

Tips to Develop your Academic Strategy

Academic career strategy requires careful management, although it will also be a matter of looking for opportunities and new ways in which you might execute your talents. Academic careers often take unexpected turns as new paths and opportunities emerge. At all times, you will need to manage your career. Planning and executing your strategy will set you up for success, and will challenge and extend your likely performance.

1. Develop a clear academic identity and narratives

Be clear about why you work as an academic and the overall directions you wish to take.

- Who are you as an academic?
- What drives you?
- What do you hope to leave as a legacy when you start to move toward retirement?
- What do you see as your particular strengths and talents?
- What do you feel passionate about?

2. Understand your capabilities, potential and career aspirations

It is important to be realistic about your capabilities and strengths.

- Be clear about the outcomes that are required by your university and your discipline.
- Make sure you are familiar with your promotion criteria and use this as a benchmarking rule of thumb.
- Seek feedback from your various sources of advice to confirm your perceptions match the reality.
- Regularly check your performance against external metrics.
- Challenge yourself by seeking external awards or recognition.

3. Set and follow through on annual goals and priorities

Goal setting and prioritisation are particularly important strategies for academic career success. They can assist you in identifying the most critical activities and outcomes you should be pursuing. They can help you prioritise which tasks and goals need to be seen as of highest importance. They can also help you review your workload to assess whether you are over stretching. Finally, they can be extremely useful in checking your progress to ensure you are not just marking time over the course of the year.

- Take time each year to think about your directions and the priorities you would like to achieve over the coming year.
- Clearly identify your long-term goals.
- Consider the steps you will need to accomplish in this coming year to support those long-term goals.
- Make yourself accountable to achieve the key goals you have identified.
- Prioritise time and energy to these priorities.

4. Optimise your mentorship support

Career mentors are normally people who have extensive knowledge of your field, discipline or type of role. They are normally more senior, with a wider base of experience. Their primary role is to enable you to make informed judgements about your career, offering you insights and thoughts to assist with the development of your career strategy. Make sure you develop at least one mentoring relationship and have a good mentor supporting you.

5. Seek sponsors

Sponsors open doors: creating career related opportunities for you to move into broader or more challenging spheres of activity. These opportunities might include access to senior networks across other universities or the sector; commendations to other senior colleagues; acting as a referee or linking you to unpublicised career avenues. Identify suitable sponsors and meet with them to discuss your career goals and desires.

6. Build your evidence base

Your evidence base should be built up over time, evidencing your various roles and outcomes. Collect your evidence and keep it in a dossier that can be readily accessed. Check to see how *you* have changed and evolved over the course of time. Also check that your evidence will support your future promotion or external recognition efforts in the future.

7. Seek performance feedback regularly

In addition to undertaking self-review and evaluation seek feedback from others to further monitor and assess your performance. Feedback from others provides an important opportunity to triangulate and check that your interpretation of what is required, what is achieved and what needs development matches that of other expert sources.

8. Regularly evaluate your progress and effectiveness

Make sure you regularly review and evaluate your career strategy, annual goals, outcomes and any challenges that are emerging.

The following questions might assist in reflecting on your approach and success:

- Am I clear about my strengths, identity and goals?
- Are my ambitions realistically grounded in an accurate knowledge of University, sectoral and disciplinary expectations?
- Are my goals sufficiently challenging? Are they being achieved? If not, why not?
- What are my long-term aspirations? Do I have a clear sense of my narrative, philosophy and identity?
- Am I testing my performance by reviewing my profile with experts or mentors? Why not? What is stopping me?
- Am I making the best use of the *Academic Career Development Planning and Review (ACDPR)* discussion? What could I do to improve it?
- What is my plan for promotion? Are my goals reflecting this ambition?
- Have I developed a good range of mentors or do I need to? Am I using their support appropriately?