

@UlowaNeuro Notes

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If you had unlimited money to support your research, what would you do? This is one of the most revealing questions we ask tenure-track candidates in early-stage interviews. It offers a window into the candidate's creative and big-picture thinking as well as their ambition. Without financial restrictions, where would we take our science?

Of course, in the real world, everything costs money. And getting that money is a grueling process that can take us to our lowest lows and highest highs. A number of our junior faculty in the INI have achieved their first major, independent funding recently, which is cause for celebration! It also offers a chance to reflect on what a successful grant looks like. We know that grants must be well-written and offer a broad perspective on where the field is going. It's easy to get buried in data. The key is to ask big questions and to tell a compelling story.

A great example of creative and broad-based thinking is Rainbo Hultman, who this month was awarded an NIH Director's New Innovator Award. Only 85 scientists nationwide across all biomedical disciplines were awarded grants through the NIH's High-Risk High-Reward Research Program. These are truly the best and brightest thinkers in their fields. Rainbo is asking a big question: how can we predict behavior based on patterns of electrical activity in brain, and further, can we connect those to patterns of gene expression? Her work crosses disciplines and is enhanced by collaboration with Sanvesh Srivastava in the UI Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science.

Additionally, we've celebrated with Kai Hwang, Catherine Marcinkiewicz, Deniz Atasoy, and Joseph Glykys as they have received notices of award for their first R01 grants over the last few months. They add to the strong record of funding for neuroscience research at Iowa, with our INI faculty bringing in more than \$50 million in NIH funding annually.

Even as I sometimes find myself pulling my hair out in exasperation while working on grants (cautionary tale!) I know that each one makes me a better scientist. Why?

Because writing can help you think.

When we give ourselves the time to focus on writing these stories, we open pathways to future discovery. With my schedule, I could spend all day, every day in meetings, both administrative and scientific, and never have a chance to stop and think. That's why I have protected "writing time" in my weekly calendar. I need that time. We all need that time. Sometimes the only way to get to a bullet point is to spill a full page of thoughts and ideas, narrow it to a paragraph and then winnow it to a single point. There are no shortcuts. Writing takes time, and when we give it that time, we produce better science.

This is a good time for a reminder that the INI supports our members who want to work with a scientific editor, including those in the [CCOM Scientific Editing and Research Communication Core](#). Contact INI Administrator [Meghan Lawler](#), for details. Another great resource is Strunk & White's "Elements of Style," a slim paperback full of terrific writing tips. In fact, I have extra copies on hand and will give them to the first 10 people to request by replying to this message. Bonus for reading to the end!

I look forward to celebrating your writing efforts with funded grants and published manuscripts.

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