes if it's something that might be of interest to you.

Now one of the other things that I found to be particularly helpful for myself is to share out my goals for research and writing on social media. And something to consider for 2018 is maybe creating a personalized hashtag that you could use across social media platforms, whether you're on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or somewhere else where you want to create a hashtag that is specific to your research goals, and that allows you, throughout the year, to be making kind of notes to yourself, check-ins, accountability to your social media colleagues, and then you can just look at the hashtag to see all the different kinds of images and posts that you've made throughout the year related to that.

I also think it's really interesting to take pictures of your work, and also of you working toward your goals. And again, this is going back to this idea that our brains kind of trick us, and we do not think that we're doing as many things as we think we're doing, but once we have the evidence in front of us, or the hours that we spend on our research and a writing and our projects, it's a little bit hard to refute that evidence. So taking some pictures, posting them to Facebook or Instagram, or wherever you want to kind of be sharing out this information. Or even keeping them privately for yourself. Your research goals, for many of us, they are big part of our life, so documenting that in a way that you, that is interesting to you, can be really helpful.

Another possible way of sharing out your goals on social media is through blogging. And again, this is something where you can do kind of microblogging, somewhere like Twitter or Facebook. LinkedIn now has a really great blogging mechanism as well. There are group blogging platforms like Medium where a lot of academics hang out and talk to each other, and comment on each other's work. Or you could certainly build your own blog if you have a professional website. But the general idea is to kind of check-in, talk with people about the kinds of things that you're researching and thinking about, and it also allows you some time to just write reflectively about what it is that is of interest to you—what's working, what's not working—help you to kind of troubleshoot your things as well.

Now one of the things that I think are is really fun to do on social media is if you plan some kind of sprint or a writing retreat, or some kind of dedicated time to work on a project, and then you can share about that period of time specifically. I think this is one of those things where people will really cheer you on social media. You can create a dedicated hashtag for that. And this is something. I've definitely done in the past when I've done writing challenges, like month-long writing challenges or multiple day writing retreat. And it just helps to kind of hold you accountable to doing the work because you know other people are paying attention, and they're kind of interested in the kinds of things that you're sharing out.

The last strategy I think that is useful for staying accountable, and this is really more of a private strategy is something like journaling. Just checking in with yourself on a daily basis about how things are going with your research and writing. This is another great way to check in with your goals looking at your goals, and maybe picking one for each of your journaling sessions to talk about the kinds of things that you were able to work for with that with regard to that particular goal. And journaling is, again, a kind of record keeping it allows us to really have a realistic understanding of what we were able to do. And sometimes if we're not able to do things, if we're really struggling with productivity, why? Maybe there's something going on that's really competing with the time that you want to be giving to your research, and it allows you to have a record of that as well.

So, I would love to hear about your research goals, and I would love for you to share your research goals for this year with the “Research in Action” community on Twitter. Feel free to use the hashtag RIAresearchgoals. We'd love to hear what you're up to this year, and feel free to use the hashtag throughout the year, if you need one, to report out on some of the things you're working on we would love to hear about what you're doing and also cheer you on throughout the year.

So happy New Year, I hope you're sending some amazing research goals. I'm Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with another episode.

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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