

This is a section of [doi:10.7551/mitpress/14740.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14740.001.0001)

Demystifying the Academic Research Enterprise

Becoming a Successful Scholar in a Complex and Competitive Environment

By: Kelvin K. Droegemeier

Citation:

Demystifying the Academic Research Enterprise: Becoming a Successful Scholar in a Complex and Competitive Environment

By: Kelvin K. Droegemeier

DOI: [10.7551/mitpress/14740.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/14740.001.0001)

ISBN (electronic): 9780262377201

Publisher: The MIT Press

Published: 2023

The open access edition of this book was made possible by generous funding and support from The MIT Press Frank Urbanowski Memorial Fund



The MIT Press

Afterword

Those of us who are scholars or scholars in training and have the privilege of undertaking research and creative activity in the US are among the most fortunate individuals on the planet because the US is a global leader in science and technology research, creative activity, and related education. Especially important to this leadership role are our American values, which are manifest in many ways in the context of scholarship. Specifically, the freedom to explore ideas, create new knowledge, perform and exhibit our works, express views and opinions openly—including those critical of others—start companies, share results, allow scholars from other nations to move freely about and utilize our resources, and transition scholarly outcomes into benefits for society.

More extraordinary, however, is the congruence between American values and those values foundational to the conduct of scholarship itself—namely, honesty, integrity, transparency, accountability, freedom of inquiry, sharing, collaboration, mutual respect, impartiality, objectivity, civil debate irrespective of the topic, openness to new ideas and approaches, reciprocity, and principled international and merit-based competition. Unfortunately, such is not the case in some countries, and thus the US has been and remains a beacon to the world with regard to values.

Yet even today, those values are being challenged. On many of our campuses, certain topics are deemed off limits for discussion. Individuals of certain political persuasions or points of view are harassed or prevented from speaking, and persons of certain races, gender identities, or other characteristics are demeaned or marginalized. This is not what America is about, and it certainly is not what the scholarly enterprise is about. Agreement with others is not the point. Mutual respect and support are.

Although research and creative activity have many reasons for existing, as described in this book, I believe one of the most important is to preserve, practice, and model for one another, and for the world, the set of values mentioned

above. In that regard, three important characteristics describe the powerful role of research and creative activity in society.

First, research and creative activity *inspire*. The word means to encourage and comes from a Latin word meaning to “blow life into.” Think about scholarly activities as a flame fed not with oxygen, but rather kindled by ideas and perspectives—bold thinking and creative ideas—until a raging inferno develops. And this inferno, by its very characteristics, attracts interest. Research and creative activity do just that. They motivate us to think beyond ourselves and give us a passion that draws the best out of us. We simply are not willing to settle for not knowing, and research provides us with the tools to understand! Think about examples that move and inspire you. Perhaps it was the first image of a black hole shadow, which appeared in newspapers around the world, or the development of COVID-19 vaccines with unprecedented speed, or a drama, opera, or work of art. Those and countless other examples touch each of us in different and special ways, providing hope and making life worth living.

Second, research and creative activity *unite*. To unite means to join together or come together to become one thing. This is the epitome of scholarly endeavors, which bring people together with a common goal—to explore innate curiosity, create new knowledge, solve problems, and express the amazing complexities and beauty of humanity. One’s race, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, political views, religion and other characteristics should not come into play. Yet, as explained in this book, scholars still have work to do in order to ensure the veracity of that statement.

Finally, research and creative activity *guide*. In some situations, this occurs in obvious ways, say via the provision of solutions to compelling challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The unprecedented speed with which vaccines were developed and distributed was made possible by decades of curiosity-driven research and coordination among local, state, federal, and corporate leaders. In other situations, the guidance from scholarly work is subtler, such as when a theater production portrays a particularly challenging time in our nation’s history and reminds us of the fragility of life and the importance of loving and supporting one another.

America’s scholarly enterprise is one of society’s few remaining constructs in which values foundational to Western civilization are cherished and protected. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, as scholars, to ensure these values remain a guiding North Star not only for the good of research and creative activity, but also for the very welfare of humanity.

© 2023 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

This work is subject to a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND license.
Subject to such license, all rights are reserved.



The MIT Press would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewers who provided comments on drafts of this book. The generous work of academic experts is essential for establishing the authority and quality of our publications. We acknowledge with gratitude the contributions of these otherwise uncredited readers.

This book was set in Times Roman by Westchester Publishing Services, Danbury, CT.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Droegemeier, Kelvin, 1958– author.

Title: Demystifying the academic research enterprise : becoming a successful scholar in a complex and competitive environment / Kelvin K. Droegemeier.

Description: Cambridge, Massachusetts : The MIT Press, [2023] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022062131 (print) | LCCN 2022062132 (ebook) | ISBN 9780262547079 (paperback) | ISBN 9780262377218 (epub) | ISBN 9780262377201 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Universities and colleges—Research—United States. | Research—Moral and ethical aspects—United States. | Research—Methodology. | Learning and scholarship—United States.

Classification: LCC LB2326.3 .D76 2023 (print) | LCC LB2326.3 (ebook) | DDC 378.0072—dc23/eng/20230512

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022062131>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022062132>