

Memorandum: Research Norms in SPS

The purpose of this memo is to set clear expectations for engagement in scholarship activities for SPS faculty in order to create both equity and accountability. Theoretical, empirical, and applied research and the broader production of new knowledge are central to SPS's [mission](#) and [vision](#) and have played a key role in our School's development since its beginning. This includes public-facing scholarship that is geared towards non-academic audiences and is integral to our identity as a public serving institution. High-quality, cutting edge research both distinguishes SPS as a center of innovation and knowledge creation - and provides expertise to our local, regional, national, and global communities. Scholarship is essential to a vibrant and sustainable academic community and, along with teaching and service, is highly valued by SPS and Boise State. Importantly, research, teaching, and service are all mechanisms through which SPS faculty create value. While some faculty may have skillsets that favor research and others teaching or service, all three components are essential to fulfilling our mission.

This memo is an addendum to the SPS [P&T guidelines](#) and [workload policy](#), and only applies to SPS faculty with research as part of their normal workload, which includes all tenure/tenure-track faculty. The expectations outlined in this memo are based on current research practices by SPS faculty. The guidelines below are set out to both communicate how scholarship is valued in SPS and the expectations for research production, based on current norms across the school.

Understanding the Value of Scholarship

While creating accountability around our research mission can be challenging since we are often without direct and equitable comparisons between the activities that different faculty engage in, it must start with understanding the value of scholarship. Based on the SPS mission and vision, our understanding is focused on how our work impacts our communities, whether it be our academic communities, which include students and scholars locally, nationally, and globally, or our non-academic communities, including citizens, other public servants, and policymakers. From this perspective, the value of scholarship hinges on new knowledge being created and disseminated to various audiences so that it influences thought and practice. This value also depends on both the quality of the insights of the research and the channels through which it is distributed (e.g., journal quality). Although publication in peer-reviewed outlets is often seen as the standard, scholarship comes in many forms and SPS's P&T guidelines value a wide range of scholarly work products and offer specific [examples](#).

Putting Research Workloads & Evaluation in Context

There are three contextual issues to understand in the evaluation of SPS faculty research productivity. First, SPS's workload policy allows flexibility in balancing faculty teaching, research, and service workloads. Research-intensive workloads exist to support and encourage research excellence by allotting faculty more time and space to engage in scholarship. Research-intensive faculty allot 40% of their time to research (equivalent to 16 hours per week), while teaching-intensive faculty allot 20% (equivalent to 8 hours per week). Although these are the two most common workload allocations for research, not all faculty fit into one of these two models. Additionally, faculty career focus and research profiles can change over time, and the flexible workload policy is here to support that. All faculty with a research workload are expected to engage in scholarship, but more scholarship production (and higher impact research) is expected from faculty with a higher portion of their workload dedicated to research.

Importantly, other job responsibilities often bleed into research time, and it is the responsibility of faculty to either guard their research time or adjust their workload to accurately reflect the actual time they spend on research, teaching, and service. This is a necessity to fairly and consistently evaluate faculty. For instance, faculty that take on more service, and sacrifice time for research in the process, should adjust their workloads, so they are not unfairly evaluated on a workload that presents barriers to their scholarship. It is the responsibility of faculty to manage their time around scholarship and to communicate with the Faculty Director if they need to make adjustments based on their other emergent responsibilities.

Second, there are dual assessment systems at Boise State, like at most public universities. The first is the annual performance evaluation system (i.e., Faculty 180) that operates on a calendar year basis; the second is the P&T system that evaluates performance over multiple years and operates on the academic calendar. Research productivity is not always easily measured on an annual basis, as most faculty will engage in multi-year research arcs in which the research process stretches over several years and major contributions may not be published until the final stages.

In this context, faculty need to think about and understand their "research arcs," which are typically a series of projects connected by a similar set of questions, theories, or datasets but manifest as several distinct work products over time. For instance, one may invest themselves in building a dataset that leads to three or four articles, as well as a blog post or two, over a three year period. This represents a research arc where articles and blog posts are unlikely to be published until later stages, but faculty can plan for and account for their activities at each stage by clearly articulating this pathway. Another example may be building a relationship with a community partner with the goals of securing a funded contract that leads to a technical report for the partner, and data that can also be used to support peer-reviewed research. Faculty are

likely to work on several research arcs throughout their careers, and are also likely to work at different stages of different arcs at the same time.

Third, SPS's mission and vision rests upon public engagement and impact, and its workload and P&T policies are designed to encourage and support both peer-reviewed and public scholarship. While peer-reviewed journal articles are often the standard in the fields represented in SPS and are necessary under our P&T guidelines, there are other valuable research products that SPS faculty produce, and these should be considered in evaluating one's research profile. In particular, public service scholarship is at the core of our mission and vision, and is highly valued as a result. In other words, there is no one way in which scholarship must be conducted or how it manifests as final outputs. Rather, the important point is that impactful research is being conducted and is then disseminated to academic and/or non-academic audiences.

Taken as a whole, this means that the research profiles of no two faculty are alike, and there is a high degree of variation on the yearly and multi-year cycles that depend on both workloads and the career focus of individuals. Given this, it is incumbent on faculty to place their research productivity into context so that it can be evaluated in light of the normal productivity across their peers. This means that it is the faculty's responsibility to communicate both: 1) their planned research arc and how it breaks down over different cycles based on milestones or work products; and, 2) the value it creates including for whom on how.

The Role of External Funding

Applying for external research funding, while not required, is highly valued and encouraged in SPS and is strongly reflected in our research norms. While external funding (e.g., grants or contracts) does not directly create value for our communities in of itself, external grant funding or contracts with community partners can be a valuable step in the research arc for faculty and eventually creates value from the research products it supports. These research products may range from peer-reviewed publications to technical reports or public presentations. Importantly, receiving external funding is not the final step of one's research arc, nor the only step, but for some, it is a crucial step to advance towards high impact scholarship. Nevertheless, many SPS scholars do not require external funding to produce high quality scholarly research, and they will not be penalized for that.

External funding requires significant time and energy to both apply for and to manage, if awarded. If this work effort is not accounted for, it disincentivizes both seeking external funding and producing the types of high quality research that depend on it. In order to account for this, external funding is viewed in terms of progress towards the ultimate goal of producing impactful scholarship (or where funding plays into one's research arc). Additionally, both internal grants or

unfunded external grant applications can be assessed from the same perspective. It is also important to note that funded grants are not a sufficient enough contribution if they are not connected to the production and dissemination of knowledge through work products such as peer-reviewed scholarship or reports provided to our community partners. In all cases, it is faculty responsibility to communicate how funding advances their research arcs towards the ultimate goal of impactful research.

Norms of Traditional and Non-Traditional Academics in SPS¹

One of our strengths and what distinguishes SPS at Boise State is that faculty members here produce research in both traditional, academic ways and in more public-facing forms, with faculty typically expected to contribute in both ways. This commitment is reflected in our SPS P&T guidelines and workload policy. While peer-reviewed scholarship is required of faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion, our policies do not inherently favor any one type of research and faculty have flexibility to use their expertise in a variety of ways to create value for our communities.

Below, we provide examples of the work that is typical of two types of scholars in SPS, or, in other words, two paths for scholarship, both of which are valued. The first is one whose activities lean more towards those of a traditional academic, with their work focusing on producing scholarship for a primarily academic audience; the second represents a scholar whose activities lean more toward less traditional research activities, whose work focuses on informing and engaging audiences outside of academia. While the relative weights are different (in terms of time spent on academic vs. public-facing scholarship), both scholars produce a combination of both different work products, reflecting the types of scholars we have across SPS.

The table and the following section describe these researchers, what normal research productivity looks like for them (based on data from recent years), and sets out expectations for both annual and multi-year cycles. Importantly, this table assumes faculty workloads include 40% research. Faculty that are on lower research workloads will only be expected to produce scholarship in proportion to their workload. Most SPS faculty will not fit neatly into either of these categories, in fact most of our faculty straddle these two categories, but these provide some

¹ Programs may develop addendums to this document to provide contextualization and additional specificity as it applies to their disciplines. In order to ensure consistency, addendums may not contradict this memo in any way and are subject to the approval of the Faculty Director, in consultation with the Research Director. Additionally, faculty across SPS should also be offered the opportunity for input on addendums, even if their primary contributions are to other programs.

general guidelines that can be used to better understand the norms and expectations for research productivity.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Traditional academic</i>	<i>Non-traditional academics</i>
Raison d'être	-Production of knowledge & application of knowledge to real-world problems	-Using expertise to help solve public challenges and/or informing the public or policymakers
Research arc	-Several articles written on a similar subject, may culminate in a book project, that make a cohesive contribution to knowledge on a subject and establish one's scholarly expertise -Publication quality and impact increases over time -Often partially supported by external grant funding	-External funding with the work from grants/contracts leading to technical reports in the short-term and peer-reviewed publications over time -Engagement with the public, media, and policymakers and dissemination of research products on a topic to sufficiently establish one's credibility and legitimacy as an expert to those audiences
Target audience	Other academics & policy experts	Community partners, public and/or policymakers
Primary work products	-Peer-reviewed journal articles and/or books -Grant proposals for external research funding as a tool to advance scholarship	-Research grants, applied grants, service contracts, research reports or technical papers for community partners (e.g., public agency) -Popular media articles, blog posts -Reports for policymakers -Public presentations
Secondary work products	-Conference papers -Popular media articles, blog posts	-Peer-reviewed publications -Conference papers
Normal productivity (on 40% research workload)	A combination of: -One to three articles in peer-reviewed journals with mid-range ranking per year -One book every five to six years -One grant proposal for externally funded research every 3 to 4 years -One secondary work product every year	A combination of: -Applies for one to three externally funded grants or service contracts per year -Completes one to three research or technical reports per year for community partners -One peer-reviewed journal article every one to two years and/or one book every five to six years -Regular and consistent engagement with policymakers or the public, including media interviews or appearances, blog posts or popular media articles, etc...

Examples of Productivity for Traditional Academics

Antwoine is a traditional academic on a 40% research workload. He publishes two or three peer-reviewed journal articles in most years. Although in some years he only published one article, he also showed consistent progress on other projects that are in the process of development during that time. Over three years, Antwoine publishes around four or five peer-reviewed articles, a few of which appear in the top journals in his field. Megan is also a traditional academic on a 40% research workload. She publishes a peer-reviewed article every year and a book with a reputable academic press over a four or five year period. During that four to five year period, Megan also wrote a grant proposal for external funding. They both make annual conference presentations and write various blog posts. Their research products represent a clear arc around a central set of themes that help establish their expertise on the subject.

Antwoine and Megan meet expectations for research.

Brenda and Tiffany are also traditional academics on a 40% research workload. They both publish more peer-reviewed journal articles than Antwoine and Megan (e.g., publishing four or more total articles in a year) and do so in more prestigious journals, in addition to conference papers and blog posts. While Brenda has also consistently sought grant funding to support her work, with at least one of the proposals having been successful, Tiffany has found she can advance her research agenda without external funding. Over three years, several of both Brenda and Tiffany's articles have appeared in their field's top journals. As a result, they are clearly establishing themselves as experts on their topic. **Brenda and Tiffany exceed expectations for research.**

Chad is a traditional academic on a 40% research workload. He publishes infrequently. Over three years, Chad has published only one article per year, and none in top journals. He also has not participated in many conferences, written blog posts, or applied for grants. His scholarship does not show a clear arc, and he has not established a reputation for expertise through his research. **Chad does not meet expectations for research.**

Examples of Productivity for Non-Traditional Academics

Elliott is a non-traditional academic on a 40% research workload. Over the course of a year, he writes one or two technical reports for community organizations that he has partnered with and applied for one or two external grants or contracts with those organizations to fund his work. He also writes a blog post, is interviewed by the media, or participates in a conference (either academic or non-academic) at least once a quarter. Over the course of three years, he also

publishes two peer-reviewed articles connected to his work and is starting to outline a book project, which he plans to complete in the next four to five years. His work represents a clear arc around a central set of themes and he has established himself as an expert on his topic. **Elliott meets expectations for research.**

Diego is also a non-traditional academic on a 40% research workload. Over the course of the year, he writes more technical reports and applies for more external grants/contracts than Elliot does (e.g., working on three or more external grants over the course of a year). He also is more engaged with the public and policymakers through his blog posts, media interviews, and conferences. Over the course of three years, he has published three peer-reviewed articles and has secured a book contract. He has clearly established himself as an expert on his topic. **Diego exceeds expectations for research.**

Francine is a non-traditional academic on a 40% research workload. She typically only writes one technical report a year and does not consistently have grant funding or contracts to work on. She only writes blog posts or is interviewed by the media once or twice a year. Over the course of three years, she has only published one peer-reviewed article. From her work, it is not clear what her broad contributions are, and she has not established herself as an expert. **Francine does not meet expectations for research.**

Workload Adjustments

Faculty should be diligent in accounting for their scholarship and how they allocate their time between teaching, research, and service. Faculty should adjust their workload to align with their actual productivity. Faculty who fail to meet expectations for scholarship, based on their research workload, will be encouraged to adjust their workload percentages, taking on either more teaching or service responsibilities instead. For faculty who consistently fall short of expectations or who are barely meeting expectations, the Faculty Director, in consultation with Mentoring Committees and/or the Dean's office, may recommend an adjustment to better align contributions with workload percentages.

Political Science Addendum to the School of Public Service Research Expectations 1/26/2024

Purpose

This document is an addendum to the School of Public Service guidelines for research expectations. As a *High Research Activity* (HRA or R2) university with aspirations of reaching a *Very High Research Activity* (VHRA or R1) status, this document compares and contrasts ourselves with both peer institutions and aspirational peer institutions to situate the Political Science department within the norms of the discipline relative to the goals of the School and the University.

In creating the guidelines, the following caveats and goals guide the formation of the document:

- Publishing in an academic political science journal is difficult. Top journal publications in general field journals happen once or twice a career for even very productive political scientists at High and Very High Research Activity Universities.
- Aiming for a top-tier publication or a well-funded grant is a costly gamble that ought to be recognized by the School. Failure to recognize it means the faculty member absorbs the risk without benefit.
- Co-authorship in political science requires a substantial intellectual contribution to a project. Unlike other fields where [merely sharing a data set](#) grants you co-authorship, data sharing is the norm and considered a public good. The bar for co-authorship in political science is high, and adding people who did not contribute substantively to a project is unethical.
- For the School and the University to achieve a higher tier of national research status, we need faculty members to publish in top journals and to achieve substantial grants.
- Boise State faculty members do not have access to the same resources as VHRA institutions, which makes research publications easier to accomplish. Such support includes consistent internal course buyouts that reduce faculty below a 2-2, Ph.D. research assistants in relevant political science subfields, depth within faculty research expertise for co-authorship opportunities, and other complementary resources that enable high-end research.
- Likewise, faculty salary does not match VHRA faculty salary, and the School has embraced this with some expectations for a reasonable work-life balance.

- Service demands within the School have been high and beyond traditional expectations since the School's founding.
- Any system should be ex-ante transparent and not based on *ex-post* comparative assessment with peers.
- Faculty should be involved in multiple outlets of research productivity to increase both their and the University's profile as well as being able to succeed in publication consistently.

Evidence

The political science program in the School of Public Service encourages its faculty to pursue high-quality venues for publication. However, the acceptance rates in political science journals tend to be low.

For example, the *American Political Science Review* has an [acceptance rate of 5.9%, with 42% of papers desk rejected and 45.2% of papers rejected after peer review](#). The median reject time for a paper that goes out for peer review is 70 days under the current editorial team. As such, faculty who wish to publish there will have less than a 6% chance rate of publication, all else being equal, and must wait over two months for a low-probability decision. Manuscript preparation time between submissions and incorporating feedback suggests that faculty members are likely only able to submit to a top Political Science journal about twice a year for their top work.

The other two top-three journals in political science offer slightly more favorable outcomes. The *American Journal of Political Science* has an [acceptance rate of 6.52%](#). The *Journal of Politics* had a 2-year average [acceptance rate of 13.8%, which varies substantially by subfield](#).

Subfield-specific journals are in a similar state. The Americanist journal *Political Behavior* does not report the acceptance rate, but its revise and resubmit rate in [2015 was 13.2%](#), which was the highest it had been in four years and was expected to decline. *Comparative Political Studies* has reached a new high of a [16.2% acceptance rate](#). The *International Studies Quarterly* publishes around [10.1% of its submissions](#).

Based on these rates alone, if a political scientist were accomplished in all three of these subfields, write six papers, and submit them all in a year to these six journals, they would have a 50% chance of publishing no papers that year (not including a failure to publish due to revising and resubmitting the paper and publishing it a second year).² Someone who submits these six articles every year might get one every few years and will have several runs where they publish nothing in peer-reviewed journals. A run of failure events in a 50:50 odds situation is not

² Calculated as a 49.58% chance to fail to have a paper be desk-rejected, rejected after review, or rejected after revision and resubmission. This probability assumes all papers are equal, naturally. While things like reviewers can be stochastically distributed, it assumes average paper quality as well, which is an unknown during submission.

insignificant. If a political scientist submitted six articles to these six journals every year in a 30-year career, they would likely not publish for 15 years, and about 1 out of 20 political scientists would not publish for [20 of their 30 years](#). The likelihood that any political scientist would publish for 25 out of 30 years using this strategy is less than 0.019% or an average of one political scientist in every 5,000. Expecting consistent publishing in the top field or subfield journals is a statistical impossibility.

Notably, like most fields, Political Science is a [single-submission peer-reviewed](#) field. As such, when we submit to a single journal, we are barred from submitting to other journals that work, and a journal will take between 2-3 months on average for an initial round of peer review.³ It is common for peer reviewers to see the same manuscript in other journals due to the size of the sub-sub-fields in political science, and, due to that risk, any rejected article ought to be revised if a scholar does not want an automatic rejection from a repeat reviewer. Any individual manuscript, with constant work, can likely only be submitted to two journals a year, given review and revision timelines.

These barriers to research and publication in political science are well-known. HRA peer institutions and VHRA institutions that Boise State aspires to have workload policies recognizing the difficulty of publishing within political science. [Georgetown University](#) (VHRA) expects approximately one completed project annually and progress on a second one annually for faculty that meets expectations. The [University of Missouri](#) (VHRA) expects an average of four papers in political science every five years. [West Virginia University](#) (VHRA) rewards two “excellent” annual evaluations in a row for a published book or a significant research grant, while annual peer-reviewed article publications result in an excellent or good rating. [Kansas State's minimum standards](#) (VHRA) for meeting expectations in political science include: “1. Minimal standards. The department expects all faculty to meet at least one of the following requirements. a. One recent research paper submitted or revised and resubmitted for publication within the past two years, or b. Presentation of one recent research paper at a professional meeting within the past two years, or c. Submission of a proposal for external funding within the past two years.”

For universities with the same research rank as Boise State, [George Mason University](#) (HRA) expects an average of two articles yearly for someone to achieve excellence in their annual reviews. [The University of Colorado - Colorado Springs](#) (HRA) requires continuing research activities to meet expectations, progress towards publications as exceeding, and actual publications as outstanding in expectations in political science.

Additionally, co-authorship in political science assumes equal, or close-to-equal, collaboration among parties, with it being rare for authors to be listed in order of contribution. Two-thirds of all political science papers are submitted in [author-alphabetical order](#) as assuming unequal contribution or wanting to note that is abnormal. While other disciplines have [low barriers to entry for authorship](#) and have [conventions to address this in authorship order](#), political science does not and maintains high expectations within collaborations.

³ See previous links for average time to peer review decision from various top journals.

This addendum focuses solely on expectations surrounding academic/peer-reviewed research in political science journals. The Political Science Program strongly supports and values work that crosses disciplinary boundaries, as well as public-facing scholarship and research activities. Many political science faculty members engage in research that is published in other fields, or in public-facing outlets, and the program is strongly supportive of these efforts. This discussion is not intended to minimize research activity that does not appear in this document, the goal is to give context to peer-reviewed publication norms within political science.

Narratives

Hannah is a traditional political science academic with a 40% research workload. She publishes one academic article in a mid to high-tier article a year but sometimes publishes two in a given year. In addition to publishing peer-reviewed articles, she supplements her research activity with conference and workshop presentations, book chapters, and grant proposals. **Hannah met expectations.**

Immanuel is a traditional political science researcher with a 40% research workload. He intermixes book manuscripts with some peer-reviewed articles. Over three years, Immanuel worked on a book manuscript and submitted it to different publishers while attending and presenting parts of the book at workshops and conferences. In year two, he published the book with New York University Press and a chapter in an edited volume. In year three, he is involved with post-publication activities, including author-meets-critics panels, public talks, blog posts, and other promotion activities. **Immanuel met expectations in research for all three years.**

Ayn is a traditional political science researcher with a 40% research workload. She publishes 15 blogposts in well-known venues like the *Conversation* and *Good Authority*. Ayn was not also making substantial contributions to peer-reviewed work and **did not meet expectations in research that year.**

Abu Nasr mixes public service research with academic peer-review research. One year, he submitted work to the *APSR*, *CPS*, and a grant proposal to the NSF. Both papers went out to peer review (not desk rejected), and the NSF made it to the panel stage of review but did not publish a paper, nor did he receive a grant. Given his consistent previous record and substantial efforts to high-quality venues, **He met expectations in research.**

Simone published an article in *Political Behavior*, wrote two articles for the *Conversation*, attended three conferences, and submitted a \$125k grant proposal to the NSF. **Simone exceeded expectations** in research for the year.

Eugene combines an extensive focus on public scholarship with more traditional academic research on a 40% research workload. In one year, he wrote multiple papers with co-authors and presented them at two conferences. He also published one article in a subfield journal.

Drawing on his area of expertise and research, he conducted frequent interviews with national, state, and local media outlets and was quoted or featured in over 20 pieces. Eugene **met expectations in research.**

Carla is a traditional political science researcher on a 40% research workload. Her research often crosses disciplinary boundaries, and in one year she published an article in mid-tier journal in another field, received an R&R from *American Politics Research*, and submitted two other articles for review. Carla **met expectations in research.**