Episode 44: Monika, Frank & Pat (Part 1)

**KL:** Katie Linder

**MR:** Monika Raesch

**PR:** Pat Reeve

**FC:** Frank Rudy Cooper

KL: You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode forty-four.

[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 special two-part episode, I am joined by three faculty members from Suffolk University in Boston, MA: Dr. Monika Raesch, associate professor and chair of the Communication and Journalism Department; Dr. Pat Reeve, associate professor and chair of the History Department; and Dr. Frank Rudy Cooper, professor of law, who until recently was the president’s senior advisor for diversity.

Each of my guests today have recently experienced taking on administrative roles while also trying to maintain their scholarship and research productivity, so that will be the focus of our discussion today.

I should also mention that I have co-published with all of today’s guests on the subject of using backward design practices in a writing group—so I’ll make sure to link to that piece in the show notes.

Thanks for joining me, everyone. It’s great to chat with all of you.

**PR:** Thank you.

**KL:** So, I thought that I would kick us off just by talking a little bit about challenges that you guys might be experiencing—that you guy and gals, I should say—might be experiencing as you’re working through researching and writing as administrators, and one of the things that I really value about your self-reflection and your thoughts on this work is you’ve started to call yourself administrative teacher-scholars, which is quite a few identities to juggle. How are you defining this grouping of identity for yourselves?

**MR:** Umm, I think I’m going to step back one step to just a teacher-scholar, because we’re all at the same institution and we have the same faculty handbook that we are following. I think that’s really what got us started to consider our identities in that way, and in our handbook, a teacher-scholar is defined as faculty who engage in “teaching; scholarship, research, creative and/or professional activities; and service to the University, the profession and the community.” And so....

**FC:** Oh, Monika, I would just add I was on the strategic planning committee that came up with that term, *teacher-scholar*, for us to use, and it really was about compromising between the increasing focus on scholarship at this school and its past as a school where you really just teach people to practice, when it comes to law school, or just sort of teach the basics and don’t worry so much about scholarship when it comes to the other schools.

**MR:** Yes, and I think that’s why that was on our mind, because it was so consciously brought to all the faculty, and so for me personally that term means that I should be actively engaged in teaching and scholarship, and ideally (for me at least) with an explicit link between the two, because they inform one another. And so I’ve done a lot of scholarship that I can bring back into the classroom, and vice versa. I have also written about my teaching pedagogy. And then with administration, for me at least, at first glance it appeared to take away from being a teacher-scholar, almost like it is like taking time away from it, and you have to refocus in a completely different direction, but then as I pondered that, I thought, that’s only if I let it be that perspective. I then actually felt like I had to adjust my perspective and actually realize that the administration perspective can be a real benefit to the teacher-scholar if the environment and the context provides the appropriate support for that so that now I can bring in administrative experiences into my scholarship role as well as in my teaching, and vice versa, again.

**KL:** I love that intentionality that you’re talking about about relating your teaching and your scholarship. For listeners, we have a couple other episodes with guests who’ve talked about that: Kevin Gannon’s episode on balancing teaching and research, and also Peter Felten’s episode on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and I’ll make sure to link to both of those in the show notes. Pat or Frank, do you have other thoughts about what it’s meant for you to kind of balance or juggle these different identities?

**PR:** I’ve thought about that challenge, both in terms of just the sheer fact of having to harmonize these three competing imperatives, and I think, honestly, they are competing, and that’s because of the institutional context in which we work, but like Monika, I’m trying to figure out ways that I can reconcile the responsibilities in a way that allows them to build off of one another as opposed to compete with one another. So, at some point it would probably be worthwhile to talk about the kinds of institutional constraints that can either promote or inhibit the ability of faculty to integrate these three sets of responsibilities in a way where, in fact, they do build on each other.

**FC:** I would agree with both Monika and Pat and just say that, for a long time in law schools, or at least the law schools I’ve been at, Villanova School of Law and Suffolk, I’ve found that there’s a debate about whether your scholarship actually helps your teaching, so I’m glad that Monika pointed out, and also Pat, I think, agrees, that the scholarship does help your teaching. For me, that integration of the two has been really productive and helpful for a long time, and especially, I think, the scholarship has helped my teaching even more than the teaching’s helped my scholarship. When I think about the administrator role, I have found some frustrations with it in the way that it pulls you away from the teacher-scholar role, but I also felt like I learned the nature of the university and what else goes on here a lot better by being an administrator, so that, I think, will prove to be helpful down the line.

**KL:** So, Pat, you mentioned this idea of institutional constraints, and Frank, you’ve pointed to this to, of maybe being pulled away from these other roles. I’m wondering if you can speak to that a little bit, in particular some of the logistics of being an administrator and being a teacher-scholar and trying to balance all of these things. Has there been anything that’s been particularly challenging that you’ve really had to work through, and if so, what have been some of the solutions that you’ve found?

**PR:** I can speak directly from my experience, and when I thought about our presentation today, I thought about what I brought to the position of being a chair, and I realized that I had one large asset, which was my proclivity for self-reflection, because I knew the job would confront me with new demands and that I would have to somehow integrate those with my teaching and with my scholarship as well as my service, something that often doesn’t get mentioned when we talk about teacher-scholars. But I have three very concrete deficits in the deficit column, which I had to confront as chair and which have certainly impinged on my ability to integrate my various roles. The first was that my department had been eroded, both from within and without, over the last eight years, so as a result, I inherited a faculty that are both disengaged and disaffected, and so I had to set the goal of what I call “slow chairing,” understanding that I would only be able to change the environment of the department very slowly and incrementally. The second deficit that I saw was that, the obvious one, like Monika, we came into the jobs with no job descriptions and no training, and she was a godsend to me because we buddied up immediately and began figuring out who we were going to go meet with. We’ve only me twice since the fall started, but those have been helpful conversations. The third challenge was that I was given—this is unique to me—I was given a chair sabbatical, and by that I mean I was given a sabbatical in March, appointed chair the following month, and the Dean was loath to deny me the sabbatical, so we agreed to this sort of jerry-rigged chair sabbatical which I call an oxymoron. So, you know, these are not insurmountable problems, but they are the lived realities that I carry with me as I try to think about harmonizing these three disparate roles.

**KL:** Mmm. That’s really fascinating. Monika or Frank, do you want to add anything?

**FC:** Well, I’ll just add that I’ve found the administrator role created some very tangible logistical problems, in terms of having a lot more meetings than I would have had before, and just trying to manage even the time I found interesting. Probably the principal challenge beyond this organizational one was that you had to switch modes all the time, and sometimes I would find myself coming out a of a class, and you’ve got that sort of both high, and then you’re feeling drained, but you’ve got to turn right around, and then people are going to be asking you questions about something completely different. So, I went from talking about, uh, this would have been criminal procedure and what the police can and can’t do, and then I’d walk into a meeting and people would want to know what can staff do to help students feel more comfortable and welcome, and they’re not all that related. *[laughs]*

**MR:** I agree with both of them in that. For Pat’s perspective, that yes, we did not really receive training. There has not been such a thing as a chair school or something like that. You learn it as you go and by speaking with our wonderful colleagues, who opened up the doors to us with all our questions. And then in regards to Frank with the time management, as well as the switching modes, I’ve found one way for me to this is that I had to literally have a mental and a physical separation. So, one of the first things I did when I became chair is I literally created a physical corner in my office desk that’s my chair’s corner so that when I have to do these administrative tasks that do not lend themselves well to jell with teacher-scholar, you will find me in that corner of my office, because it helps me to then just be focused in that role. And when I’m done, then I’ll go back to my other table that is my teacher-scholar table, in a way. And, yeah, divide my time between them.

**FC:** And I would just note that you can’t hear our heads nodding, because Pat and I were both like, “Oh, yeah, that’s a great idea.”

**PR:** Yeah, it is. Because I concur with Frank. I can remember years ago, when I was made director of an academic program, somebody was observing that it was difficult for me to make the transition from administrative to scholarly role in any given day, in any given hour. And I think there is a different part of the brain that we exercise when we’re doing administrative work versus more conceptual work where we’re trying to build a theory, defend it, and present it. So I love the idea of carving out a time to regroup and reorient to the task at hand.

**FC:** There was a small way in which I thought of doing that, which was all the time I was wearing suits, and I don’t really love wearing suits. I wear them to teach, but now I suddenly found that administrators at Suffolk, everybody—the male administrators—wear a suit and a tie every day, and just coming to school every morning with a suit and a tie on made me think, like, alright, always on, in administrator mode.

**KL:** These are such great, amazing, concrete details. Thank you. So, one of the questions I have, just based on what you guys are saying is—and I’m thinking, for our other people, who might be researchers, teacher-scholars, thinking about taking on administrative roles. My first question is just are you finding the time to continue your research endeavors, and also, kind of bridging off of that, what should other people know, you know, if they’re considering moving into these administrative roles? But I think our listeners may just want to know, can you do both? Can you be an administrator and can you continue with writing and research?

**MR:** I think that you definitely can, but I feel like you have to be very disciplined. At the beginning of each semester, based on my new teaching schedule, etc., and the service that I’m in, prior to becoming a chair, I created myself an Excel spreadsheet, Monday through Sunday mapped out, and I would block off times, like when are you in the classroom, when are you doing your morning office chores, the first half hour when you get into the office, and so I would carve out these times anyway, and I noticed that I would have no problem doing that right in the first week of class. Once I became chair, I could not complete that spreadsheet anymore. I had to go through a few weeks experiencing when is the heavy email flow coming in, and it’s not necessarily on Mondays when chairs are suddenly bombarded with emails. And so from that, I’ve now been able to create that Excel spreadsheet for myself again, and I’ve carved out two times where I will absolutely, no matter what, do research, and if it means that I have to hide—last week, I was actually sitting on a bench in a mall because it meant nobody could disrupt me. I left the building, because that’s how I could get it done. But so I treat those hours that I’ve now carved out as as essential as my teaching hours, because otherwise I’ve got to be a hypocrite. How can I write annual reviews about my colleagues on their scholarship, teaching, and service if I’m not publishing myself? So I really think you can do it, but you have to be very disciplined, and you have to acknowledge it is less time than I used to have. Absolutely it’s going to fluctuate with weeks, like, if I know the schedule for next semester has to be created, that week, there will be lack of writing time or research time. But then you can make up for it in the next week when that particular task is over. So I think just being aware of that schedule and planning ahead like that, I think you can do it, but I think it requires organization and discipline.

**FC:** So, I would note, as well, I think of the book that you introduced me to, Katie, which is Paul Silvia’s *How to Write a Lot*, and what I saw as one of the key points there was the idea that you’ve got to separate inspiration from actually writing, and with less time, at first I lost my ability to write, the scholarship, because I found I couldn’t get inspired and my time was so sporadic, and I think it made it important to get back into that mode of writing now, because I’ve got 15 minutes or a half an hour, and I’m just going to sit down and just get down whatever I can get down, which might not be as much as I would’ve when I was in a more sort of open-minded state. Kind of like—you know, I think that Pat was saying that you’re thinking big theory, and then you switch to sort of local administrative problems, but if you follow some of those principles of separating the inspiration from the writing, that started to help me out.

**KL:** Mm-hmm.

**PR:** I really don’t have much more to add except that, in addition to everything that’s been said, I would advise patience. I’ve had to learn patience in the sense of understanding that just because I wasn’t getting to writing in the first couple weeks of the semester didn’t mean that I wouldn’t. And in fact, this weekend, I looked at my calendar and realized that as of the end of this week, things are really going to quiet down for me, at least I hope. It’s looking like that, and the chief impediment has just been the volume of meetings, as Frank said, and I see many fewer of those. But I would also say, getting to your question, Katie, about what advice would you give, I thought about that a lot, and I think, in hindsight—and I’ve only learned this from working with our group to create an article that’s the basis for this podcast—I would say, challenge the tendency to self-isolate once you become an administrator, because you’re only talking to yourself, and sometimes your mind is a dangerous neighborhood if you’re trying to problem-solve. I think it’s useful to hear other voices. That can be as simple as identifying other faculty administrators whose practices you admire, and learning from them, something that Monika and I have tried to do. I think forging a support system of other administrators who share your scholarly aspirations makes a huge difference, because hearing that it can be done is incredibly motivating when it feels impossible. And I would also advise someone taking one of these jobs and trying to balance these three roles against what I think of as reflexive reflection as opposed to dispassionate reflection, reflexive reflection being a tendency to make assessments in the moment that are based on emotion rather than clear thinking about your operational challenges and opportunities, because I think those end up only buttressing your sense of self-doubt, and that’s at a time when you’re trying to learn a new job and juggle all these new responsibilities. That can be debilitating. And then one of the things I’m getting more interested in doing, and it’s largely because of Monika pulling us together to write about the dilemma of writing as an administrator, I think periodic freewriting or journaling is probably really a useful idea, something that I’m going to try for myself.

**MR:** I actually want to add something to what Pat just said. She reminded me of something that is so everyday for me now that I hadn’t even thought about it, but that is when I joined the writing group with Frank and Pat and another colleague of ours, Micky, in—there was this accountability. Whenever you manage to write, you let the others know, and you set goals, and there’s always this cheerful happiness replying to your email coming back to you, like, “Yay! Good for you.” And it makes you feel good, you’re accountable to them, and yeah, you are just really a community, a team of supportive colleagues, and I think that’s, like Pat said, it’s such a key to have that, so that when you have a bad day, you know there are others who have been there before and yes, they can pull you through.

**FC:** And I would add one more piece of advice, which is at the front end, really negotiate in the scholarship. I did not do this, but I wish that I had thought to say something like, “I want time. I don’t want money, or at least I don’t want as much money.” And that also to negotiate in something like I come in at 10 on Tuesday mornings or I come in at 9:30 every day, so that you sort of build in the time. Now, some people write anyways first thing in the morning, but build in some time for scholarship. It might be the time that you do the reading, even if you do your writing at 6:15 in the morning.

**KL:** Well, I’m feeling very inspired by your experiences.

We’re going to take a brief break. When we come back, we’ll hear a little bit more from Monika, Pat, and Frank about some of the opportunities they’re finding in their roles as administrative teacher-scholars. Back in a moment.

*[music]*

# Segment 2:

**KL:** So, something that you mentioned in the first segment, which of course I’m really intrigued by, is that you’re working on an article about your experiences writing as administrators. So I was hoping you could tell me a little bit more about that and what that experience has been like, but also kind of how did that article start for you.

**MR:** The way this article started was, I don’t recall exactly how many weeks had passed, but I had basically become the department chair, and at one point I took stock of my résumé, of my C.V., and I got a little heart attack that I hadn’t published something in the recent past. And I’m currently editing a book, and, right, that always takes longer. There is no *[inaudible]*, like, a short-term outcome of this. So, I announced in the writing group to Pat, Frank, and Micky that my plan was to get an article published, and that, I suppose, is another challenge (sort of from the previous segment into this segment), that I feel that the administrative role does impact in-depth research negatively, but it opens up all these opportunities to actually write shorter articles or less-in-depth research-based articles, and it opened up my door to all these publications *[sic]* that I had never known about before, such as the department chair. And so I brought the idea to them, saying, “I’m announcing this as my deadline. I am writing an article on this transition from being a teacher-scholar to an administrative teacher-scholar.” And I remember everybody was pitching in, and I remember very distinctly that Pat was so persuasive and in such a good way that we should do this as a group, and from there the article grew. Yeah, so I came into the meeting thinking I’m writing a short article, and now we are in the 20 plus pages together, and it’s so enjoyable to do this investigation together.

**KL:** I love that. It reminds me of the article that we wrote together, which, again, I will post in the show notes. It was one of my most enjoyable collaborative experiences, writing that article with you all. And I think one of the things that you’re raising which is so interesting is sometimes these collaborations come out of places that you don’t expect, and that sometimes just talking with colleagues about your writing and scholarship can really learn to some interesting relationships, so I love that. I’m wondering if, Pat or Frank, do you want to add anything about how you found administration to be a source of scholarship for you?

**PR:** Well, inadvertently, for me—although I’m beginning to think about other ways, so let me answer your question directly. What struck me as being.... Well, let me restate that. What I loved about Monika’s idea was that it was so counterintuitive, the notion of writing your way out of this feeling of being stuck and unable to write, and trying to dig down and understand why it is we felt stuck. So, that was sort of an epiphany, to realize that that was a moment that really was an opportunity rather than an obstacle to writing. But I’m also thinking more, after having chaired my second faculty meeting today and seeing the kinds of behaviors that are either going to bring us down or, if I can begin to change the ethos of the department, will allow us to move forward, I’m beginning to realize I should start making notes to myself as I go forward in this role, because I might really want to write about the experience of being an administrator in academia and the kinds of social or occupational norms that present particular opportunities and challenges for chairs.

**FC:** Maybe we’ll get codenames. *[****KL*** *laughs]* So, I guess I was trying to think about the article and how it felt for me. One of the things was the “writing your way out of a block” felt good. As far as administration being a source of scholarship, one of the things I thought was important was that I was doing work on diversity as an administrator, and my interest is in race, gender, and law, so I’ve always been kind of following diversity issues, and there was a nice way in which they came together. Even though I said before that I had to sort of shift my mindset, it wasn’t such a bad shift, because the issues were related to what I care about.

**KL:** One of the things that each of you brought up in segment 1 was how you’re really trying to have these different identities as scholar-teacher... or teacher-scholar, rather, and administrator really blend together in ways that make them more effective. I’m wondering if you can talk a little bit about how you bring the ideas and values that have inspired your teaching and scholarship into your administrative work, and what does that look like for you?

**FC:** So, the values were consistent with what I care about anyways and what drew me into the field, and I think that caring about race and gender but expanding and learning more about issues I was less aware of, like people who are thinking of themselves as non-gendered and what is this cis identity term, and so forth, I found actually found really helpful to broadening my scope beyond mostly focusing on race and gender in my own scholarship, and I am maybe going to be working with a colleague at another school who focuses on sex orientation, and I think that’s going to be really fruitful and may have been helped in some ways by having worked in this role.

**MR:** I think—I was trained in Europe as an instructor at higher education levels, and the emphasis was really about being reflective, reflecting on your teaching and also in your scholarship, so I think one of the first things I brought with me into the administrative role is that value on—I really value reflection, which ultimately, that’s what our article is about that we are writing, [inaudible] reflecting to learn and to move forward, to progress, to always improve, basically. And then the way I find it also feeds the other way around, I mean, some of the teaching pedagogy can easily be applied to administrative roles. I mean, a department meeting can have many forms. It is the traditional thought to think, okay, we’re coming into a room, we’re sitting back for an hour listening and maybe taking a few notes, if you’re a participant. But you can be much more engaged, right, there kind of think-pair-share, small group work, brainstorming activities, all that stuff can be so easily applied in department meetings to make them more interactive and engaging to everybody in the room, and I think, also, more fruitful in that way, so that hopefully all faculty in the end have ownership of whatever it is that is being developed. And I think that’s a slow transition.

**FC:** And I would add one thing back in, which is when I was talking to Micky Lee, who’s in our writing group as well, she was pointing out that when I was running this diversity task force, I was doing some things that seemed like they were inspired by my teaching, and some of them were and some of the weren’t, but definitely it is both a place where you can utilize pedagogy and maybe a place where you can learn something for taking back into the classroom.

**KL:** Mm.

**PR:** What I would add, actually, is something that I draw from my previous incarnation as somebody who used to teach dispute resolution at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and one of the hardest things to accomplish is to persuade mid-level professionals to rethink their sense of their practice and to even consider for a moment that there are competencies that they can still learn and need to learn, and even some behaviors or practices that they need to undo. It’s amazing the amount of resistance you can create by even raising that prospect. So, today after today’s meeting, I was thinking, what is it that I can do that will foster the kind of self-awareness that I used to try to engender among my students in dispute resolution? For example, I discovered (and I hope I don’t step on toes here) that social workers were frequently very unwilling to consider that, possibly, their conflict resolution were not as strong as they thought they were, and trying to unpack the emotional baggage that made it different for them to learn new skills. I think of that as being comparable to working with a faculty who’s developed bad habits and is disinclined to unlearn them.

**KL:** So, it is always such a joy to talk with each of you. I want to thank you so much for your time in this part one episode talking about your experiences as administrators and teacher-scholars, so thanks so much for joining me!

**MR:** Thank you for having us!

**FC:** Thank you, Katie.

**PR:** Thanks very much.

**KL:** And thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of *Research in Action*. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with part two of this episode.

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

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