Episode 96: Rebecca Pope-Ruark

# KL: Katie Linder

# RPR: Rebecca Pope-Ruark

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

# [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.

On this episode, I'm joined by Dr. Rebecca Pope-Ruark and associate professor of English at Elon University where she coordinates the professional writing and rhetoric program and leads the design thinking studio in Social Innovation pilot program. She earned her M.A. in professional communication from Clemson University in 2000 and Ph.D. in rhetoric and professional communication from Iowa State University in 2007.

Between her M.A. and Ph.D., Rebecca spent two years working in marketing Communications in Silicon Valley her research interests include student collaboration and project-based learning agile project management strategy for managing both faculty and student work design thinking pedagogy especially in the liberal arts and medic intelligence in professional and technical writing pedagogy. Her work has appeared in disciplinary journals including the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* and *Technical Communication Quarterly* as well as in scholarship of teaching and learning journals.

She's led workshops on agile in the scrum framework at multiple conferences including the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She is the author of the faculty development book, *Agile Faculty: Practical Strategies for Managing Research, Service and Teaching* available from the University of Chicago Press. More information about Rebecca can be found at her website RebeccaPopeRuark.com

Thanks so much for joining me on the show today, Rebecca.

**RPR:** Thank you for inviting me. I'm so excited to be here.

**KL:** So I am super excited because you have this new book out called *Agile Faculty* and this is an area that I've been kind of intrigued by but I feel like I don't know a ton about. And the book is framed around two key concepts: agile and scrum. So let's start there.Can you kind of define those things for us? What are, what are some basic definitions?

**RPR:** Sure the easiest way to think about it is to think of agile almost kind of an overarching ideology and set of values and then scrum as a practical framework that kind of Builds on those values so both of them come out of software development, which can seem like a really weird place to look for a productivity management kind of strategy, but it was agile itself was kind of codified.

Maybe I'm about fifteen years ago sixteen years ago by a group of software developers and leaders who really realized that they were not being productive in terms of delivering. What sales people were promising on their work, and they weren't being fulfilled in that work because they were chasing deadlines all the time and putting things off and not being as effective as they wanted to be. So they got together and created this agile manifesto that really just talks about valuing people and good work and quality over some of the things that were having productivity and their industry in the past and there are several frameworks that kind of fall under that value set and scrum is the primary one that most people are familiar with their some others, but their fit their very software specific. So scrum is a framework for organizing work around a couple of different kind of concepts that we can talk about, but it doesn't tell you what to do, but it helps you figure out what the priorities are and how to approach it, and then you get to decide what you do reflect on that so I really like it because it's almost like a closed feedback loop. And iterative closed feedback loop because it you work any kind of short chunks of time you do things like plan what you're going to commit to revisit those commitments while you're working on them consistently and then review what you've done demonstrate that and then at the end of that also reflect on the process so it's a product and a process kind of development practice. And then in software they would keep you know if you think about software, really, things aren't done anymore right? There's always a next kind of update, or there's an added feature. We don't wait for two years to get a new CD from some software program. Those are always continuously being updated, so nothing is ever really done so working in these shorter cycles helps you feel like you're really accomplishing things, and you're getting things out there while you're also seeing yourself making progress and being able to adapt better to changes that might come up or problems or opportunities during that process, so we've got kind of the larger value-based, human-centered, is very humanistic when you if you look at the value statements of focus and commitment and courage of the larger agile value set and then scrum is a framework for implementing those values and getting work done.

**KL**: So what's really interesting to me about these two ideas is that I don't feel like as faculty or as researchers, or as administrators in higher ed, we're not really trained a lot in project management. I mean depending on our disciplines, maybe this is included for some people, but this seems like a nice framework if you are struggling with project management and trying to kind of figure out how to juggle a lot of things at once. And like you said, a lot of our projects I think about like course syllabi for example, we're constantly updating them like these things are never done, but I'm curious how you originally connected these concepts to the idea of faculty work-life because you're right they are a little bit different.

**RPR**: Right, and I'd honestly I wasn't looking for a productivity management system when I stumbled across it. My husband is actually a software engineer so he had moved to a company that had just started to use this about 10 years ago, and he would just come home and kind of talk about how weird that was for him. Because if you think about software developers they kind of like to be in their own individual corners, doing their little piece of the puzzle and then not talking if they don't have to—and he lets me say that out loud other people. But so he would tell me about some of the things that they would do and it was more kind of the practices and the little rituals that they would have like they would have. They stand out that the beginning of every day as a team and they answered three questions: What have I done since we last met? What am I doing today? And what might I need help on? And that’s kind of revolutionary for a software team to answer those questions and to be able to kind of ask for help every day, or to offer help to someone every day that accountability was really interesting to me and when I was listening to that in that context, I was more concerned about student collaboration at that time. I thought, I felt I teach professional writing and rhetoric courses publishing grant writing those kinds of things and had some really bad experiences and kind of business and technical communication courses with group projects. This was just kind of that standard. It was very clearly slapped it together at the last minute some plagiarism issues that they didn't catch. They just weren't learning what I had hoped that they would learn from that process, so as I started to think about how can I do that better and introduced that to students, in terms of how to help them manage their collaboration, then I started seeing oh well this this check in thing actually works really well if I check in with myself every now and then and if I use that to revisit the goals that I committed to. Am I actually making progress on these things that I said I would make progress on? Am I keeping myself accountable to myself really? Even as I'm asking my students to stay accountable and their collaborations. I started using things like the scrum board which is a really super easy three-column project management board. We've got your backlog of things you want to do, the things that are in progress, and done. And just writing those out and moving those around started making some really big differences, and how I was thinking about the projects that I was doing how they interrelated and how I could be making progress on different pieces of different projects at the same time, so it helped me visualize my pipeline in ways that I had never been able to visualize before, and move myself kind of out of that checklist mentality of what I'm working on and what I can be aspiring to.

**KL**: This is so right up my alley, Rebecca. I mean, I love this idea and as you're mentioning the scrum board. I'm thinking about different pipeline visuals I've used as well. You know, you mentioned this idea of kind of people going into their corners doing their isolated work, and you know this being a little bit of a different mindset for them. I wondering, you know, I think about academics some of us are kind of the same way. You know we're a little bit isolated. What is it about these concepts that you think works, so well for productivity within academia? I mean is it that piece of it that it's kind of bringing people out of. Their shells a little bit, or are there other pieces that you think are just really well fitting to this particular culture.

**RPR**: I think there's a couple of things. And one of the things that I tried to make clear in the book is that you don't have to be collaborating to use these strategies. They were designed for that, but you can also use them as it's a really lightweight framework that you can just kind of implement what pieces work for you, and how you think about your own work, so you don't have to be collaborating on a project to use it most of most of the things that I write tend to be individually authored so I can kind of keep track of those myself and keep myself on task. But it does work wonderfully for collaborative authorship or research studies that I'm doing it. Also works really well just for writing groups. You know, if we all have kind of a sense of what people's kind of backlogs look like and what they're committing to and then kind of use those as our check-in points for our writing groups, we might not be writing something together, but we're all working on something and we can add that little extra layer of accountability through this process. So it's a lightweight kind of strategy that you can apply on your own or with a collaborative group. It just depends on how you really want to use it and what I like about it is that you don't have to use the whole system. Right you don't have to follow the scrum guide from software to the letter to get benefits from it. It's just another way and it. One of the things I do, actually really like about it, is that it changes our language a little bit, and how we think about projects, so it's not kind of that checklist mentality. And checklist have their place those are great, but it helps us kind of see the projects and our work at multiple levels. Here's the really big picture. Here's the chunks, but here's the really actionable stuff that I can do to help me meet those chunks and complete those chunks, which will ultimately help me complete the larger tier project. So it's a really good way just to kind of pull out. What's useful for you in terms of what you need to help hold yourself accountable to your goals or even figure out what your goals are? And also to be adaptable as those goals change opportunities come up, or your experiment goes bust and you need to rethink something. It's a really flexible way to just kind of rethink that on the spot if you need to and keep your priorities in mind, but also to remember that those priorities are flexible things change. You know, our faculty lives tend to be a little chaotic sometimes especially at certain times of the year, so thinking it helps you think about what you can prioritize now knowing what's coming up in your work life or in your life life and being able to stay accountable to the commitments that you make to yourself into your own goal.

**KL**: Some of the things that's kind of interesting to me about what you're describing is that sounds somewhat it sounds somewhat repetitive or maybe cyclical so that you're kind of getting yourself into a little bit of a pattern or a routine. Is that part of it as well?

**RPR**: Yeah. The whole the word we would use would be iterative in software. So you, you're doing small chunks of things that help you advance toward the larger goal or completion of the larger project, but you're doing them in chunks that allow you to do something now, commit to its focus on this thing, get that done and workable and readable or shareable, or just to a place where you're comfortable that it will let you go to the next stage of that process and give you that foundation, and then you keep building on it. It's really kind of the motivational theory of “small wins,” really, in a lot of ways. You can see yourself making progress on the small things because you thought about what the small, actionable steps you can take are. So you don't need to wait until you have four hours completely blocked off to work on your lit review. You, there are things that you can do you can pick a task and you can do this in 15 minutes, or I can do this in an hour. And I prioritize those things and I can keep working on those as I go throughout my day or my week, but then I also have kind of a goal for maybe two weeks at the end of two weeks I want to say that I've accomplished these things and I'm going to make that commitment to myself, and I'm going to prioritize that work. And I think sometimes without those commitments we, we just we go into reaction mode right what you know the next email. That's coming or the next student that walks in walks in the door so we have to be flexible in ways that maybe some professionals don't have to be. So this allows me to kind of pop in and pop out maybe more than I used to in the past, but still feel like I'm making successive good progress toward different goals.

**KL**: So you are echoing some of the things from an earlier episode that we have on setting research goals, so I'm going to make sure to link to that in the show notes for people who might want to check that out as well. We're going to take a brief break from we come back. We're going to hear a little bit more from Rebecca about some of the more specific components of the agile method back in a moment.

[Music plays]

# Segment 2:

**KL:** So, Rebecca, I want to dig in even more to some of these kind of more specific strategies and ideas that come along with the agile methodology and one of them that you've kind of briefly mentioned in segment one that I want to dig into more is this idea of a backlog. And I think that this is something that people might conflate or kind of think about in terms of a to-do list. So let's kind of differentiate them a little bit: How would you say a to-do list is kind of the same or different from a backlog?

**RPR:** Sure. I tend to think of the difference between a to-do list and a backlog in terms of focus. I think that we use to-do lists when we are thinking in terms of time, here are the things that I want to accomplish, and I'm going to check them off on a list and these are the things that are maybe need to focus on today, or I need to make sure get done today backlogs tend to be less about time and more about complexity if that makes sense. So if you think about your to do list you might have write lit review for this article on your to-do list for weeks and weeks and weeks because you just keep putting it off because it's kind of too big and other things come up, and you respond to that email or to that student instead of working on the lit review. It’s too big to kind of process is going to take too much time and you wait for that time to show up if that's going to happen. With a backlog, it’s less time dependent, and you think about the tasks and the items that are on that backlog in terms of complexity instead of time. So if you think about any kind of study that you're working on or maybe you're working on a book project or an article or your writing, or you're developing a class those are big things. Those are things that have a lot of moving parts working within them. And if you made it to-do list for that it would kind of go on forever, and you know you have all these things kind of mashed together, and you don't have you don't tend to have the most information about projects when you sit down to make those lists. You learn that information as you go through the process. So a backlog is really is a tiered, prioritized to-do list in a way if you want to kind of complete them. So in scrum, they talk about three different levels, and I'd like to use this language because it does break you out of some of the typical kind of checklist mentality words that we use. So at the highest level you would have what we would call an “epic,” which is, you know, the study itself or the book project. Those are kind of the big, big giant things that you're working on within each of those projects so you have pieces. You have these complex things that you need to accomplish, but that are still kind of big we call those stories, so it might be if you're doing like a study on goal setting for example you would need to break that project and destroys like reviewing the literature, thinking about your methodology, comparing that to literature on methodologies, defining the research question. That's all stuff that you need to do before you can even speak about writing it up. Right, that's what there's a big space between those, those processes so at the story level, you can articulate what those pieces are and you can kind of keep adding to those as you go, but there's so there's a there's a list of chunks of work under the epic that we would call “stories.” And then what's in the stories that's where we can really break them down into the more granular actionable things that we can do. Like go collect 10 articles from the library or make notes on these two articles, or you know determine final research question those are things. That we can do in a realistic amount of time that are necessary and important to making sure that that project was forward successfully, but that aren't necessarily just kind of things that we check off. The nice thing about backlogs is that by splitting them up into tiers you see how they work together, you see where different projects are. So you might be in data collection in one study and writing something up in another study and that helps you kind of think about, “well I could be doing this while I'm doing this other thing” or this could happening in the background while I'm going to pull this other little task out of this story to make some more progress on that. So and that's not necessarily to say multitasking is good, but it's thinking about what your brain’s on at that time what the priority is at that moment and what can you get done to make a step toward the goal that you have set for yourself on this project. So it's kind of like a to-do list, but it's it's, it’s granular in a different way, and it's structured in a different way and it can tend to be more flexible because you have an understanding that right lit review means a whole lot of stuff. It's not something you can sit down and do in two or three hours tops. There's a lot of things that you need to do to complete that. But I know what I need to do here, the 10 things that I need to do to write this lit review, and I'm going to start checking them off as I go as I find time to be able to do them. So those are things that are hard to estimate in terms of time, but when you kind of compare them in terms of ok, I think this is a more complex tasks, so I'm going to break this down. But this is also dependent on some other things, so I can pick the things that I need to work on they're going to make that that other story possible. So it just a way of thinking differently about your time and about the complexity of your projects.

**KL**: So I love that you’ve introduced these new words. Because thinking about my project stories makes them sound like a lot more manageable and nice and positive. [**RPR**: Students love that language that it gives us something to hang on to you that's different.] Right, well in also the idea of epics too, like my work is epic absolutely like it gives it kind of a sense of presence that I really like. Okay, so that makes backlogs a lot more clear. There's also this thing called a sprint. So I want to know a little bit more about the relationship between backlogs and sprints. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**RPR**: Sure so a sprint is essentially a time box in scrum and software development in the old days of software development and unfortunately so in a lot of software development. They tend to work in a method that says we have this goal in a year, so we're just going to kind of quad toward that in a year.

But we're human, and we will will never really use that time extremely effectively if it's an entire year. So the the agile Guru is when they started developing that methodology, and and the scrum process said, let's work in shorter chunks. We know that we can remain accountable and on task for two to four weeks and get some really good work done stuff that work stuff that we can put out if we need to stuff that's necessary before we build other stuff stuff. That's going to give us feedback before we go build other stuff so we can see at this useful or if the market has changed or something like that. So in software Sprint's tend to be two to four week time boxes. During which the teams will choose items from their backlog to work on, commit to completing them, complete them show them off in a demonstration and then reflect on their process. So it's a framed time box in which you plan, you work, and you stay accountable regularly you demonstrate what you've done, and then you reflect on your process and go back through the sprint again. So it is that iterative cycle of working I'm working on the project. So the way that backlog plays into that is that typically if you're a software company for example. You would have a product backlog for specific product so Adobe Photoshop there there's a product backlog? There's a lot of different things that are that are working there, but the teams can't work on the entire product the teams can focus on a feature where the teams can focus on a slice of something and then other teams are going to pick up all the other stuff. So you go from the larger backlog to a sprint backlog. These are the things that are high priority right now, these are the things that I can accomplish in whatever time goal I've set for myself, and these are the things I'm going to commit to and I'm going to work on during this sprint. So, you can you can choose whatever sprint kind of framework works for you. I think I tend to do probably monthly sprint so when I do my own research projects and I have that up and running. I tried doing it kind of weekly in that was just a little bit too much. Some people that I've worked with have you know do it at the end of a semester, and I kind of plan at the beginning of the semester and check in with themselves. Kind of depend on depends on what works for you and the rhythm of your semester. But really it's just taking a slice because you can only work on a slice at a time. One of the things that I love and we can maybe talk more about scrum boards is that if you visualize a scrum board on a whiteboard, you have visualized the thing that has just three simple columns on it: backlog, work-in-progress, and done. Then you put things—put your tasks on sticky notes, and you can move the sticky notes around on the board that should kind of visualize what you're doing. A good scrum board though the middle column, that work-in-progress column, is always narrower than the other two columns. As that visual reminder that you can't do everything at once. It's over here in the backlog, you know it's coming, I'm choosing to focus on these things right now, and when those are done once. I have met that commitment I'll move that to done and I'll choose something else to work on. Because it's very easy to see the to-do list and see here's all the things I have to do. I'm going to do all of them at once. And that kind of that damages your commitment it damages your focus because you feel kind of scattered, so it's a it's a visual reminder to say this is what I'm working on this sprint this is what I'm working on this day. And to take that kind of and use it to kind of center yourself as you're moving forward in your work.

**KL**: So as you're describing this Rebecca. I feel like one of the things that's really sticking out to me. Is that with the idea of a backlog it seems like the idea is to really create brain space it's to kind of get all this stuff out of your mind onto a chart so that you can see here's everything I have. And then the idea of a sprint is to really focus that energy, now that you have the brain space, where you going to focus it in. And that's the part that I think could be really useful for academics. Who are doing you know like a writing retreat or something like that or they want to take a term and really focus in on you know revising a particular class or launching a new project or something like that. I wondering if you can talk a little bit more about what makes up an effective Sprint and if there are people listening who are thinking about doing this around their research. How could they kind of prepare for success with using this method?

**RPR**: Sure, I think two things to think about when you're thinking about your spreads in your backlogs. The first thing is know what you can commit to and that takes some practice. You know how what it knowing the rhythm of what semester is like and and your own working rhythms and when you're productive and when you're not productive.

So thinking about it kind of playing with—they call it velocity in software development. It's like what can you really accomplish in a certain amount of time and that takes a while that takes some practice to figure out what your kind of optimal velocity is for for moving towards your goals. But scrum also builds in agile is the odd gel kind of value piece of it. It is a lot of kind of respecting because self and the people around you were all trying to do the best we can at that moment in time. And knowing that flexibility could be required things to come up priorities can shift and giving yourself permission to shift those kinds of things. But also, within that structure still holding yourself accountable. You you're making these commitments to yourself because you've made goals you have something meaningful that you want to accomplish, whatever that is in terms of research or teaching or even service there. There's something valuable there that you want to contribute, and you want to get out into the world so holding that kind of commitment sacred I think to yourself is very important. When it's very easy to just kind of for me for example. It's very easy for me to just put my research aside for a semester and focus on students. I work at an undergraduate-focused institution, that's our priority. So it's very easy for me to say I'm just going to deal with them, and that's what I'm here for. But that in some ways that makes me not as great of a teacher as I could be if I'm kind of if not looking at different aspects of my identity and being able to model things for them and that work as well. So figuring out what you commit you can commit to overtime is really important, and what that time is. And I think the second thing with sprinting and the whole process is committing to the feedback loop. Because you could just kind of go on and on and on and on and just kind of move things down your scrum board and pick up tasks and move them, but you may not be working at your optimal, but your optimal value at that point, right? So what the what I like about kind of the idea of holding that sprint sacred is that you plan you check in with yourself while you're working. But then you demonstrate it you show what you've accomplished, and then you review the process and I that's one of the things that that I think works best if you use scrum with students as well. You give them the opportunity to publicly demonstrate what they've written or what they've completed, but then you ask them to look at their process how effective was this process for you. Did you collaborate well? Did you communicate? Well, where could you have done better? What can you commit to now that you can do better in the next cycle right, and if you do that with yourself you can kind of have an honest conversation with yourself and say you know what I made this commitment, but I over committed and then it made me feel bad or this other thing came up, and that was more important, and that's okay, so I'm going to let that go or I'm going to choose to you know, “I need to be more accountable, so I'm going to ask one of my colleagues to check in with me every couple of days and I'll offer that to them as well just so we can make sure that we're making progress on our goals.” So it's that check-in point throughout that accountability in the scrum language. We call it “inspect and adapt.” There's a regular inspect and adapt cycle that you follow. So whether it's you know a couple times a semester, once a semester. You check in and say OK, Where am I? What am I doing? Am I doing? What is producing the most value for the goals that I have for? For my career? Or for my teaching? Or from my research? Or for my life? Whatever that is how can I make sure that I'm committed to that and making good progress.

**KL**: Those are such good questions all right. So we're going to take another brief break when we come back, we'll hear a little bit more from Rebecca. Back in a moment.

[Music plays]

# Segment 3:

**KL**: Rebecca you've mentioned a couple of times this idea of a scrum board and longtime listeners to the show will know I'm a huge whiteboard fan. I definitely mention it on various occasions; I have huge white boards in my office at home, in my office at work. So, I'm wondering if we can talk about this idea of a scrum board—you've mentioned kind of those, these three areas. Let's talk about how you set it up. What's on there, all those different kinds of things, so remind us again, what are the three areas of the scrum board?

**RPR:** First of all so the three areas are three different columns one for backlog one, the work-in-progress or the web and then done. So it's really simple you can put more lanes on them, but there's really no reason to sometimes. I've done for column ones, but really the first two columns were just backlog, maybe there's a column for the epics and there was a column for the stories. Just two separate them out a little bit if I have multiple things in a pipeline at this point at different stages. But really the three columns, looking at mine as we're chatting about it. The three columns work really well, and I use I have a whiteboard in my office. You can also just tape off a wall with some painters tape if you've got that in my classes where we can't kind of commandeer a wall for an entire semester. I'll just take a simple manila folder and open that up and draw three columns in it and use smaller sticky notes for that. So we haven't talked about sticky notes yet, and sticky notes or wait. There's a that scrum and agile or just a big kind of conspiracy by the Post-it industry to make more money on sticky notes. Because we definitely use a lot of sticky notes in this in this type of project, but um for your scrum board, and I usually take regular size sticky notes, and then I will move each task that I'm going to work on during the sprint. I will write each one on a sticky note and then add those to my backlog. And you can do a numbering system or kind of a project notation. How, whatever that works for you. But all those into my backlog for the Sprint and then pick whatever those highest priority ones or the low-hanging fruit ones are move that into my whipped column, and then work on those. And when I finish those tasks, then I'll move that sticky note into done, and then pick something else to move into web portal or rethink what's on there. You can absolutely use software for this. There are a lot of different kinds of software packages that you can look at but in my experience there's something. There's something psychologically valuable about taking a sticky note and putting it in the done column pray. It's just a little boost and when I introduced it to students in the classroom for group projects—you know the first day. We talked about collaboration and what that means and how it's different from cooperation, and we help them set up their scrum boards. And they will almost always write kind of silly little things at the beginning like, make scrum board just so they can put something in the done column and get that little feeling and then as we go through the project and they're working on it. You can almost always, here at some during the class time there will be a little cheers because they've moved something and done, and they feel like they've accomplished something. So it's a great little psychological boost to see things working their way down the board to just really visualize your accomplishments.

**KL**: Right well, I mean. I'm one of those people who write things on my list just to cross them off. Even if I've liked already finished them so I have a record so this speaks to me—very, very much. I'm wondering though if you could talk a little bit about, because one of the questions this raises for me is one of scale. Because you talked about you know the backlog not necessarily being a to-do list but kind of working down in those different layers of eventually getting to kind of your, your action items for what you need to do. So is there any sense of like not putting certain things on the scrum board because they're too detailed like can you talk a little bit about that? What are the kinds of things that get included there?

**RPR**: Sure, and I do want to mention that I'm not anti to-do list at all; I use to-do lists all the time. Those are the kinds of things that kind of keep, keep me reminded on all of the different things that are working in my faculty life, and my life life.

What's happening in my classes and my research and my service. I've got to-do list for those, and I use, I have lots of perfectly happy with to-do list for those kinds of things. I personally use my scrum board and my backlogs just for my research because that's just what works for me. I know people who have done it kind of for their class work to see kind of where they are in their grading this number of papers or things like that it helps them lies that way.

I don't think anyone that I've talked to about this has actually kind of mashed everything onto a scrum board. You know this service projects plus teaching plus research most of the people that I've worked with. To kind of pick one area and focus on that and then use some other system that works for them to keep track of teaching or things like that and I think really what goes into a task or what goes into a story is just personal experimentation deciding on what's a reasonable, chunk.

You know if, if you going back to the lit review of sample if you put right lit review as a task. You're not going to get very far on that. It's going to stay in that lane, and that work-in-progress lane for a really for really long time because there are lots of other things that you can do, but that's also kind of a cue to yourself to say this thing has been in my work-in-progress column for a really long time.

What's happening there? Do I need to break this down farther, and if you start on the flip side of that if you start kind of writing up notes, and you put in a work in progress and you can check it off five minutes later. That was probably a little too granular, so it's really just kind of a process of what works for you for how you're going to split it up. How much kind of complexity how much time you want to kind of dedicate two different things, and how you prioritize.

**RPR**: Okay, so I'm going to get a little bit crazy about this, but I'm wondering if like depending on. So let's say you have a sprint and you want to work on a few different projects, would you consider doing multiple scrum boards? Like one for each project, or would you like color code the projects on one scrum board? Like what I mean, let's get into it. What is this like? What you know you're like the expert here. What would you recommend for something like that?

**RPR**: I would not recommend multiple scrum boards. I like to be able to see the forest and the trees at the same time, and if I have multiple boards, and I'm moving them around then I really can't see everything at once and I'm going to miss something or not be able to use sometime or some time you just need to brain break, and you want to try something different, so you can move on to there another project. So I color code with different color sticky notes. It's always a big adventure to go to Office Depot and pick the color of my semester sticky notes—make sure their color coordinated, but I color code by project I'll, along rows on my personal scrum board, and that's what I have my students do as well. If they're you know they have a bigger project that there are a lot of them are working on together, then we'll split them into teams and each team will have some different colors. So it just makes it easier to see in one place in saw development, there's some very specific recommendations to not have multiple backlogs and to not have multiple boards, which gets complicated when there's so many teams working on it. But I think even for a small collaborative group, just having it somewhere where you can see it where they can see it as useful. So I have a scrum board in my office. I know people who also have scrum boards in their office, and then those are those are open to everyone.

You know you can people come in and comments on my board or ask me questions about it or ask me how to set one up or ask me to look at there's vice versa so it's, it the inspecting the adapt piece that we talked about earlier the third leg of that is transparency. And transparency is about visualizing and showing people what's, what's working and then thinking about what is working. What's not working? How can I how can I shift that to make sure it's it's helping me make meaningful progress to my most meaningful goals.

**KL**: Right well, I'm wondering Rebecca, maybe we can have a picture of this scrum board that we can post on the show notes so people can be like what is this thing that they talking about, so let's post a picture, and then you'd also mention some digital tools, so I definitely want to mention Trello. I think is one that is kind of really works well for this in terms of columns, and then there's another one that I'm familiar with, KanbanFlow, that is similar, so we will link to those in the show notes. Are there other tools that you think are kind of useful for this or that you've heard could be workable for a scrum board?

**RPR**: Sure. LeanKit has a good scrum board process and you can get academic pricing for that. So if you want to use it in classes, or just for yourself, you can get some pretty-- pretty good pricing on using LeanKit’s product, and they do they do enterprise level stuff, so you, can you could they have lots of great little features that you can use.

I know some people who have done Basecamp, but that takes some additional coding and really thinking through so you kind of need to be pretty solid in that particular platform if you're going to use that. I also know people who just use Google Docs they'll just they'll set up kind of a spreadsheet and just put little tickets that your different colors for different for different tasks to represent different things for them, and then we'll just kind of copy and paste them down the line. So I think it's whatever works for you.

There are a lot of tools that you, online tools, that you can use if you do go ahead and research that. Google about that largely because a lot of software development doesn't happen in one location anymore teams are there spread across the country and across the world so there are lots of different products that you can kind of look into and see what works for you. Or what your University might already have access to so that's always a good place to start.

**KL**: Awesome. Well, Rebecca, thank you for letting me completely nerd-out on all things agile method, productivity, and scrum boards—this was super fun. Thanks so much for coming on the show.

**RPR**: Thanks for having me.

**KL**: Thanks. Also to our listeners for joining us for this week's episode of Research in Action. I'm Katie Linder and will be back next week with the new episode.

[Music plays]

# 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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# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode 96 of the research and action podcast Dr. Rebecca Pope-Ruark shares a couple methods for using a scrum board in the classroom - take a listen:

**KL:** Rebecca, I know that you've been using a version of a scrum board in some of your research on scholarship of teaching and learning, and I would love to hear more about that. What's going on there?

**RPR:** Sure, I teach at the 300-400 level. I teach a lot of really big project based courses and service-learning courses, so I like to have my students do really long semester projects. Not a kind of a two-week collaborative project. They'll do things upwards of 12 weeks working with a partner or a client or on a publication so that there it's a long project. They really need to collaborate with is with each other, and they have to figure out how to get where they're going and what their goals are. So in those classes they're still other kind of a unified scrum board for everyone depending on kind of where the classes and if we can take that wall or teams in the class might have their own little manila folders with smaller sticky notes that we've created a scrum board off of as well, but what's really great about using a scrum board whether you're having your students work on a collaborative projects, or even just kind of seeing how they're working through a process or writing process, or something like that is that you can visualize tier thinking over a period of time.

It's not just. You know there's what I see here's my plan or here's my proposal, and here's my reflection at the end. You can actively see how they're thinking and how they're thinking is changing over time based on how they update their scrum board. So I will have the students set it up, and then I will take picture of it, and then the students will do whatever they're doing work on different projects and then at the end of that.

I'll take another picture of that so over the course of a six to eight week project. I've got 16 pictures of their scrum board that show me what thinking and what they moved or what they’re prioritized or what they realized they didn't need to do or what they realized they needed to add. So in addition to kind of my my teaching by walking around and by listening to some of their daily scrum meetings and things like that, I can really piece together. How they're thinking about something what they're learning where they might need some more help, so I can kind of just in time teach where I see that. But just just that one board gives you an immense amount of data to really think about how students are learning and how there processing what they're doing as they go through a specific project or through a specific process. So it just that visualization it's good for them, but it's also a really amazing kind of research tool and data point as well.

**KL**: So as you're thinking about that as data. I mean are you taking kind of snapshots of it along the way so that you have kind of a record of it as you're going.

**RPR**: Yep, yeah, especially if it's a wall. That's super easy because they'll just leave in the bubble still be there if they're using the folders. I tend to have them keep the folders in our computer lab kind of in a safe space that lab is open to them in the evening so if they want to have a team meeting they can come in and they can grab their scrum board and do it there. So I'll you know at the beginning of class or at the end of a class, I'll just take a quick phone photo of their scrum board. And just make sure you sort them right away into folders, so they don't kind of jam up on your phone, and you get very confused. I've been known to do that every once in a while, and that's not very good scholarship. So yeah, I just take a picture of it, and I kind of I will write down some notes as well kind of keep it running Google Doc of some things that I noticed a group doing or concerns that I had or just kind of review it quickly and then by the end of that project when you can once grades are turned in and you can really start thinking about that as data as opposed to learning. You've got a really good resource. You've got visual imagery, and you've got some of your own notes about what you what you've done, and then you've got the student work as well. What wasn't the result of the process, so it just makes the process totally visible—visible in terms of their learning, and how they're moving forward.

**KL**: So it, I mean, you've kind of alluded to this that it's also an amazing teaching tool in terms of metacognition and asking students questions about their learning about their process is that something you've also built in as well.

**RPR**: Yes; absolutely you wanted to things that we didn't talk about was the daily scrum meeting and that the accountability meeting at went every day if you're doing software you would meet every morning and have this little meeting. When I'm doing a project with my students will do a daily scrum at the beginning of project time in every class, and this is not a progress meeting it's an accountability meeting is a commitment meeting everyone goes around the room, and they'd answer three questions: What have I done since we last met to meet our goal? What am I going to do today? What am I available to do today? And where might I be stuck or where might I need some help or some feedback at this point? And that's all you do every one answers those questions, and then we can say okay, so based on that these are the three things that we think we need to move forward on today, or these are the things that we're stuck on that we all need to revisit as a group or why don't you three go work on this and we'll go work on this and we'll talk about how to move forward. So they are constantly checking in with each other. It's very hard to hide in that kind of context. You know if it's if you haven't been doing your work. It's going to be very clear very quickly that either there's some problem that's holding you up, or you're not being accountable to the team and we can deal with that much earlier than we might have in a regular kind of group context. So it gives you so many different points of reference for the students to really think about their process not just the product that they're building if what they're doing is effective.

Because look I mean if we think about it. How often do we actually teach our students to collaborate or talk to them about what that means? They mostly cooperate right. They know how to effectively divide and conquer things and throw them together, and that's an efficient use of their time even though they know it might not result in the most effective product. But if we talk to them about collaboration and give them different ways of thinking about it and talking about it practicing it then they can start to figure out. What strategy is best for them in different contexts and make good decisions about that.

**KL**: Well, thank you for sharing a little bit more about how you're using your screen board in the classroom and also for scholarship of teaching and learning.

You've just heard a bonus clip from episode 96 of the Research in Action Podcast with Dr. Rebecca Pope-Ruark sharing a couple of methods for using a scrum board in the classroom. Thanks for listening.

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