Kick Starting your Research Program

Karina Vernon

Department of English, UTSC

- I'd like to acknowledge that the land on which we work is the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit River

- I joined the Department of English in 2009

- My research and teaching field is Canadian Literature, with a specialization in black Canadian literature, archives, regionalism, urban studies, black cultural aesthetics, multiculturalism, black-Indigenous solidarities, and decolonization.

"Kick Starting Your Research Program" Presentation Overview

1. My Bio and Research Profile

2. The Importance of Ongoing Scholarly Mentorship

3. Finding Time for Research

3. a) The Relationship Between Research and Teaching

4. Work/Life Balance

5. Questions and Discussion

1. My Bio and Research Profile
Karina Vernon

- I was awarded tenure in 2008

- I currently hold two SSHRC Insight Grants:
    - <u>2015-2021 SSHRCC Insight Grant</u> PI for the project
    "Black Art and the Aesthetics of Spatial Justice"

    - <u>2017-2022 SSHRCC Insight Grant</u> Co-researcher for the project
    "Call and Responsibility: The Transformative Reception Aesthetics of Black Canadian Literature, Film, and Music"

I became Associate Chair of English in January 2018.

- I have two books under contract and forthcoming with Wilfrid Laurier UP:
  - *The Black Prairie Archives: An Anthology* (Fall 2018)
  - *In the Archives of the Black Prairies: A Critical Monograph*
(Fall 2019)

  - In 2017 I was nominated by my Department Chair for the *UTSC Research Recognition Award*

The Black Prairie Archives
An Anthology

Karina Vernon, editor

Anti-CV

- But I am not a superhero; I learned by making lots (and lots!) of mistakes how finally to "kickstart" my research profile.

- My single biggest mistake:

- Once I earned my Ph.D. I thought my apprenticeship was over. I thought I should not seek further support or risk being seen as not qualified for the job.

- This is an anxiety that is common in academics, and in particular women, racialized people, and minoritized scholars.

→ I did not seek early peer review of my grant applications, nor of my course syllabi

→ I was not strategic about who I listed as readers of my work

The Result?

- <u>Failed Grant Applications:</u>
- SSHRC Insight Grant 2012, 2013, 2014
- Reader reports: "This project raises some fairly predictable questions"

2. You are Not Alone:
The Importance of Ongoing Mentorship

- You've gotten the job, but opportunities for mentorship continue.

- The University is *on your side* and *wants to help you* to succeed in your research endeavors.

- Rather than being seen as "not qualified for the job," when you seek guidance and support you will be:
  - →Regarded as stronger scholar, because seeking support is what strong scholars do;
  - → Building a research network, which is vital to a robust research portfolio;
  - →Strengthening your scholarship;
  - → Improving your work flow, saving time, and improving work/life balance.

Who makes a good mentor at this early career stage?

- Your Ph.D. supervisor
- Outside UTSC: senior colleagues in your field
- Inside UTSC: Your new colleagues

What Supports Are Available Inside UTSC?

- The University *wants to support you as a researcher*
- The Vice Principal's Research Office offers a slate of supports for all career stages
- You can mix-and-match the supports available

1. Suzanne Jaeger

- Contact Suzanne for matters related to:
- University of Toronto internal research funding programs (e.g. Connaught)
- External research funding opportunities for faculty in the social sciences and humanities
- Research administration and communication of funding opportunities
- Vice-Principal Research approval on My Research Applications electronic approval system (MRA)
- Research policies and procedural issues
- External research awards and honours

Supports Available Through the Vice Principal's Research Office

- Wiki of successful grant applications
- Peer review support
- Research Grant Enhancement Fund
- Research Competitiveness Fund
- Bridge Funding

- Don't delete emails from the VPRO
- Consider going to the brown-bag lunches

Talk to your Chair about your Research Goals

- Your Chair is not your boss; s/he is on your side.

- Make a plan about what you want to achieve in the next 5 years.

- Talk it over with your Chair. S/he knows what supports can be put in place to help you achieve what you want.

- Make an appointment with the Research Office to talk about your research goals.

3. Finding Time for Research

- How do you balance the new, demanding teaching and service load with your research profile?

- Different rhythms:
  - Some people set aside certain times of day (mornings/ evenings), or certain days of the week for research (off teaching days)
    - It helps to not check email until after the research and writing are done for the day
  - Some people prioritize teaching during the academic year and prioritize research during the summer months.
  - Find the rhythm that works for you – there is no single right way to approach it as long as you feel like you are making time for research.

3. a) The Relationship Between Teaching and Research

- No matter your research rhythm, it is often helpful to *make your teaching work for your research*:
    - Teach the texts you want to write on yourself, or which will help you keep up on conversations in your field;
    - Design senior undergraduate classes and graduate seminars around your own research problematics

    →This strategy also pays off pedagogically.
    Your students will sense your investment in the classroom.

The Relationship Between Teaching and Research, continued….

I'm talking about teaching in this workshop about research because the teaching will, in my experience, take up as much time and energy as you are willing to give it.

- Tips for creating time for research:
- When revamping a new course, change only 20% of the course material and assignments.
- Build into your syllabus "islands of familiarity" – some teaching days and weeks that you don't have to prep everything from scratch.
- Take the pressure off yourself during crunch times of the term or when you know you want to be planning conference papers, etc., by:

  - planning to invite guest speakers;
  - making a field trip (e.g. Doris McCarthy Gallery);
  - showing films as primary texts;
  - Planning in-class group work;
  - peer review of essay drafts;
  - individual or group presentations.

4. Work/ Life Balance

It is humanly possible to have both a robust research portfolio and a life outside of university work.

→*In fact, the two go together.* It's important to have fallow periods in order to fuel creative energy.

- Balancing work and personal/ family life is doable:
  - I generally don't work in the evenings or on weekends because I have young children.
  - That means I have to work as effectively as possible during my work days.
  - Give *yourself* time off.
    - No one will check if you've taken/ not taken vacation.
      - Don't forget: Your UTFA contract (July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2020) stipulates that:
      "Employees shall be entitled to an annual vacation with pay on the following basis:
      (i)   three weeks for the first five (5) years of employment with the employer;
      (ii)   (ii) four weeks in years six (6) through ten (10); and
      (iii)   (iii) five weeks in year eleven (11) and thereafter."

Summary

What you need to kickstart your research program is:

- Strong and ongoing mentorship
- Resources for research –grants for research and/or research assistants
- Time to research and write.

5. Questions and Discussion Period