

# *Journal of the National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing*

## **MOVING FROM CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS TO SCHOLARLY PUBLICATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Conference presentations offer an opportunity for faculty at all ranks to present their research to attentive audiences and receive feedback critical to the presenter's research program. However, for many presenters, conference presentations do not advance beyond the conference itself and ultimately does little to advance the presenter's research agenda. More specifically, many conference presentations do not transition to publications which are critical to career advancement and the promotion and tenure process. In this paper, we examine the issue of advancing conference presentations to publications and highlight factors that may preclude this process and ultimately advancement to senior faculty ranks.

**KEY WORDS:** research, scholarly publications, presentation to publication pipeline, research cycle

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## **Introduction**

Scholarly publishing is a cornerstone of the academy of higher education alongside teaching and service. Although many in the academy master the art of successful teaching, far fewer develop an ease and love for scholarly publishing process. Unfortunately, this lack of development in scholarly publishing can have substantial negative consequences as the process is linked to the promotion and tenure (P&T) or the acknowledgement of achievement in the academy. Scholarly productivity of academicians is judged very critically during the P&T process, thus scholarly productivity is a must to move successfully through the ranks from Assistant to Full Professor. Worrall (2016) noted that “Becoming a well-published academic is a long and challenging process. It requires hard work and some luck. It can be as infuriating as it can be rewarding. But, the process has to start somewhere and, for many developing academics, it starts with a reworked and revised conference paper eventually getting accepted in a reputable journal”. (p. 3). A key goal of this publication is to assist emerging scholars in understanding the scholarly publishing process and how they relate to critical milestones necessary for progress toward P&T. A secondary goal of this publication is to highlight traditional barriers that faculty from underrepresented groups frequently face and offer solutions to overcome such barriers. It is our hope that achieving the aforementioned goals will assist in the development of the necessary requisite skills and confidence for adequate long-term scholarly productivity.

## Conference Presentation or Publication?

The publication process is difficult. For some, it is absolutely frightening and even the thought of engaging in the process can lead to a paralyzing fear of potential rejection. Others are overcome by “writers block”; those times when they just cannot write (Hara, 2010). Ultimately many are so disrupted by this fear that they delay writing and others discontinue manuscript development altogether and move to other less stressful activities. One such example is conference presentations which typically offer a source of encouragement and validation. Conference presentations are associated with immediate and positive feedback from professionals in the same discipline. Such feedback offers young scholars

much needed and vital encouragement and what is believed to be a metric of career success.

Yet, junior scholars must be clear that conference presentations regardless of type (invited, peer-reviewed, etc.) are not equivalent to peer-reviewed publications. The number and size of the audience attendance of conference presentations does not reflect positive research or general career progress. Some even argue that conference presentations have no real impact beyond the conference itself (Nicolson, 2017). In contrast, publications have wider reach and longer lasting impact. This point is underscored by Vardi’s (2009) statement that, “The reviewing process performed by (conference) program committees is done under extreme time and workload pressures, and it does not rise to the level of careful refereeing. Therefore, the rigor of the review does not rise to the level of the peer-reviewed journal and in some conferences the majority if not all submitted papers are accepted. Additionally, conference presenters are provided no feedback regarding their submissions. Consequently, the acceptance of their submission only indicates the submitted project was deemed worthy of presenting at the conference and the individual submitting the project does not gain any real insights from the reviewer and his/her “peer review”. Further, there is some expectation that conference papers will be followed up by journal papers, where careful refereeing will ultimately take place. In truth, only a small fraction of conference papers are followed up by journal papers.” (p. 6). Therefore, junior faculty must beware of the allure of conference presentations when they should be setting their sights on the greater value of publications.

Publications are a key element of the P&T evaluation and ultimately job stability and long-term success in academia. More importantly, conference presentations (local, national or international) do not carry the same weight during the P&T process and for many scholars the lack of publication does not reflect the completion of “real research”. Additionally, a track record of publications relevant to a line of research inquiry is frequently required of those faculty seeking external grant funding from agencies such as the National Institutes of Health or the National Science Foundation. Consequently, junior faculty must understand: a) the need for the proper balance between conference presentations and publications necessary for P&T, b) the weighting of conference presentations and publications for P&T at

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their institutions, c) how the pipeline of conference presentations to publications can be fluidly achieved and d) the cyclical nature of conference presentations, peer-reviewed publications and their relationship to grant activity.

## Creating Balance between Conference Presentations and Publications

Striking the correct balance between conference presentation and scholarly publications can be difficult for junior faculty. Many feel the need to attend and present at conferences to “get their name out there” and share their work with a (hopefully) knowledgeable audience. However, conference presentations may conflict with the need to develop a scholarly publication record. It is important to note that conference presentations are critical to the scholarly writing process as they provide opportunities to gain insights and feedback about their research (Bugeja & Wilkins, 2006). Still, they should be viewed only as a critical first step in the development of scholarly research activity and not a substitute for publications when one is seeking P&T (Bugeja & Wilkins, 2006). Some suggest an annual “one-three-one publishing strategy”; one conference presentation, three journal manuscripts and one (research) collaboration (Poindexter as quoted in Bugeja & Wilkins, 2006). Others suggest 2-2-2; two manuscripts in preparation, two manuscripts under review and two manuscripts in press (Furtak, 2016). While the authors of this paper do not necessarily support a specific ratio between conference presentations and publications, we do believe the ratio should be based on a greater number of publications relative to conference presentations in consideration of P&T expectations. Regardless, junior faculty are better served by devoting the time necessary to cultivate a potential manuscript rather than devoting time to multiple conference presentations during the same time frame.

## The Pipeline of Conference Presentations to Publications

Despite the focus here on the need for a greater ratio of publications to presentations for P&T decisions, conference presentations do offer an independent contribution to one’s scholarly productivity. Junior faculty should be urged to understand the rationale for conference presentations beyond “getting their names out there” or the positive and immediate feedback the

conference presentations offer. In fact, conference presentations should serve to feed the “pipeline” to publications (Bugeja & Wilkins, 2006). For example, conference presentations can represent an opportunity to receive preliminary evaluations of the rationale, goals, objectives or aims of pilot/early work prior the development of manuscripts (See Figure 1).

Junior faculty must understand that when key research from their research programs/laboratories is presented at conferences it is in their best interested to have a manuscript “in process” (if not completed) and a target journal identified. In some cases, junior faculty should skip conference presentations altogether and move their pilot studies/early work directly to publication (See Figure 1). Such an approach: a) creates a systematic process by which they move their research fluidly from idea to presentation to publication, b) develops an internal timeline for manuscript submission and c) precludes other conference attendees from abstracting key information, methodologies, etc. from the presentation and incorporating them into their research before the presenter has an opportunity to publish the work and receive maximum benefit of their intellectual property. This organized approach also serves to maintain a focus on a systematic and programmatic line of research rather than disjointed conference presentations that do not serve to advance the individual’s research agenda.

## Research Cycle: Conference Presentations, Publications and Grants

For those faculty seeking grant funding to support their research, the conference presentation to publication pipeline extends to grant seeking mechanisms and creates a more complete research cycle. Similar to the conference presentation to publication pipeline, the research cycle including grant submissions moves ideas to pilot studies, conference presentation, early publications to support grant submissions, receipt of grants and data driven publications detailing the outcomes of funded research (See Figure 2). The research cycle frequently creates a systematic and programmatic research approach whereby each stage of the cycle builds upon and supports other stages creating a fluid process for conference presentations and publications.

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Figure 1. The conference presentation to publication pipeline.

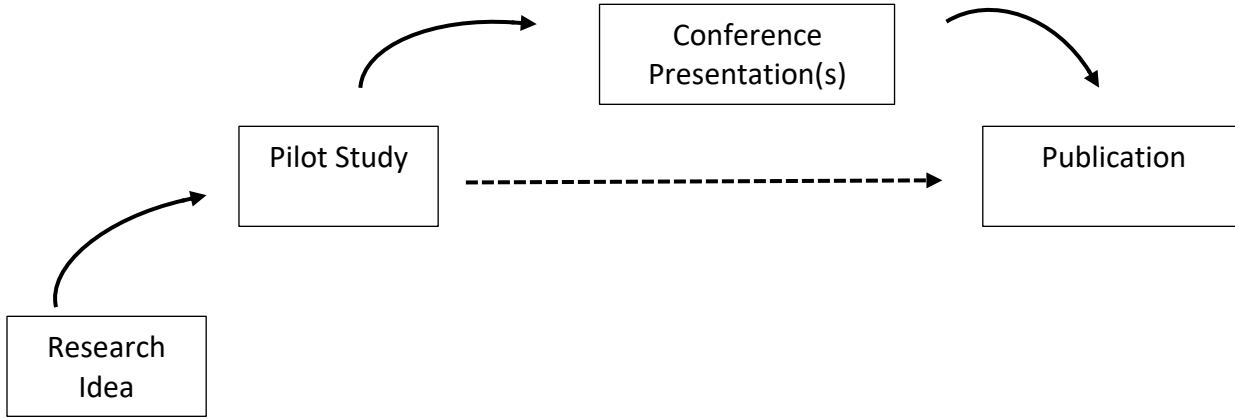
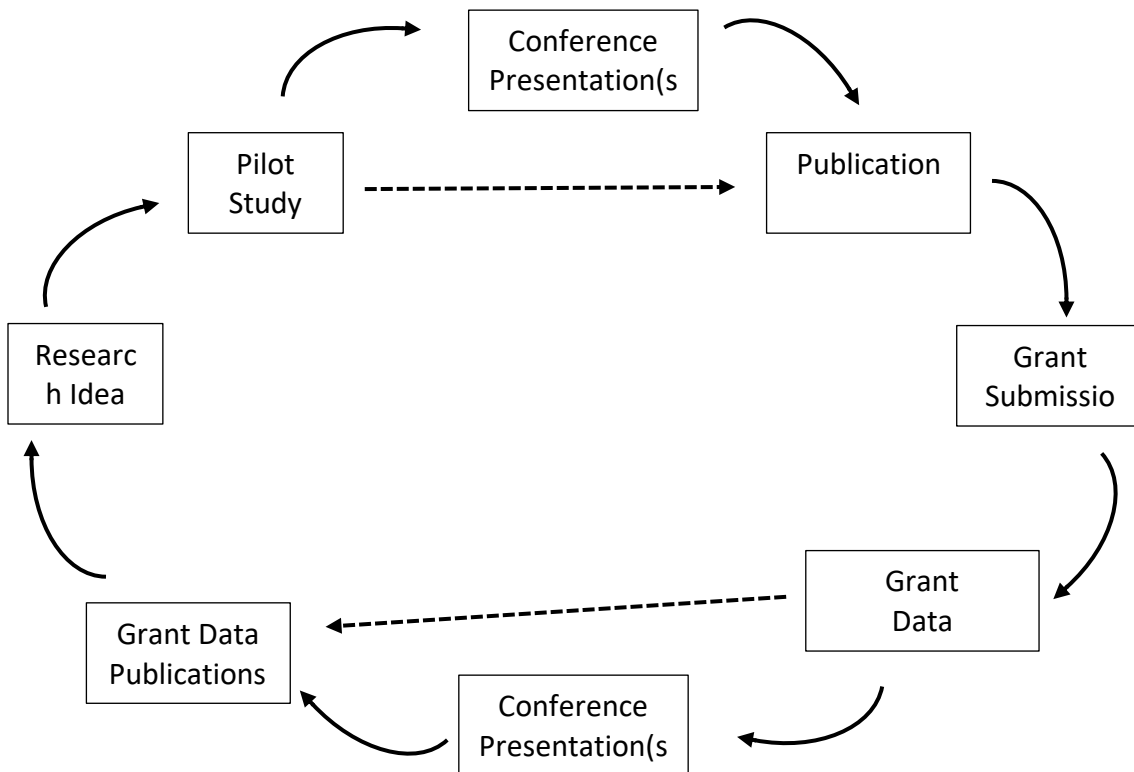


Figure 2. The research cycle: conference presentation to publication to grant to publication.



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Figure 2 represents just one hypothetical cycle although the process can generate conference presentations and publications at any stage. For example, the development of grants includes detailed reviews of the literature to support the rationale for the grant as well as pilot work completed that highlights preliminary findings or demonstrates the feasibility of a methodological approach. Consequently, elements of a grant submission can be translated into publications such as: a) systematic reviews emerging from the literature review, b) pilot studies included in the grant, c) methodological and analytical papers based on novel approaches or d) research protocols. Accordingly, junior faculty engaged in research, seeking funding and fully invested in the research cycle may be less likely to become a “writing stalled professor” (Brown, 2017), given the wide range of potential publications emerging from the systematic and programmatic approach and the research cycle itself.

We offer one word of caution related to the constant recycling of the same research data in the research cycle to potentially stimulate publications. Multiple renditions of the same data at conferences does not move one into a productive research cycle. Junior faculty can be tempted to engage in multiple presentations of the same data (and over several years) resulting in inflated productivity (Sigelman, 2008). This practice ultimately moves the individual further away from the needed number of publications necessary for P&T. Others argue that this practice is in essence “double dipping” which has short term benefits (number of presentations) but ultimately a long list of presentations that are “going nowhere” in terms of publishing potential (Dometrius, 2008). In summary, if conference material cannot be moved to publication, the life cycle of the material has likely ended regardless of how it is received at conferences. These issues should be carefully considered when attempting to move presentations to publications in the research cycle.

## Finding Time to Write

Regardless of the organization of a research cycle or the engagement of grant funded research, one must set aside time to write (Slater, 2017). It is not uncommon for faculty and particularly junior faculty to be stalled in the writing process (Jensen, 2017). Yet, according to Jenkins (2015), there are few excuses for not writing including the presence of a heavy teaching load. Jenkins (2015) offers the following strategies: a) commit, which is the first step

to anything worthwhile, b) organize and prioritize to ensure there is time to write, c) schedule time to write, d) be patient with the process and e) repurpose text that has already been written.

Academic faculty must maintain a focus on writing productivity and avoid distractions that can be created by faculty service and other university responsibilities. Regarding service specifically, junior faculty must clearly understand that academic service is essentially unpaid and invisible labor that can easily be utilized to exploit faculty and distract them from their primary responsibilities (Meyers, 2018). Academic faculty, particularly those at the junior ranks, must carefully evaluate each service opportunity to determine the cost-benefit of involvement and how such opportunities are viewed and valued by the P&T committee. Junior faculty are encouraged to seek guidance in the selection of service opportunities especially when presented with service opportunities that are time intensive and those that distract from the publishing process.

## Barriers to Publishing: Women and Underrepresented Faculty in the Academy

Despite our attempts to demonstrate both the value and strategy required for successful publishing and scholarly productivity, we recognize there are barriers to certain faculty groups. Many of the barriers exist among the readership of the Journal of the National Black Association of Speech Language and Hearing (JNBASLH). For example, women and underrepresented minorities in the academy are frequently engaged in roles that negatively impact their scholarly productivity and consequently their ability to move through the academic ranks. Specifically, women are less represented as authors, editors and on editorial boards (Balabanove & Lundine, 2018). A recent study showed that women perform far more ‘internal’ service or “academic housekeeping chores” than their male counterparts but such service commitments are likely to their detriment and impact other areas such as teaching and research (Guarino & Borden, 2017). Similarly, some attribute the “minority tax” or the burden of extra responsibilities common among underrepresented minority faculty to lower publication rates and less likelihood of P&T (Rodriguez, Campbell & Pololi, 2015). Rodriguez and colleagues noted the additive burden among minority faculty is associated with the disproportionately greater

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burden of institutional diversity efforts, racism, isolation (which limits opportunities for collaboration and scholarly activity), lack of mentorship and greater clinical responsibilities. Elsewhere, it has been reported that minority faculty are assigned more teaching, advising and excessive committee work than their non-minority peers (Gregory, 2001) which can distract them from writing and publishing. Strategies to improve service inequality among women and minority faculty have yet to clearly emerge to address the current inequity.

As a critical first step, deans and department chairs are encouraged to evaluate the impact of service on women and underrepresented minority faculty. Similarly, both of the latter groups are encouraged to carefully evaluate service commitments and other departmental obligations that preclude a clear focus on the necessary milestones for progression through the academic ranks and P&T. More importantly, both groups are encouraged to evaluate the current literature regarding these inequities and educate themselves on the impact of engaging in service opportunities that positively impact other entities while limiting the progress of the same faculty. Junior faculty especially must understand that their engagement in diversity efforts offer a significant contribution to their institutions however, when P&T evaluations begin, these same efforts can represent “low career value” for their advancement.

## But One Must Write

Regardless of departmental teaching and service responsibilities or institution type, faculty must understand that scholarly productivity is required and critical to P&T. Therefore, the establishment of consistent scholarly productivity should be a primary goal. According to Toor (2014), all highly productive writers consistently exhibit similar habits. Among those are, the successful writer rejects the notion of writer’s block. They do not make excuses when writing becomes difficult; they treat writing like a job. Second, the successful writer does not “overtalk” about their projects or their writing. They do not talk about writing more than they write. Third, successful writers believe in themselves and their work. They believe it is their job to be productive.

Fourth, successful writers are passionate about their projects and seek out ways to finish projects. Fifth,

successful writers know what they are good at and find the approach that works best for them. Sixth, successful writers know how to work through the hard parts and how to finish a draft. Seventh, successful writers work on more than one manuscript at once. Eighth, successful writers leave off or stop at a point where it’s easy to start again. They do not stop in the middle of sentences or thoughts. Ninth, successful writers do not let themselves off the hook for not writing, make excuses and make writing a priority. Last, successful writers know there are no shortcuts or magic bullets. Writing is hard, and effort is required to produce good work.

## **Conclusions**

The goal of this publication was to examine the issue of scholarly productivity in the context of conference presentations and career development. Although scholarly productivity in the form of publications is expected among faculty at all ranks, there is evidence that conference presentations are more likely to occur. This imbalance is a major concern given the weight that scholarly productivity is given during the promotion and tenure process. It is our hope that this exploration of the range of issues associated with scholarly publishing can stimulate discussion and identify strategies to move faculty from a higher ratio of conference presentations to scholarly publishing. In the end such change may create the appropriate balance to ensure successful progression through the ranks of the academy.

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