

# Years of Innovation and Change: Reflections from the Editorial Board and Insights from *RMR* Journal Content

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## ABSTRACT

Innovation abounds in research administration (RA) and RA research. Members of the editorial board of the *Research Management Review* (RMR) have borne witness to many of these changes over their combined decades of experience, and the journal's content has reflected and inspired growth in the profession and its scholarship. In this piece, the journal's board members reflect on past changes and project future directions in the field of RA and the content of *RMR*. Text mining of the content from all issues of *RMR* helped to illustrate and reveal the trends observed by the editorial board.

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## EVOLVING PROFESSION

The field of research administration (RA) has grown to become an international profession requiring higher levels of expertise. For this article, the *Research Management Review* editorial board looked at the journal's content over time to describe RA's evolution and potential future directions.

Technology and specialization have characterized over two decades of change in

the field. "When I got into this business decades ago, everything was submitted via overnight express. It was a very different kind of game," said Dr. Robert Lowman, Owner of Workshops for Grant Writers, LLC and Lowman Publishing Company. "We grew as the field became more specialized and as regulations increased. We needed to become much more specialized and we had to have people who were really deep in those fields."

The board described the sequence of events that has served to catalyze change in the profession. First, events and circumstances in research require revisions and additions to policy and regulation. "Public policy tends to respond to events that capture everyone's attention and punctuate what may have been more gradual underlying directions of change," said Dr. Dean Gerstein, Director of Sponsored Research at Pomona College. "It may be scandals, it may be transdisciplinary moonshots like the rapid development of vaccines, or huge disruptions due to climate change."

Next, specialization accelerates due in great part to the proliferation of research administration policies and regulations. "The extent of administration that has to be done is continuing to grow because the regulations continue to get more complicated and copious," Dr. Gerstein said. "The bar keeps rising on both the substantive and administrative expectations and requirements for proposals and the administrative requirements for award administration."

Then, as technology facilitates RA transactions, it creates archives of data about the profession. "Research administration has become more data driven. Application management systems not only capture the proposal, but also data about the institution, expenditures, and more," said Dr. Christine Katsapis, Owner

of Katsapis Research Administration. "There is more information available to us to analyze in order to make improvements across the whole profession."

Internationalization, in turn, accelerates complexity in specialization and need for technology. "There are a lot of parallels, but there are also distinct differences between EU, UK, and US grants, not just in the types of funding opportunities but also the process from pre-award to post-award," said Dr. Sia Gosheva-Oney, Research Advisor and Project Manager at EU GrantsAccess. "The way business is done is a little different. The process has evolved due to an increase of exchange between entities. There are different levels of complexity and platforms."

*RMR's* role in advancing the profession has been to document, test, and theorize new frameworks for practice. "The journal can advance theories that we prove every day," said Dr. Angela White-Jones, Director of the Master in Research Administration Program at the University of Central Florida. "When we advance scholarship we not only promote the profession, but also enhance why we do what we do and find reasons for doing things differently or broadening the work that we do."

Journal content reflects these changes. Results from text mining of all available *RMR* issues show how, over the past decades, mentions of technology, policy, and internationalization have persisted.

Absent bars indicate the absence of an issue of *RMR* that year.

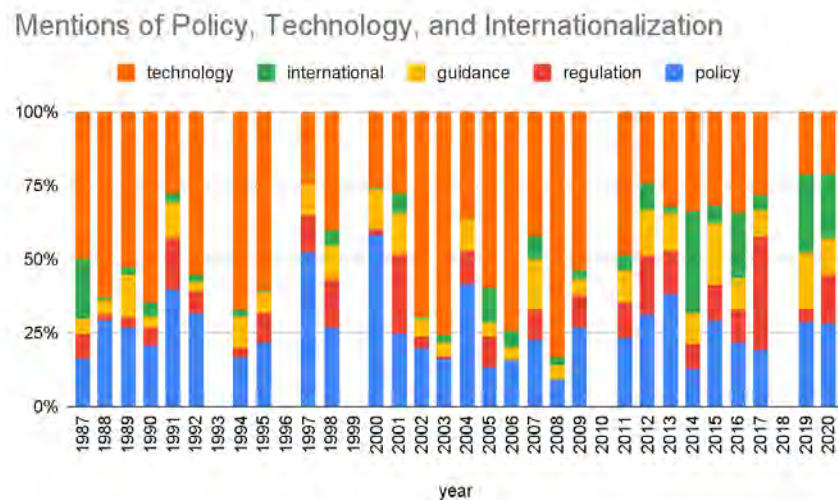


Figure 1. Mentions of policy, technology, and internationalization in *Research Management Review* articles, 1987–2020

## EXPANDING DIVERSITY AND COLLABORATION

Overarching change agents aside, two foundational aspects of research administration—diversity and collaboration—have only grown more important. The profession continues to become increasingly diverse, reflecting multiple types of institutions and a wide variety of professionals.

Our profession has a wide range of practitioners from diverse backgrounds and different research settings. The editorial board and journal content reflect that diversity. "*RMR* is taking more account of the differences and institutional types," said Dr. Michael Nichols, Editor of *RMR* and Assistant Dean for Research Administration

and Senior Research Associate at Florida State University. "Our board is perhaps the most diverse than ever in terms of gender, institution types, and international representation. We are in a better position to address issues that we face both nationally and internationally. We're not only coming from an R1 perspective. We try to incorporate other research management at a wide range of institutions. We're thinking from a scholarly perspective and coming up with practical implications."

As the landscape changes and evolves, service and collaboration will increasingly underpin research administration. "Research administrators have been able to lead that charge because we've always been so collaborative," said Dr. Lowman. "We

share techniques and information with each other, even when our faculty members are fighting tooth and nail to get the money. It's an incredibly collaborative discipline, even in a very competitive environment."

Advancing this tradition, *RMR* serves the profession by being a well-known source of information-sharing and research project collaboration. Articles keep the conversation going in the field of RA research, as is indicated by the steady

increase in citations over the several decades of *RMR* issues, with peaks of heightened citation activity.

Eighteen frequently cited articles (10 or more citations) account for the peaks of over 100 citations in 2006, 2009, 2011, and 2014. The most cited articles include two about balancing the burden of compliance ( $n=88$ ) and the importance of trust in leadership ( $n=82$ ).

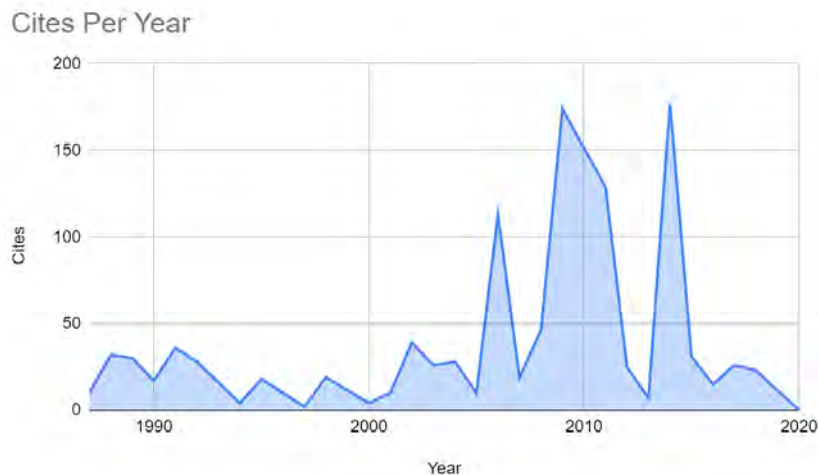


Figure 2. Cited articles in the *Research Management Review*, 1987–2020

## Most Cited Articles



Figure 3. Most cited articles in the *Research Management Review*, 1987–2020

Note: see Literature Cited section for full citations

## INCREASING PROFESSIONALIZATION

Graduate programs and certifications in RA have emerged amidst the increasingly diverse and complex landscape of RA. This training and professional development itself is another innovative trend emerging in the field.

RA research has matured as the pipeline for new programs and professional certifications expands. "Those are going to be the next generation of *RMR* contributors," Dr. Nichols said. "I think it is a good idea to grow the contributor pipeline."

In particular, RA graduate programs will yield more RA professionals and RA researchers. "I see graduate programs as being essentially a cornerstone of research administration," said Dr. White-Jones. "It is one place where you can get a lot of knowledge from not just instructors but also from your peers, while you're also building your knowledge base and your conceptual foundation of this profession, as well as creating scholarship in this profession."

Post-baccalaureate training yields more potential *RMR* contributors with expertise in research methodology and reporting. "There has clearly been up-credentialing," Dr. Gerstein said. "Due in part to the

cumulative imbalance between doctoral degrees granted and tenure-track academic openings, many more people entering the field of research development have been trained as researchers, and therefore trained to write papers. And that is another rising bar. We will see the average sophistication of publications rise, with more conclusions drawn from and fed back into theoretical frameworks."

Furthermore, this professional development in research administration in

the U.S. is valued around the world.

"Research administration as a profession is not something that Europeans are informed about," said Dr. Gosheva-Oney. "The U.S. is the site of a lot of innovation in professional development in research administration."

RMR content also has tracked these developments in professionalization, as is indicated by the general trend toward increased mentions of training and professionalization through the years.

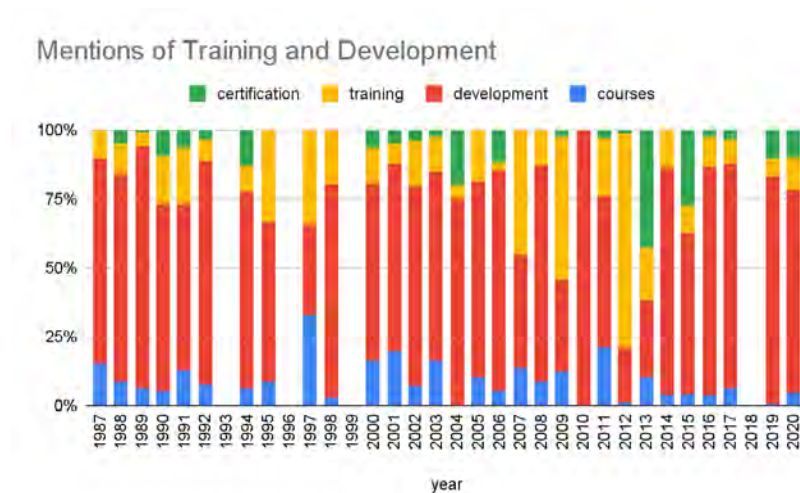


Figure 4. Mentions of training and development in *Research Management Review* articles, 1987–2020

## JOURNAL INNOVATIONS

As the profession grows and changes, the journal also has evolved to respond to the changes and meet the needs of the contributors and practitioners.

RMR stands as a resource for RA research in ways that did not exist years ago. "When I was working on my doctorate,

there was almost no research administration peer-reviewed research articles," said Dr. Katsapis. "There was just not enough literature in our fields, which is so not the case today."

The journal continues to modernize. For example, it has adopted new practices such as publishing emerging articles online first.

"We made a concerted effort to give access to articles before publication so that our readership knows what is forthcoming," Dr. Nichols said. "This ensures that we're continuing to keep the readership informed during the publication process."

The next phase of journal innovations will hopefully encourage and increase *RMR* readership and use. "We're seeing articles now that have the potential to impact how research administrators think about what they do," said Dr. Lowman. "Next we must get to the point where research administrators make it a habit of reading that literature. Maybe special issues like this one can encourage reading *RMR*."

## THE FUTURE OF RA AND RA RESEARCH

The editorial board also shared its insights about new directions for the profession and our research.

The quality and rigor of *RMR* content has matured alongside changes in RA and RA research. "In the early years, everything was a case study, and it was not obvious that they could be generalized to other institutions," said Dr. Lowman. "Now contributors are doing surveys and collecting data of other kinds. That's different from what we saw 25 to 30 years ago."

The *RMR* journal serves as an important point of reflection and maturation in the field. The peer review process and the process of adapting graduate-level work

into manuscripts for publication both establish both the quality and reputation of the field.

"It's an emerging profession," said Dr. Katsapis. "We need more scholarship, self-analysis, and research. It's critical to how dissertations and theses are created to sustain a body of research in peer reviewed journals, which provide checks and balances of other experts validating your information. One of the journal's biggest contributions is protecting the reputation of our profession. The journal is critical to the formulation of the growth of our profession."

The journal can help advance our knowledge in critical areas of research administration such as the "influence of foreign influence on research integrity," said Dr. Dhanonjoy Saha, Research Professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. "It has been on the books for a long time, but the government is requiring more rigor and accountability."

The board called for more research into the way we conduct the work of RA, as well. One example is to conduct research on the ways in which COVID has necessitated and tested the bounds of remote work. "Research is needed on the impact of remote working on research administration productivity," Dr. Saha said.

Future work might also consider intellectual property. "Universities do not get the deserved benefits of the intellectual

property that they generate," Dr. Saha said. "The way it works now, private companies are making much money at the expense of the universities. I wrote an *RMR* Letter to the Editor about how many universities and investigators do not pay much attention to innovations that they make or cannot gain much from the technology transfer."

Finally, future contributions to the profession will inevitably include the creation of our own theories and models. "We will start creating our own research administration theory," said Dr. White-

Jones. "I think that would be tremendously helpful and challenge our readership and challenge our professionals to go even further making connections and providing information."

Text mining confirmed these trends and illustrated the need for more RA research. Mentions of rigorous methods involving theory and models, as well as surveys and trials, have increased over time in *RMR* content, with more room for growth in areas of frameworks and theories.

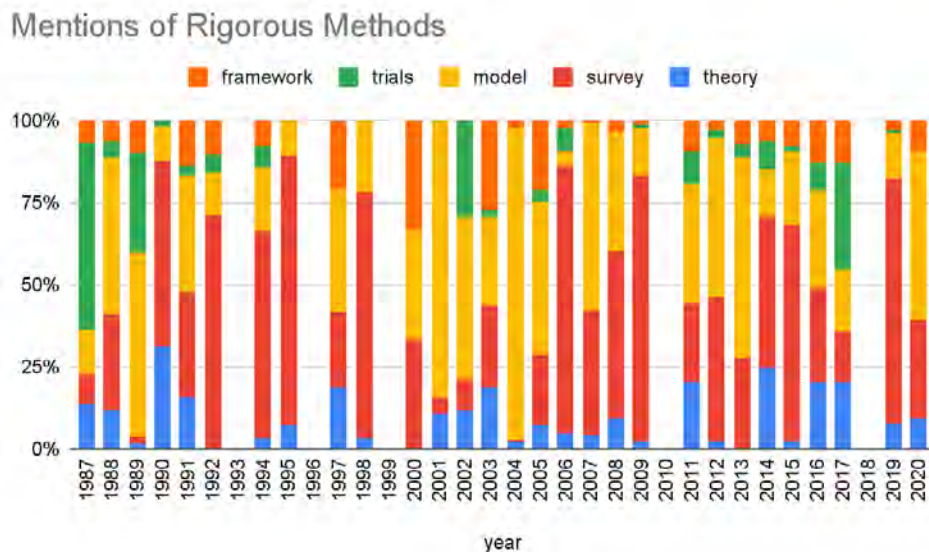


Figure 5. Mentions of rigorous methods in *Research Management Review* articles, 1987–2020

### ENCOURAGING FUTURE CONTRIBUTORS

The future fast approaches in research administration, and the editorial board of the *Research Management Review* invites

collaborators to share in reporting these innovations and help advance scientific knowledge in the field.

The editorial board sees conferences and workshops as ripe with potential *RMR*



contributions. "There's a ton of useful information presented at annual meetings, regional meetings, or even workshops. I would love to see that information incorporated into articles or another type of manuscript," Dr. Nichols said.

In fact, the board provides assistance and support to new contributors as they adapt submissions from conferences and workshop presentations. "Board members go so far as to assist authors to improve manuscripts for publication," Dr. Nichols said. "This adds to the rigor of the manuscripts that we've published. In these ways, *RMR* becomes even more of a professional development tool."

Future contributions can come from not only within RA but also from allied fields such as university advancement and

purchasing. "It also would be good if others who are not necessarily in research administration contribute," said Dr. Lowman. "Contributors from advancement and other sectors could write about how research administration could better interface with them and with sponsors."

Above all, the editorial board invites RA professionals and RA researchers from all areas and backgrounds to submit to the journal, contribute to our body of knowledge, and advance our profession further in the process. "I would like to motivate contributors to submit, regardless of the topic," said Dr. Gosheva-Oney. "I've met a lot of very interesting people who have great ideas, both were somewhat intimidated. But if you don't try, you're never going to succeed."

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## LITERATURE CITED

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