

A useful guide to research

Book review

Garbers, J G (ed) (1996) **Effective research in the human sciences**. Pretoria: J L van Schaik Publishers. ISBN 0-627-02165-4. 438 pages.

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Effective research in the human sciences is designed to provide researchers, supervisors, and masters and doctoral students with practical guidelines that can be used to manage research programmes. The emphasis of the text is on the management of masters and doctoral training and research, with the general objective being to augment or to supplement the conventional training in research methodology received by students in the human sciences.

In addition to the above general objective, a number of specific practical objectives are pursued in the text. The reader is introduced to ways in which graduate research can be adapted to changing trends in the *national and international science and technology systems* (S & T systems) and to the implications of such changes/trends for the individual who wishes to build a meaningful career in human science research. Additional objectives include the provision of *specialized information* on aspects such as technology development and transfer, liaison with policy makers, and team-building; an introduction to specific *methods* for functions such as prioritization and operationalization of a research field, networking, and research marketing; an explanation of the role of *information* in the practice of science and technology; and a detailed discussion of specific *skills* (eg., communication, team-building, the popularization of scientific facts and concepts) that are required if researchers are to function competently and responsibly as scientists and technologists.

These objectives are pursued at three levels (S & T system management, strategic research management, and masters and doctoral project management). Part II of the text provides a concise and focussed overview of the global S & T system with key dimensions of the system (ie., structure, underlying value system, rules, resources, goals and priorities) being discussed with particular reference to human science research.

Key dimensions of strategic research management are discussed in Part III of the text, namely prioritization, the development and utilization of institutional and personal networks, research marketing, and the communication of research findings from grass-
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roots to policy-making level.

The fourth, and final section of the text - which focuses on project management in masters and doctoral studies - contains some information which will be familiar to students who have received a conventional undergraduate training in research methodology (eg., an overview of the research process, a discussion on the art of scientific writing) as well as information that is not conventionally covered in undergraduate methodology courses, but which is likely to be pertinent to students engaged in postgraduate study (eg., the funding of research projects, issues pertaining to successful postgraduate study) or to students who have completed their postgraduate studies and who wish to successfully pursue a career in the S & T system (eg., management of and participation in national research programmes, career planning and development in the S & T system).

In the course of the text the reader is thus taken on a journey from the macro-level to the micro-level of research management. At each stage in the journey the authors - 17 senior South African social scientists - make every attempt to make the trip as comfortable as possible for the reader. Each chapter begins with a clear statement of aims and objectives and concludes with a concise summary and questions for further discussion. Extensive use is made of practical examples and where appropriate key references for further study are provided. The terrain traversed varies from the lofty heights of the international S & T system to the specifics/pragmatics of the national S & T system; a dual focus which effectively orientates the reader towards both a career in the international research community and towards national priorities in a rapidly evolving local S & T system.

Although written primarily for graduate students, I have little doubt that this text will enjoy wide readership among active researchers, research supervisors, lecturers at universities and technikons, and indeed among all of those who are charged with the formal production of knowledge in this country.