Developing a Research Agenda

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Overview

• Goal of this lecture: discuss strategies that will help you plan and draft a Research Agenda
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• Explain what a Research Agenda should accomplish

• Identify questions you should ask yourself while writing
Overview

• Clarification: this lecture will treat a “Research Agenda” as a standalone document

• This lecture will help you craft a 1-2 page document that outlines the goals and context of your research
• Research Agendas are often used in application materials
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Applying for an academic job or research-based position

Applying for a grant or fellowship
Main goals of a Research Agenda: demonstrate your ability to undertake productive scholarship if given the proper support
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Explain how your prior experiences conducting research has shaped your approach to new undertakings
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• "Agenda" implies forward-looking speculation
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• Yes, a Research Agenda is a type of “road map” for moving ahead
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• Yes, a Research Agenda is a type of “road map” for moving ahead

• However, drafting a Research Agenda starts with looking back at all the work you've done (previous publications, grants, seminar papers, etc.)
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• Assumption for this lecture is you've already conducted preliminary research
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- Assumption for this lecture is you've already conducted preliminary research
- Will discuss five steps to help you structure a Research Agenda
- These steps require you to reflect upon prior research experiences
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- Clarification: these steps are not an “instruction set” for writing a perfect Research Agenda every time
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• These steps are a general structure that can help you focus your ideas

• As is often the case with academic writing, finding models in your field can help you write/revise
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• First: locate your position within a larger discipline
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• What specific sub-field of research are you operating within?

• What specific idea or issue do you want to explore?
• Second: narrate your own approach to this research interest
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• What do you prioritize or value when conducting research?

• What methods do you use when gathering and analyzing data?
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• Reflecting upon previous research is useful
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• Try to locate the common methodology that is used in your previous work

• Topics and data may change but methods are a bit more consistent and transferable
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• Third: summarize how current scholarship syncs up with your research interest and priorities

• This step a bit more substantial, so let’s discuss it in a bit more detail
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- What have other researchers said about your interest and methodology?
- Are there recurring ideas that keep re-appearing throughout this research?
• A recurring idea can be:
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- A recurring idea can be:
  - An analytical process used by researchers
  - A limitation researchers must negotiate
  - An issue/problem that researchers want to solve
  - An opportunity that researchers want to build upon
  - A keystone author or text in a given field
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- It can be daunting to summarize broad trends
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• It can be daunting to summarize broad trends

• Keep it straightforward. Try to isolate 1-3 recurring ideas or key terms that are central to contemporary research

• Focus on a handful of ideas or key terms as opposed to speaking to an entire field
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• Fourth: explain how you plan to build upon the ideas, concepts, or key terms you identified in Step Three
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• What specific projects do you plan to undertake?

• How can these projects contribute to the trends you've identified?
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• A Research Agenda demonstrates your ability to be a peer and participant within a field-of-study
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• Advanced research is iterative and on-going

• Show how your research can evolve ideas and concepts
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• Fifth: clarify the benefits of undertaking this research
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• Fifth: clarify the benefits of undertaking this research

• What do you hope to accomplish?

• What do we gain from undertaking your research?

• What field(s) would benefit from your research?
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- Let’s recap
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- First: locate your disciplinary position and interest
- Second: narrate your own approach and methods
- Third: summarize how current scholarship syncs up with your research interest and priorities
- Fourth: explain how you plan to build upon the ideas, concepts, or key terms you identified in Step Three
- Fifth: clarify the benefits of undertaking this research
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• Things to avoid
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• Avoid empty praise towards others (and yourself)
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- Avoid empty praise towards others (and yourself)

- Acknowledge the contributions of others but no need to use excessive modifiers (wonderful, excellent, etc.)

- If you already have publications or grants, explain how the ideas contained within these documents add to your research agenda
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- Avoid unproductive criticism towards others (and yourself)
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- Avoid unproductive criticism towards others (and yourself)
- Avoid language of “right” vs “wrong” when discussing other research
- You can acknowledge expected difficulties when undertaking your research. Use this as an opportunity to clarify your methods for overcoming these difficulties
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• Lastly, avoid over-generalizations, vague statements, and universal claims
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- Lastly, avoid over-generalizations, vague statements, and universal claims.

- Don’t claim that you plan to change everything or that everyone can benefit from your work.

- Once again, advanced research is iterative and ongoing.
Conclusion

• Remember, the steps outlined in this lecture are meant to be transferable.

• Knowing what each section of a Research Agenda should accomplish will help focus your ideas.

• It is also useful to find samples that you can model.
Conclusion

- The ORS Lab has consultants to help with both quantitative and qualitative research questions
- Webinars that discuss writing strategies
- Resources to help authors draft writing at every stage