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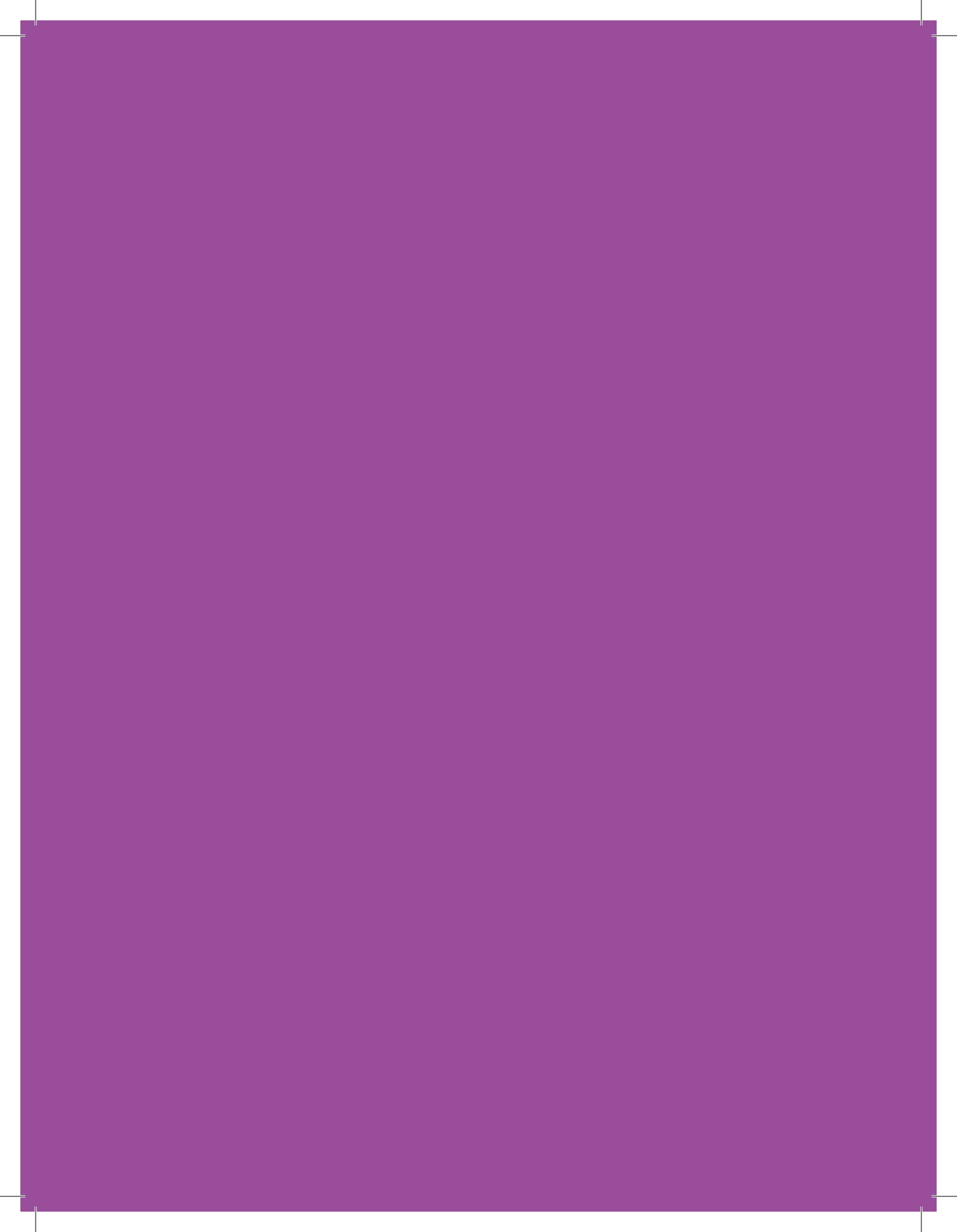
RESEARCH AND CREATION

Conducting quality research
and creating, or overproducing?



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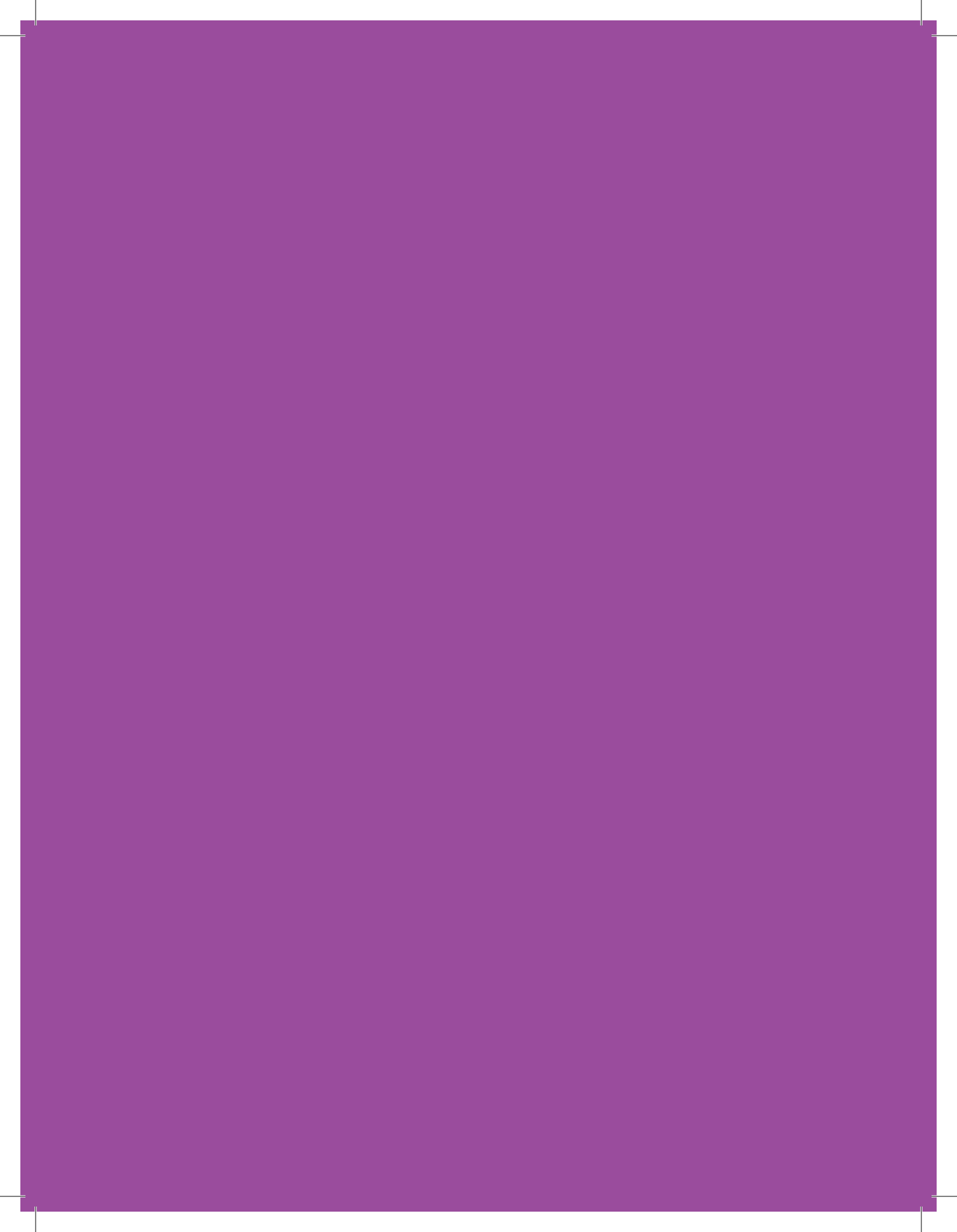


WORKING
CONDITIONS FOR
PROFESSORS
IN QUEBEC
UNIVERSITIES

03.

RESEARCH
AND CREATION

Conducting quality research
and creating, or overproducing?



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RESEARCH AND CREATION

Conducting quality research
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This publication is an initiative of the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université (FQPPU). It is the third in a series of four brief reports resulting from an action research project undertaken by the FQPPU's Committee on Working Conditions for Professors. This research was made possible by the ongoing support of the FQPPU and its staff, and in collaboration with the executive committees of unions and associations of professors. We appreciate their help and want to thank all of the professors who participated in the focus groups and shared their experiences and thoughts; their accounts greatly contributed to the analysis.

This research was funded by the FQPPU.

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This brief report and the others in the series are available through the FQPPU website:
www.fqppu.org.

- 1. The Juggling Act | Thriving or surviving?**
- 2. Collegiality and Management | Organizing or being organized?**
- 3. Research and Creation | Conducting quality research and creating, or overproducing?**
- 4. Teaching and Education | Communicating or bargaining?**



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Introduction

Universities have undergone drastic changes over the past few decades, as has the work of professors. University professors in Quebec are still deeply committed to teaching, research, and service. Many, however, worry about the trend to commercialize knowledge and the resulting changes to working conditions for professors, which insidiously reduce autonomy, lead to work overload, and warp the rules of collegiality through the introduction of competition.

In order to better understand what can improve or compromise commitment to a university career, and to supplement the quantitative data already available on the issue, the FQPPU funded an action research project that included professors from ten Quebec universities. Professors from different professions and disciplines, at various career stages, participated in the study.¹

The focus groups illuminated certain aspects of professorial work that are deeply ingrained in universities, but also uncovered hidden, more difficult aspects of such work. The stories and the exchanges in the focus groups, as well as the analysis, lead to a broader understanding of professors' working conditions, including how they developed and what pitfalls exist. The interview excerpts are freely included, while respecting anonymity. They were chosen for their authenticity, because they go beyond the anecdotal and reflect widely shared perceptions and experiences. The personal accounts are excerpts from interviews conducted from 2010 to 2013, which were obtained in 18 focus groups of five to fifteen participants. In total, 145 professors from ten universities (École Polytechnique, Concordia University, Université de Montréal, Université de Sherbrooke, UQAM, UQO, UQAR, UQTR, Université Laval, and McGill University) took part in the interviews.

The dissemination of these research results in brief reports constitutes an invitation to other professors who may want to be heard. These documents are intended to mobilize them to protect what is important and to contribute to solutions.

With this in mind, the FQPPU would like to join forces with union executives to support professors who are prepared to lead initiatives in their workplace and make real commitments to changing some aspects of their work.

1 Details about the methodology of this action research project can be found in the methodological appendix of the first brief report (Macé, C., M.X. Noël and C. Leclerc, *The Juggling Act: Thriving or Surviving?*, FQPPU, 2015, p. 37-38).

RESEARCH AND CREATION

This is the third in a series of brief reports dealing with different aspects of the daily work of professors. While the other reports address the difficulty of finding a balance between work, family responsibilities, and personal time, and the erosion of collegiality, the arduousness of administrative tasks, and the new realities of teaching, this report focuses on research and creation carried out in universities. How do professors view this component of their workload? What challenges do they encounter with regard to grant applications? What kinds of pressure do they experience in relation to obtaining funding, publishing results, and disseminating research? What strategies do they use to advance within the system? This report will attempt to shed light on these and other issues.

RESEARCH AND CREATION: FROM PASSION TO FRUSTRATION

The Raison d'Être of Research-Creators

The research-creation component of the workload takes up a significant portion of professors' work time and helps give meaning to their professional involvement, since it enables them to satisfy their curiosity

by making discoveries and contributing to inventions.² Publishing a text of scientific value or a recognized work of art is a source of great satisfaction. While, for some, research-creation is part of the natural path of their curriculum after their graduate studies, for others, this component is so central that it led to a career change.

It's my second career. Research is the reason why I changed careers.

A number of professors describe research-creation as one of the most exciting careers, despite it being very demanding. Professors enjoy and try to actively maintain this aspect of their

2 Research and creation include funded and unfunded activities that contribute to advancing, expanding, and deepening knowledge, as well as diffusing it and using it in innovative ways. This includes research and creation for pedagogical development, as well as a variety of projects that involve technological innovation related to developing new products and processes or solving technical problems.

workload, since it is an essential part of the professorial career. They would like to spend more time on research-creation and find it unfortunate that they cannot.

I'm sometimes under the impression that the only times when I actually conducted research were during my thesis and during my sabbaticals, because I finally had time to read, and read what I wanted, not just what I needed to read in order to publish. What is research? I sometimes ask myself this type of question. Ultimately, it's producing.

Research is very difficult but also very interesting because there are plenty of doors to be opened and things to discover. It's a passion, but it also leads to overload.

Due to the unique nature of research-creation, some professors feel that it is at the heart of the profession and identity of a university professor, in that it is what distinguishes them from other categories of teaching staff.

Research is my pride and joy, my raison d'être. It's the very essence of what sets us apart!

Some professors outlined the impact of different departmental dynamics on their own research-creation projects. It seems that it is sometimes easier to carry out research-creation projects when the departmental assembly values this



component of the workload. Some found it difficult to carry out research-creation in departments that insufficiently valued or encouraged it.

I found myself among colleagues who didn't conduct research and who were not funded. Practically none of them... maybe one or two. This can lead to internal problems because they are the ones who evaluate you. You could be seen in a negative light if you've done too much research. However, in departments that actively conduct research, this is not a problem. It all depends on the department.

Others claim that research-creation is instead used to avoid other activities that they find to be more restrictive or energy-intensive. This leads them to feel oppressed and insecure.

Research has become more about sustenance than passion for me. If I don't publish, I'll have to teach another course, which means less time at home. It's not motivating; it's a threat that hangs over us.

Research-Creation on a Pedestal

Professors invest their time in research-creation because of their passion towards it, but also because of the importance attributed to it in comparison to the other components of the academic workload at key moments in a professor's career, such as evaluation, tenure, and promotion. Since new professors know that this

aspect will be thoroughly evaluated, they spend less time focusing on teaching and internal and external service, sometimes even neglecting these components of the workload. Their logic is to value individual prestige over institutional involvement. A few professors noted that despite how much they enjoy research-creation, the current situation negatively impacts their work.

The environment ensures that, in many cases, we start off feeling passionate, but then we become disillusioned, or various ups and downs lead us to believe that it's more about funding and university reputation than about passion. But, it needs to be about passion.

Others spoke nostalgically of a time when research-creation was different and involved less stress with regard to grant applications and less competition in terms of publications and graduate students.

I remember when we were very happy with a small NSERC grant of \$20 000 per year. We would take on one student and publish one or two articles per year. Life was good!

While it can be a source of satisfaction, research-creation sometimes causes a great deal of concern. Expressions such as "constant battle," "on-going

pressure,” and “frequent frustration,” are often used to describe it. For professors, having to adhere to such a stringent performance model leads to stress.

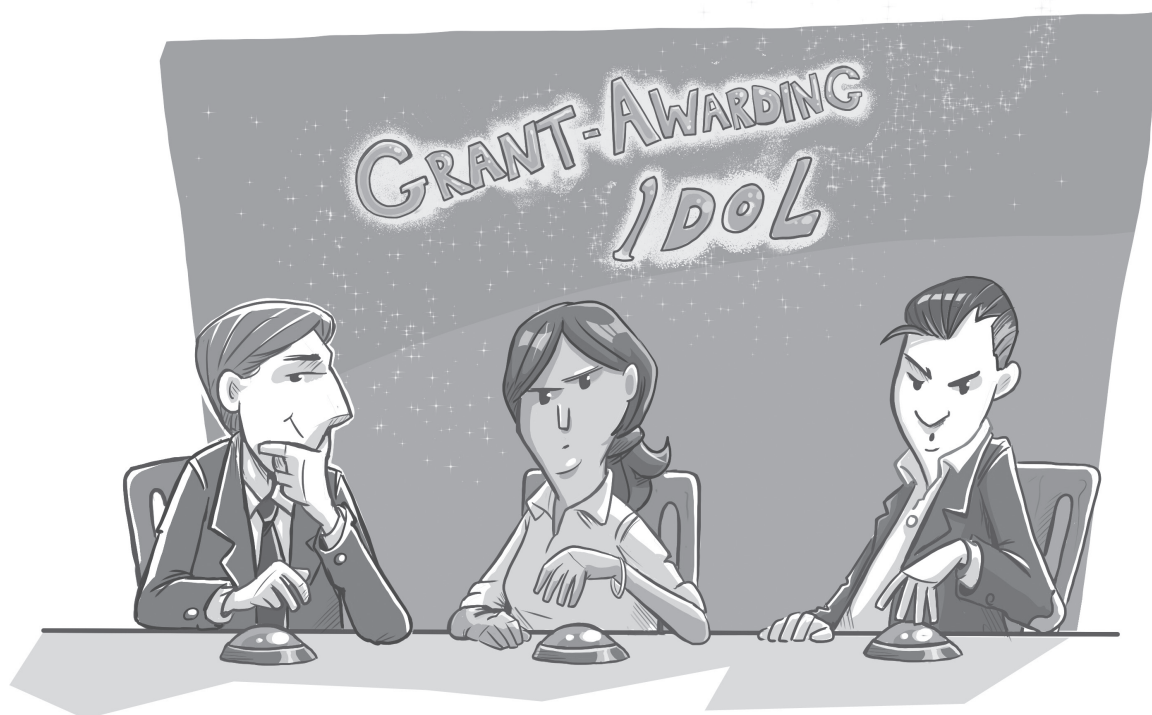
I feel like research is a dead end, because if you stop doing it, you can never go back. It's a unidirectional decision.

The accounts show that there is a strain on professors caused by the need to maintain a constant flow of research-creation projects in order to remain

competitive. If, by some misfortune, there is a slow period in one's career, the only option available seems to be that of building on the work of colleagues, which can have drawbacks.

If you haven't done anything in three years, you're essentially done. I've often heard this in the department. I have always had a lot of passion, but figuring out how to reconnect is not always easy, unless you partner with another professor who tells you what to do.





Spillover Effects

While all professors agree that research-creation is an essential and enjoyable part of their work, they are very critical of some of the issues that are associated with it. Given that research-creation is highly innovative work, professors are sometimes dismayed to note that time spent thinking or creating is barely valued.

I've always been under the impression that I was hired for my ability to think, but they don't let me think and that really bothers me. New colleagues don't even realize this because they're caught in the vortex.

The need to publish, in addition to requirements to publish in French and in English, as well as nationally and internationally, puts a strain on professors. In some cases, internal standards require that in order to be hired and to move up through the ranks, professors need to publish a minimum number of articles each year in high-impact-factor journals, where acceptance rates are very low. Raising production quotas would undermine the desired objective, since favouring quantity would reduce originality.

For a while, the research I conducted was in response to the "publish or perish" mentality, and I got sick of it. I let go of that mind-set when I became a full professor. It's a luxury I can now afford

and I'm a lot happier and, strangely enough, more original because I'm doing what I want [...]. For me, conducting research is now a joy.

The many detours and the back and forth associated with publishing and disseminating are criticized by some who think that they can be a waste of time coupled with a lack of consistency.

The process of writing a scientific article now includes four linguistic revisions. Not one... four! It's never the same person who carries it out, and from one revision to the next, those who correct never put commas in the same place and always change one little word for another. So much time is wasted on this.

Being that the current model relies on the peer-review process, some professors are unhappy with the lack of recognition associated with other types of scientific or artistic production that generate knowledge or propose aesthetic forms that are equally valid, but less recognized.

I just finished writing a book that reports on twelve research projects about subject X. How do I categorize this? According to the collective agreement, it does not fall under research.

There are other types of research in the humanities and social sciences—theoretical, methodological, or otherwise—that are valuable to society.

Some professors also note that universities compete to obtain a spot in the rankings of a research-creation index, thus implementing a production rate that seems to distort this component of the workload. The productivity-based model put forward by university administrators, who see the rankings as a measure of the university's reputation, has, rightly or wrongly, been increasingly internalized by professors.

In requests for promotion, we see some colleagues make graphs showing their position in the Science Citation Index... This is a problem! We're probably dealing with an unhealthy level of competitiveness.

We can't forget that research is a vicious circle: CV—funding. The more you have on your CV, the more funding you'll receive, and vice versa.

Professors criticize a system that encourages and values team-based research-creation. It leads to groupings of researcher-creators who develop a dominant system that cannibalizes individual research-creation and establishes an extremely competitive system with adverse effects.

A standardized approach to carrying out research includes a star system that relies on very large, well-funded teams that continuously monopolize funding [...]. If you don't fit into this model of a large, growing team of star researchers, you could be excluded from the system entirely.



In order to stand out or succeed, professors need to be better than others, who are already the best. As a result, to keep up with the pace, they need to produce more each year because standards are constantly being raised. In this increasingly competitive system, even those who succeed struggle to keep up.

The more or less perverse effects of the star system result from the fact that star power becomes the yardstick. There are happy stars, for sure, but that's not always the case. There are also disillusioned stars who are tired and who don't necessarily carry out the activities they've taken on properly.

Finally, since research-creation standards are being raised, there are more rules to follow, and more complex ones at that, particularly for ethics applications.

There are now more forms to fill out for animals than there are for humans... Do they have short hair? Will you pet them before euthanizing them? Etc.

Professors are not questioning the need to respect ethical standards. However, they note that dealing with the associated red tape can be time-consuming and arduous. In addition, receiving ethics approval can take time, which affects both management of the research-creation project and its funding requirements.

Receiving ethics approval can take six to eight months. After that, the granting agency gets on your back because you haven't spent enough. And so, because your budget was cut by 30%, you tell yourself you need to cut costs as much as possible.

The Buddy System

The peer-review process is being called into question by a number of professors who feel that as a method of evaluation, it is not as "refereed" as it should be. Since the process is at the heart of the profession, they think that there is no need to complain about it, even though it can occasionally be demoralizing. Some professors feel disillusioned when they realize that the thoroughness at the core of research-creation projects is sometimes supplanted by political games played by allies in order to succeed in such a competitive environment.

I often see what I've coined "the buddy system." You'll publish in a specific journal, they'll ask you to publish, but in return, they'll ask things from you as well. It leads to disillusionment on all fronts.

Some professors believe that the name of the lead author directly affects an article's chances of being published. Being a well-known author in the field makes it easier to publish, despite the rigorous, anonymous process.

When I did my post-doc, I was with a prominent person who published a lot in a certain journal that is well-known in our field. When I published with him, I never had any problem getting chosen for the journal. When I didn't list him as a co-author, all of the sudden my English was

not good enough, etc. I got that feedback and the first few times I submitted to the journal, I was very bad in English... Since I'm from France, I thought it might be possible, but when I submitted with him, suddenly my English was perfect, and the corrections made were minor, very minor. So, names seem to have a big influence.

Other professors are up in arms over the fact that they work to carefully review articles for scientific journals, yet their comments are not taken into account when the articles are published. They therefore wonder about the usefulness and validity of editorial review boards.

I no longer believe in the peer-review process. I revise and review articles for journals and I give them my comments. And then the articles are published despite reservations, once again because of the buddy system. So, I don't feel like reviewing articles anymore. I send them, and I know who has reviewed me, and so, we end up getting clobbered because, well, we're on their turf...

The double-blind process is also being called into question. The accounts show that it is common to receive not only negative, but disrespectful, comments from reviewers who are able to hide behind their anonymity. Despite precautions taken by journal management teams, some inappropriate comments may fall through the cracks.

I run a journal. When I receive reviews, I send them, unless they are truly horrible. But there is always someone who likes making a bit of a joke out of it or something like that, and there's nothing I can do about that.

GRANT APPLICATIONS: AN OBSTACLE COURSE

An Increase in the Number of Rules and Criteria

One of the themes that participants emphatically discussed for a long time was grant applications and the headaches associated with them. Although professors find fulfillment in research-creation, many criticize the cumbersome bureaucratic process, particularly the way in which funding is awarded. Major frustrations include a review process that can seem random and required information that seems optional or likely to result in discriminatory treatment.

One year, I submitted an application to FQRNT and received no funding; I submitted the same application to NSERC and received \$100 000.

When I got here, I was so excited. I thought that the goal of research was to broaden knowledge until I learned that you have to follow a specific recipe, and if you don't, you have to start over.

Aside from the extensive criteria and rules are what many professors have come to call “flavours of the month.” Certain research-creation themes and methodological approaches seem to be overlooked by granting agencies. This upsets professors, who view these snubs as thinly veiled attacks on the very foundation of research-creation.

I was very surprised that there were flavours of the month, both internally and externally. I favour a qualitative approach that seemed pertinent to my line of work. I soon learned, however, that it's more difficult to obtain large grants if you propose a qualitative approach. I learned about these unspoken rules after the fact.

The fact that granting agencies value some research-creation areas over others complicates professors' work during the application-writing season. If professors deviate from favoured areas, it becomes difficult, or even impossible, to receive funding, but even if they do align their research with those areas, it is important that they know about all



of the available programs in order to properly prepare the application. This requires very detailed knowledge about the program in question, as well as the processes of the other programs and other granting agencies, in order to justify the application for funding.

To complete a grant application, even if it's for an innovation program, you need to know how the other grant programs work because to justify submitting a grant application for an innovation program, you need to be able to explain why your idea does not meet the requirements of other grant programs.

Government priorities that increasingly dictate the orientation of science upset professors who receive funding. This frustration manifests itself both in research-creation programs themselves and in imposed partnerships with the private sector.

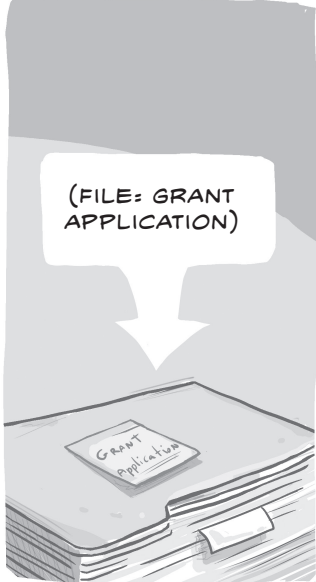
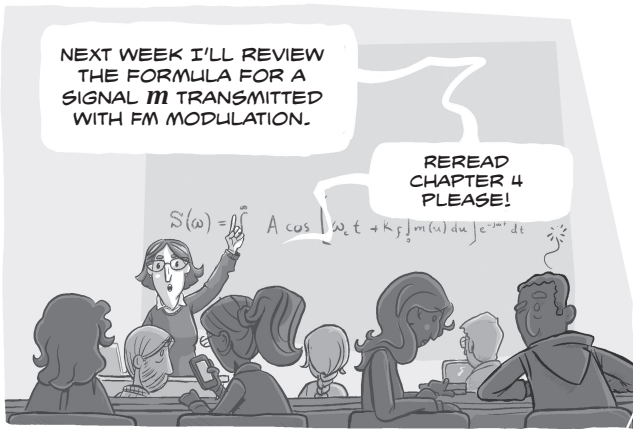
There are already these priorities that come from above. For example, the Canadian government, it's not made up of people who like science. So those people, right from the start, will tell you that if it can't be used to melt oil in the tar sands, they don't see the point of it.

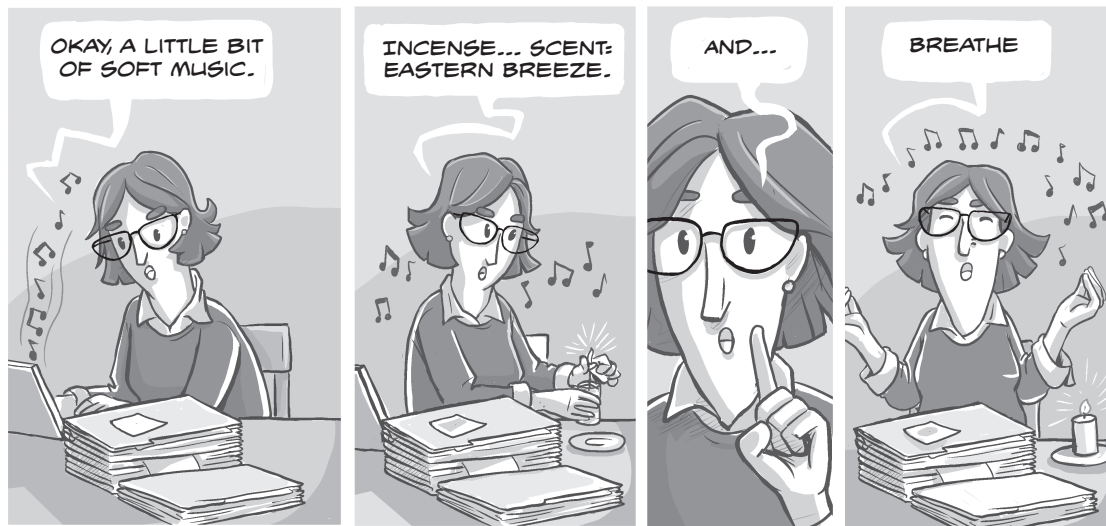
I don't have any issues with funding; it's going very well. Other than the shift, which I also notice. I've been lucky, in that the research that I'm interested in is also interesting to industrialists. If I had to change my interests, I would probably no longer have partners. That would be a major problem.

In addition, in some cases it is difficult to develop relationships in the community in order to meet collaboration or partner requirements imposed by the main granting agencies.

If you want money, you need to have industry contacts, but there is no one to help you get industry contacts. Things would happen if there were real resources in place to bring together researchers and industry partners.

Professors understand the importance of applied research, since one of the university's missions is to contribute to society's social and economic development. However, they wonder about the amount of applied research, and reaffirm the importance of conserving researcher independence and of avoiding the trap of commercializing research-creation and knowledge.



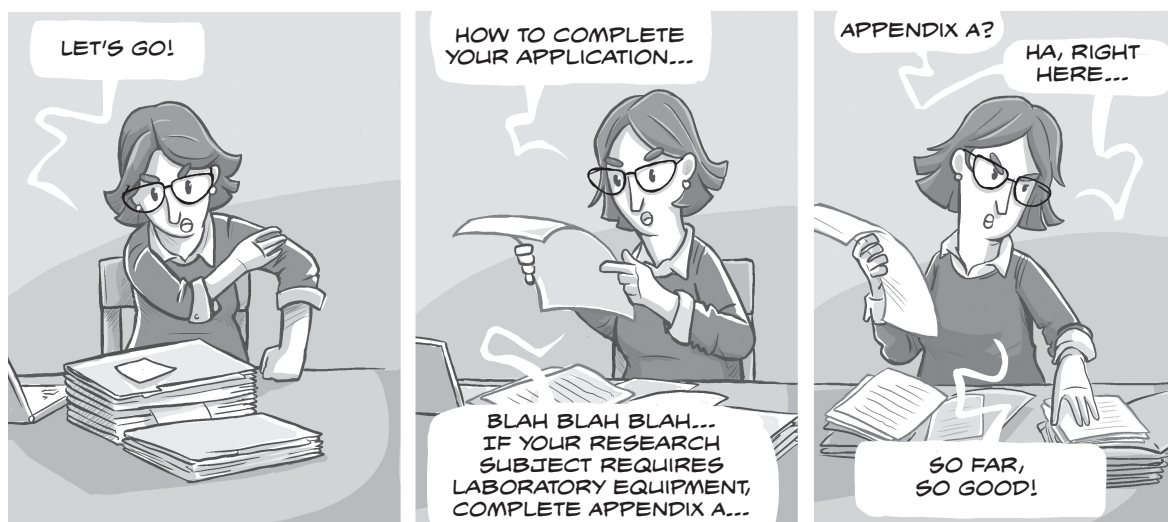


We are the only ones to do this... independent research. I can say that I'm focused on an area of research, and that next year, I want to examine this issue more fully, and there's no one to tell me what I need to work on. I will continue, but as long as funding is reduced, independence is increasingly under threat.

In addition to the shift toward meeting immediate economic objectives, to research-creation areas that are currently popular, and to criteria that must be dealt with in grant applications, professors are also unhappy with the way that committees review files. The accounting logic of adding the lines of a curriculum vitae is criticized because it does not sufficiently take into account publication quality.

Now, they don't ask us to publish in a humane manner. I don't understand. Because for us, in mathematics, it's methodology. It takes a year to write an article, or a year and a half. It's to find new results and things like that. While for them, they see it in a quantitative way... the number of publications and all that.

Since grants are becoming increasingly hard to obtain, there is fierce competition between professors to secure much-desired funding. The "winner-takes-all" rule is troublesome because colleagues engage in unhealthy competition, and it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain funding. Professors subject themselves to a collective pace where the standard is so high that they struggle to maintain it.



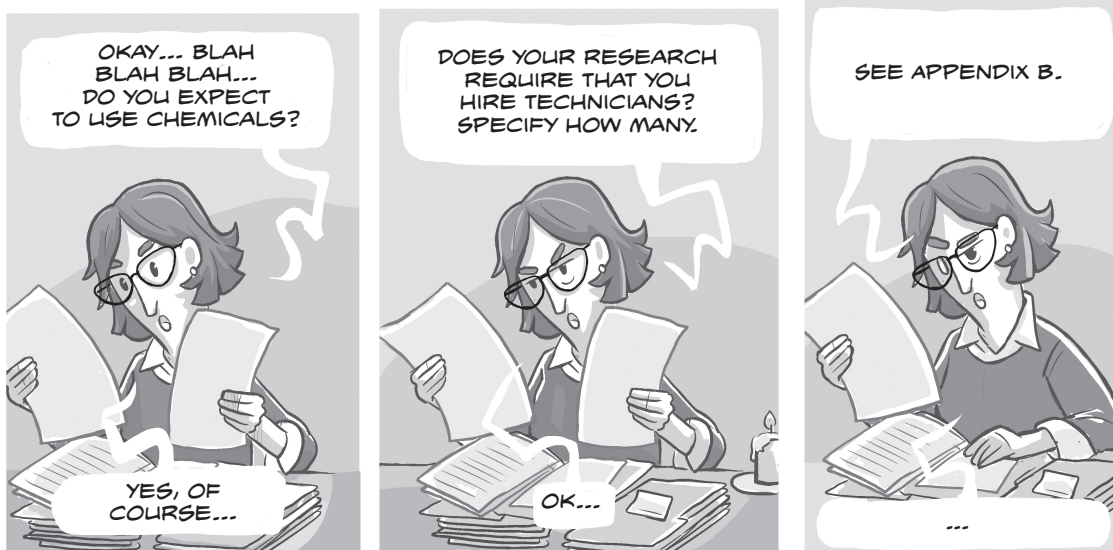
When we're talking about grants that are awarded based on competition, who do you award them to? The best. But for the best at that level, the next time they apply, they'll have to be even better because others increased their production level and quality. A few years ago, if you published twice a year, you were practically on top. Today, if you don't publish four or five times, you don't exist, and that number is growing.

Some professors feel that funding seems to be awarded at random and the probability of receiving it is so low that many have decided to adopt a strategy that consists in preparing themselves for rejection in order to avoid disappointment and cope better with failure.

Now, colleagues psychologically prepare themselves for... negative results; you need to be prepared for rejection, for failure.

Mastering the Rules of the Game

Although the success rate for receiving funding is relatively low, it is a shame that new professors get "cut off" when they finish their PhD. This period is seen as the one of the most successful moments of one's career, yet to everyone's great dismay, it coincides with the termination of doctoral grants. Considering the many criteria that must be met to receive funding, the rules that



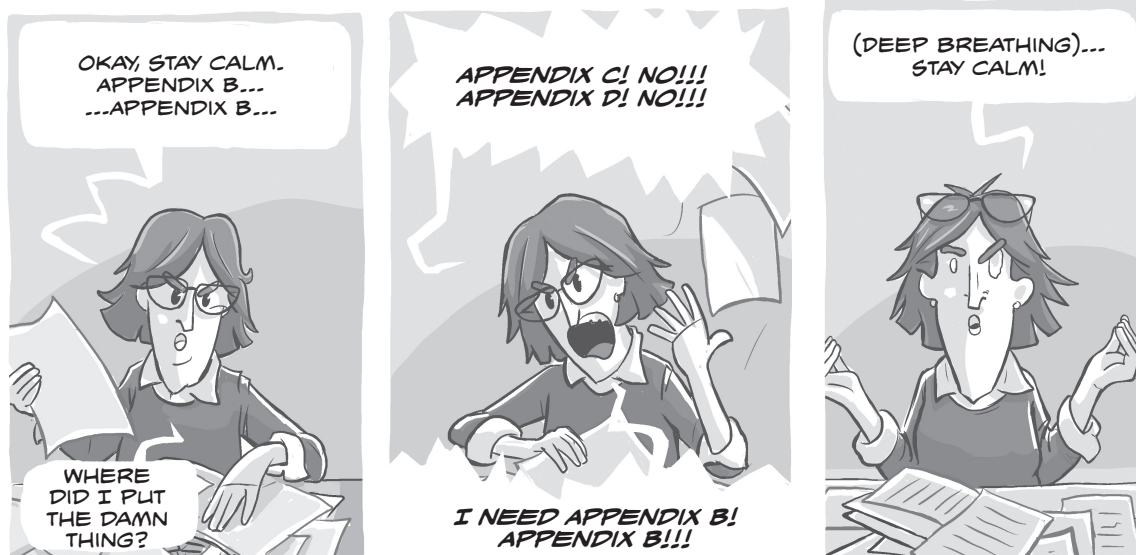
must be mastered, and the language that must be used, the interviews highlighted the fact that professors should receive more support when they complete their first set of grant applications and should be told about the inner workings of granting agencies in order to increase their chances of success.

We need to be better prepared for research issues. Knowing how it works, knowing the rules of the game. Whether we agree or not, it's reality, we can fight back...

When I did my PhD, application dynamics didn't break me. Then you become a professor, you submit your first grant application, and it's not successful. Two years after I started, I was still working on a grant application [...]. I slaved away, asking myself: where should I start? I found it quite isolating.

Professors who were guided by colleagues seem to have had a more positive experience with the process. Getting help from colleagues provides benchmarks and general parameters that make things easier and more often lead to success. The most successful professors tend to be those who know people who sit on or who used to sit on various granting agencies committees and who can provide guidance about the way things are done.

I have some colleagues who were systematically part of NSERC, and in some way, I think that's very useful. It's within a group that it happens; the same people have been there for 20 years. I've been in my department for 20 years and during that time, they have always sat on those committees, and I think that speaking to them helps you understand.



Mentors With Bad Intentions

Unfortunately, some professors have had mentoring experiences that have proven to be less successful, some even bordering on disastrous. Due to the competition involved in research-creation, some professors do not provide their new colleagues with the proper direction, or discourage them from submitting grant applications. They instead invite their mentees to work with them under the guise of preventing them from experiencing disappointment. Less experienced researchers, who have no grants in their name, find themselves in situations where they are carrying out a colleague's research-creation projects instead of their own.

How do I go about getting funding? One trick is to join professors who already have funding. But when you notice you're doing their work, it means you aren't doing your own.

I am in a department that is too big. I was assigned a mentor when I arrived, and I quickly understood that she didn't intend to teach and empower me, but instead intended to strap me on to her research projects.

I was forced to have a mentor when I arrived, and basically this person intended for me to be his research assistant more or less, without putting it in those words, but anyway... So systematically, when I wanted to submit grant applications, he told me that I didn't need to and that I



should work with him for the first year, because otherwise I'd risk disappointment. But at the end of my first year, I got FQRSC and SSHRC, and so the dynamic changed a bit. Later on, I asked to apply to be a Research Chair and they told me: "No, no. Don't waste your time with that, come work." I applied, I got it. So that put things into perspective.

Money for What, and for Whom?

Another heavily criticized element is the requirement to recruit graduate students in order to obtain grants. This sometimes leads to competition to attract students, otherwise funding will not be awarded and research-creation projects may not be carried out. Professors thus compete to supervise the most promising students.

A problem that I've encountered is that when I've identified students that I could supervise in my field of interest, I've been in competition with colleagues who are looking for students to supervise, no matter their areas of expertise. I received a grant, and I've been looking for a student for a year and haven't been able to find one.

We don't have a graduate program; there is no program in this field at this level at our university, but we still need to submit grant applications; yet we are at a disadvantage because we struggle to find students to participate. It's a major, major problem.

Since training students is an integral part of professorial work and is one of the criteria for awarding funding, professors understand and accept that a large portion of the budget is allocated to it. However, some note that they do

not comprehend the logic that requires professors to compete for funding that will be used to train students, a primary mission of the university.

All this money that we want, it's not for us, it's for our students. We are all university professors. We are paid to train students. I don't see why we need to submit grant applications. They hired me to train students, which is good, but give me the means to do so, because that's why I was hired. It's as if you were told: "I hired you to be a mason, so now you need to go make cement and find trowels."

What causes so many problems is that most of the funding budget must be used to compensate students. Some researchers are therefore trapped because they no longer have the necessary amounts to complete the research-creation project for which they received the grant in the first place.

I can't recruit students if I don't have the money. One milligram of isotope costs me \$1000 and I have animals that cost me \$80 before even entering my laboratory, and I still haven't done anything, nor is anyone paid a per diem.

Granting agencies evaluate the quality of a researcher's file based on a yardstick that a number of professors consider to be debatable. It's not

only the number of students being supervised or that have graduated that matters, but also how fast these students complete their degrees.

For granting agencies, one of the criteria, in addition to the number of publications, is how long it takes for students to graduate. So if, as I've seen in other universities, it takes six, seven, or eight years for someone to graduate in this field, it's not because professors are any worse at training students. It could be that they let students find their own way a bit more often. But, when it comes to two files submitted to NSERC, at least in our field, the one whose students only take five years to graduate has an advantage over the other whose students take seven or eight years to graduate.

Those who are Chairs don't have a choice; it's a gilded cage. If you want to continue, you need to evolve in the system, and if you want to evolve, you need to give more students degrees.

In some fields, despite having the numbers, students expect to receive awards to work with a professor. These students "shop" for supervisors based on whether or not they have grants that will be awarded to them.

I tell them: you want me to give you money, but what are you doing to get it on your own? Apply for scholarships.

But they come anyway because they also want to get their degree. I don't feel that badly about it. I would like to have more, but you need equipment at some point.

I've had enough of students who come tell me: "Okay, I'll join you, but how much will I be awarded?"

RESEARCHERS OR FUNDRAISERS?

Cash Cows?

Professors are very critical when it comes to the theme of grant applications, not only because of the complexity of the various programs available and of the rules, but also because of the very low success rate. Over the past few years, the number of colleagues that have sought funding has rapidly increased, while allocated budgets have been stagnant. Some professors noted that they sat on committees where, due to a limited budget, smaller amounts than those sought were awarded in order to fund as many projects as possible. They were disappointed that some excellent projects had still not received funding.

What comes as a shock is the perceived distortion of the research-creation component of the workload. A number of professors feel as though they are becoming sources of funding for their university, since universities generally collect a significant portion of the grants awarded to professors. Their contribution to funding their university in this way is extremely problematic.

In the dominant model, the issue is that there is contradiction right from the start. You are hired supposedly because you are a good researcher. You tell yourself: they will ask me to do research. But in the end, all they want is for you to go get funding.

We think that we are professors, we are there to train students, yet the people above us think that we are fundraisers whose jobs consists in funding the "machine." This is a real problem! [...] We all want time to think, but they don't want us to think, they want us to get money, find students, and improve statistics, because the university wants to compare itself to others. [They say]: look, with only twelve profs, we've supervised 800 PhD students and obtained 25 million dollars each... I'm barely exaggerating.



The fundraising trend puts a great deal of pressure on professors who feel the need to obtain funding in order to meet expectations. This can lead to disengagement, which is not only felt by those who struggle to work within this model, but also by those who come out on top.

I was pretty surprised to see that new star profs, people with a Chair [...], were just as stressed as I was. I'm not a star, but even stars with big files were feeling disengaged, feeling like cash cows, whose main goal is to get funding.

There are many people who mentioned the uneasiness they experience when having to apply for or renew a grant. In a few fields, some professors noted that they do not really need funding, or need less funding because of the type of research-creation projects on which they work. Despite this reality, they feel

obligated to fundraise as though it was a directive from their university and not because their work requires it.

In our case, in social sciences, we don't need a lot of money. We don't have any big purchases to make. We need to pay our assistants, but most of the time, there are things that students can't do, so we need to do them ourselves. I'm in English literature, and when I started, they told me that teaching wasn't important. Grants were what was important. For me, there aren't grants, so I have to join a team, which is very, very difficult.

Some professors noted that while funding is necessary for carrying out research projects, it mainly serves as a way to demonstrate their value as researcher-creators. They are unhappy that obtaining funding comes ahead of concrete achievements when measuring excellence among researcher-creators.

It's symbolic. If you have NSERC, you save face... you are a renowned researcher.

The accounts show that time spent preparing and writing grant applications takes professors away from their actual research-creation projects. Some question the fact that professors are required to collect the necessary funding for their research-creation projects themselves, since this component is integral to the academic workload.

I can't spend three quarters of my research time on grant applications in order to get paid. I try to keep up, but writing articles, doing research, it doesn't happen anymore.

They want you to go get funding without doing research. How can you be okay with that? You're hired because you're a good researcher, but in the end, they ask you not to do research, but to have it done.

Sometimes, professors require funding in fields where it is necessary to buy expensive equipment. In such cases, if they do not receive funding, the project ends.

The problem is that for a laboratory to function, it costs \$30 000 or \$40 000, and if you don't have it, you're \$30 000 in debt.

For many professors, purchasing scientific equipment is added to the need to hire professional researchers.

Without funding, their projects are endangered since staff members are necessary to carry projects to completion. In some cases, current employees are very competent and carry out tasks that free up some time for professors, who then do everything in their power to keep these staff members on their research-creation teams. Professors work hard to find funding to remain afloat, even during periods in which they would rather spend their time returning to their professional roots or writing.

In 2010, I had a sabbatical where I hoped to write a dream book, think, concentrate, reflect on my 35-year career, and think about my students. But, no. From the beginning of January 2010 to October 15, 2011, I completed eight funding applications. I got NSERC, so I'm not complaining. At the moment, I'm well funded. Unfortunately, it'll stop soon [...]. The problem is that I have an extremely competent professional researcher that I can't give up. My work involves techniques that are very difficult to master, and I can't teach them to six graduate students.

In contrast, others have more modest funding that does not allow for the hiring of a professional researcher. They must therefore spend time and energy to properly train assistants, so that they have the tools needed to take on responsibilities and carry out tasks that are assigned to them.

I don't have enough room in my budget to hire a professional researcher. So I find myself with 10 employees who are master's students, who I need to train because they'll be working with particular populations: offenders that are at high risk of recidivism, street gangs, etc.

The research system, in theory and in practice, is a burden. I love research, I always do it, I write, I publish. But I find that the system is designed very badly, and it turns us into small-business owners.

SME Managers?

Many professors highlight the dangerous shift from the role of researcher-creator to that of manager of a small or medium-sized enterprise (SME). The system also ensures that the funding recipient manages the project, the hired students, and the budget, files various documents, and establishes connections with the community, if necessary.

It is also inconvenient that a lot of managerial work is now carried out by professors, when, in reality, it should be carried out by support staff or professionals. In fact, all tasks that have little added value to a research-creation project should be delegated to third parties in order to save time that would be better spent elsewhere.



We should make a list of administrative tasks that we find acceptable in our role as professors, and another list of tasks that fall outside the academic workload. I'm responsible for the budget and for training people. All I need is a student's identification number to send to the main building. Period. Finished. And then I sign at the bottom. I should be doing the least work for this.

For many professors, the profession's transformation distances them from research-creation, and not without consequence, because it leads to a loss of purpose for those who are driven by and passionate about this component of the workload. The pace imposed by granting agencies, and echoed by internal standards, takes professors on a roller-coaster ride.

It has always saddened me that universities seem to have adopted and even encouraged the trend to transform professors into entrepreneurs. It devalues research because there is no time to think, since we essentially have to choose the research subject based on the publication and the imposed pace. In other words, within a year, we need to have the results so that they can be published in the journals within two or three years, in order to justify submitting new applications.

A great deal of professors are unhappy that research-creation carried out by large groups of qualified researchers has become essential in order to succeed. In some cases, the researchers in charge of these groups, and whose curricula vitae are among the most impressive in terms of funding and publications, carry out very few of the steps of research-creation projects themselves. Professionals or assistants write grant applications, carry out most of the data collection and analysis, and write significant portions of scientific articles. This model transforms these professors into business managers who train staff and use research-creation results for their own advantage.

When we look at these groups more closely, sometimes we hear that professors don't even recognize their students at their defences or that some students have never seen their supervisors.

In my department, there are 60 or 70 graduate students working on applications, on articles. They're on a roll, and some also have time to do other things. The big names, who at the core are good researchers, have become managers who no longer carry out research, and who go present results that were compiled and analyzed by assistants.

Accountability

The accounts relay the administrative intricacies that professors face when managing budgets and justifying expenses related to various grants and sponsorships. Some professors occasionally feel that they are considered to be liars or thieves by their university's financial services unit, where there is a climate of suspicion.

They ask why you bought a microwave and which room of the laboratory it's in... Or they tell me: "I've never heard of having a microwave in a laboratory." I've never heard of a lab that doesn't have a microwave! They monitor you in a bit of a paranoid way.

In some cases, professors find that the rules for acquiring equipment are complex or excessive. There is even more bureaucracy, which unnecessarily adds to the burden of an already complicated task.

When I need to send a short email explaining why I bought a "Petit Robert", I write: "To be able to write an email without errors!" It's absurd.

What I find most difficult are the administrative structures that give us a tough time. For example, I just received a large grant from MDEIE. I can't do what I want with it. I need to put out tenders, everything needs to be justified. It's a mess. I mean it's my money, but at some point I began to feel completely stripped of power, as though I was being treated like a child.

Sometimes the rules for travelling, which is required to carry out research-creation projects or to disseminate their results, are described as being disrespectful or completely absurd.

In our university, we are all potential offenders in the eyes of financial services and of the administration in general.



When you return from a conference by car, it's not okay, you should have returned by bus. If you get an airline ticket from Air Canada instead of Air Transat, it's not okay, and you have to pay the difference. The problem is feeling like we're all offenders in their eyes..

The "Penniless"

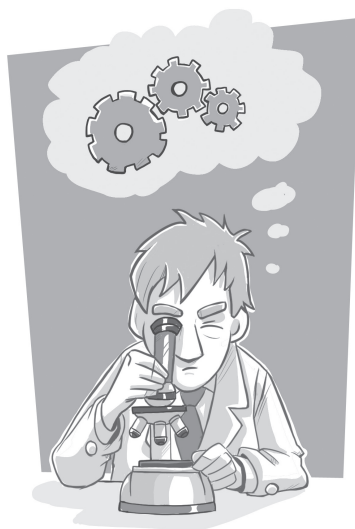
When competing for funding, not everyone can stand out and be successful in obtaining a grant. What happens to those who are left penniless? In some fields, and for some professors, receiving funding is not only a criterion for promotion or a sign of success. They must obtain funding in order to keep their jobs, which has a clear effect on their stress levels.

I thought it was the university that was hiring me, but that wasn't quite the case. It's the granting agencies. You're told that if, in the end, you don't get NSERC, you're gone [...]. I discovered that the NSERC committees don't know that their decisions affect your work in this way. I find this to be a schizophrenic, absurd situation. Of course, in principle, departments could decide to keep you, even if you don't get a grant, but that's not what they tell you, and that's not how things are generally done.

In the faculty of science, the criteria are not that complicated. In fact, there is only one: you have an NSERC grant or you don't. Period. It means that if you don't, you're gone.

I've seen profs who didn't get a grant and cried and got depressed. The issue is that when it gets increasingly difficult to obtain these grants, it reduces the pool of researchers, because instead of funding an X number of people, only half are being funded. The others are "brains" whose numbers will be reduced. The talent of these people who work well... we're going to lose it.

Funding is essential for professors, whether to remain prominent in research-creation or to simply keep their jobs, and hiring associate professors can lead to issues. They have no or very few teaching obligations and are thus able to work full-time on their research-creation projects. When they apply for grants, they have more chance of standing out because they have had the opportunity to produce more results since they are part of successful teams and have the time and equipment needed for research-creation. Given that the number and dollar amounts of grants have remained the same, some colleagues think that associate professors are unfairly taking a portion of the available funding.



What I find strange is the new trend for departments to hire more associate professors. They don't teach, or if they do, it's very little. They are much more productive when it comes to research and they take a piece of the same pie that isn't getting any bigger. They are strong competitors because they have large teams, an army of technicians, equipment... they have all they need! They don't need to supervise doctoral students, while it takes you six months to find one, six months for him or her to come, and another six months before he or she starts working. You are now a year and a half behind them. They will always be ahead of you and, clearly, their file will get thicker, faster than yours does. It makes no sense that they draw from the same funding sources as full professors.

This issue was also raised with regard to retired professors who remain active in research-creation.

People retire and keep submitting applications and keep getting large amounts of money because they are highly productive and well-known. During that time, new professors enter the system, but veteran researchers don't leave, so there are more people sharing the same pie.

TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE MODELS?

Behaviour That Needs to Change

The funding issue is intimately linked to how granting agencies operate. The current model, where the best are rewarded and where large research-creation teams stand out, works, but it has its share of issues as has been clearly shown. In contrast, research-creation that is not targeted, and is carried out by small teams or by professors who choose to spend some of their time on the other components of the workload, must also be recognized.

I think that some of it has to happen at the granting agency level. They need to start recognizing research diversity.

One of the issues in research right now is the method of funding. Stars, big teams, no one is against that actually... but we can't only have that.

It's a very effective model, but is it what we want to develop and is it the only model we want to develop?

A number of professors noted that they were authors of their own misfortune when it came to introducing and promoting the current research-creation funding model. Granting agency review committees are made up of peers, who perpetuate and impose rising standards.

I was just on a scientific jury for an award. We reviewed huge files, great files. They were really amazing files. So, we had to prioritize one. It got done. I can tell you that the way most of the professors at the table, who were scientists, evaluated the files was by counting the number of publications and students, and looking at the amount of the grant. I was flabbergasted because at this level, the issue didn't exist anymore. They had all been chosen. So what we looked at was their impact. But it's a lot easier to quantify productiveness. That's where I get stuck, and I don't know what to do about it.

It's the people who sit on committees that need to change things. When we say that granting agencies need to change their evaluation methods, they'll just tell us that we're the ones doing the evaluating...

Some professors noted that a number of their colleagues were able to succeed while taking another approach, that of unfunded or free research-creation. This could be a way to change the current model.

The way to change the current model is to carry out unfunded research.



Internal Support

The bleak picture described by a number of university professors highlights the issues that they have with research-creation and its current method of funding, which identifies winners and, as a result, losers. On one hand, winners end up distancing themselves from actual research-creation work, which gives purpose to their profession and is a source of great satisfaction for them, in order to manage their team and budget, and meet performance requirements. On the other hand, those who do not receive funding sometimes find themselves sidelined, since they cannot keep up with the pace and sometimes risk losing their jobs due to their lack of success in obtaining funding. A number of professors noted that the university, as an employer, should be under an obligation to support the research-creation component of the workload. While some universities carry out this duty with new hires by awarding them a start-up fund, it is not thought to be enough. Support should be extended to alleviate difficult periods in professors' careers.

The university should support its researchers, and if it is a high-ranking university, we can assume that most of the professors, those who conduct research anyway, are excellent researchers. There are some who are more excellent than others. We could expect that when people have been well funded for several years and have a good research file, when they lose their grant, seeing as there is increasingly less money available and that success rates are dropping, the university should step in and always have a fund available that would ensure that its excellence continues.

This aspect was reiterated by other colleagues who questioned the reasons behind the fact that once they are established researchers, they still need to sporadically prove their excellence in order to receive funding.

I've always done research, so what is the point of renewing my file every five years when it's going well? Why waste time proving that an elephant has a trunk?

In order to avoid only comparing professors for promotion purposes,

some colleagues underlined the importance of recognizing the diversity and uniqueness of different fields, profiles, and contributions. Others also note that workload adjustment could become common practice in universities. In this model, at the beginning of each academic year, professors submit their workload for the coming year with percentages of time that will be spent on each component. They are then evaluated based on this submission, which accounts for the diversity of contributions and creates a sense of security because each professor knows the criteria on which he or she will be evaluated.

At the university where I was before, every year we needed to present our workload, which took each individual's uniqueness into account [...]. Everything was transparent and evaluated [...], and each year, professors had to submit a report on what they had done, which, again each year, had to be approved in a meeting by their peers. There was no arbitrariness or vagueness when it came time for promotion, which led to less stress and enabled the person to know what he or she needed to do.

Rekindling the Flame

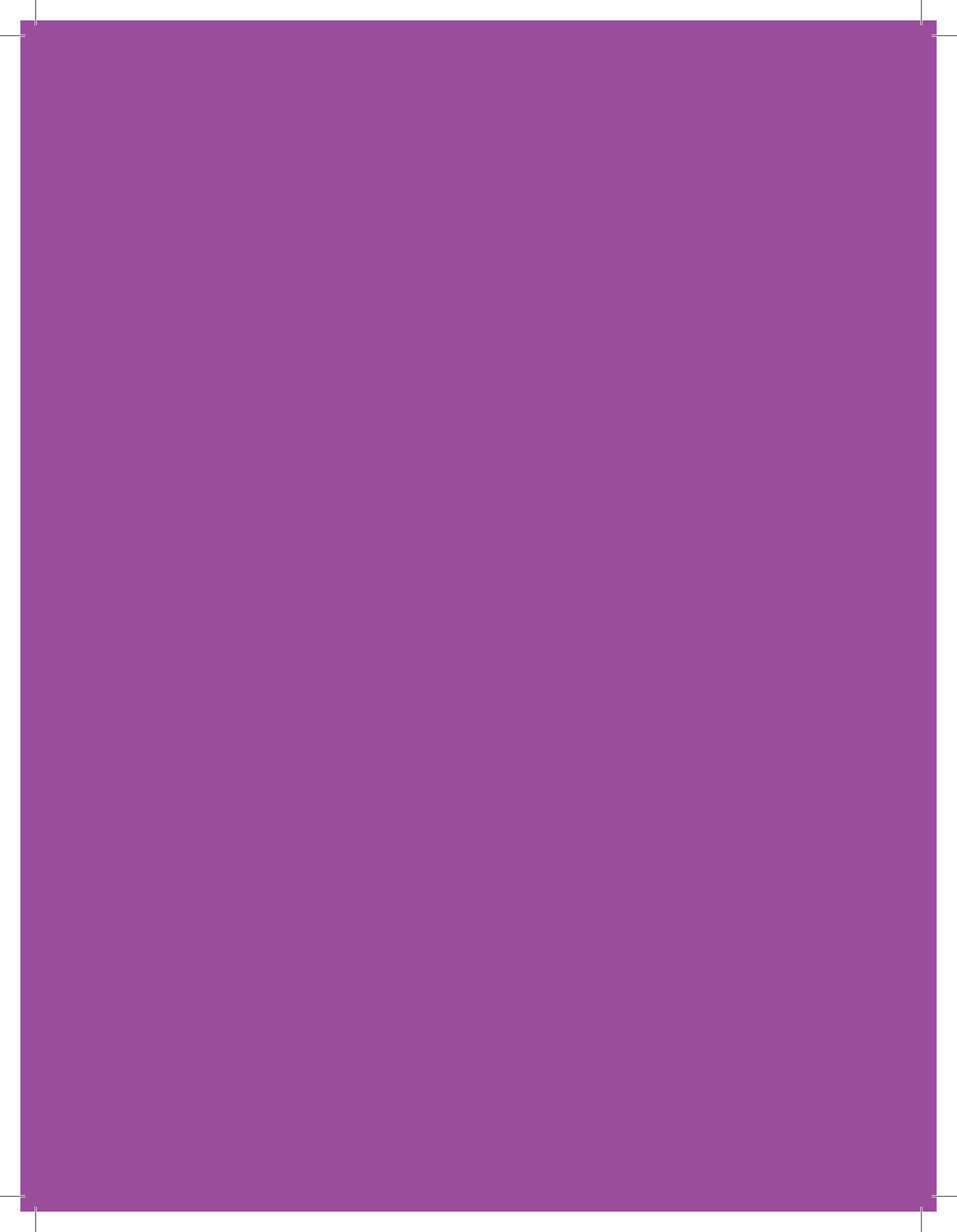
Research-creation is an essential component of academic work. It is fundamental because it leads to pleasure, purpose, achievement, and feelings of worth, in addition to being at the core of the professional identity of a university professor. However, in today's environment, research-creation has become distorted in the eyes of professors and no longer corresponds to the ideal of it that they share.

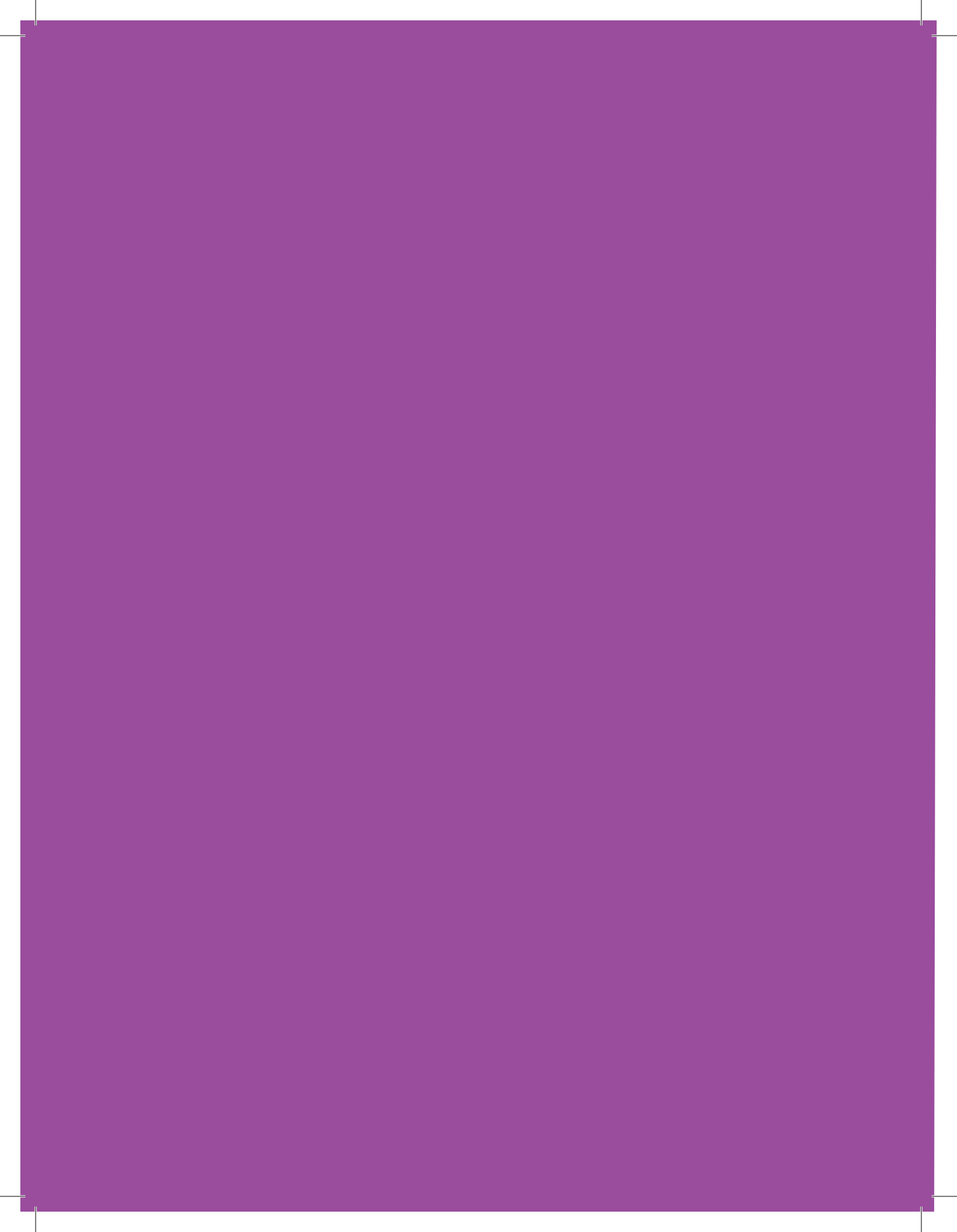
The institutional system results in pressure to produce more, which takes away time from reading, reflecting, structuring thought, and carrying out research-creation as it should be, or even used to be, carried out. Research-creation is now seen by professors as a competition for grants against large-scale research teams that contribute to the reputation of their universities. Professors would like to fully devote themselves to research-creation, since it is at heart of their work, instead of spending time on associated activities that are now required. These activities have become attached to this component of the academic workload and weigh it down unnecessarily.

The current system leaves little room for diverse types of research-creation and devalues professors who have distanced themselves from the current model.

There are many complaints about this from those “excluded” from the system, but also from those who are successful, who publish a great deal in prestigious journals, who receive large grants, who have research teams, and who supervise graduate students. The current lapses distance professors from their true research-creation work, and transform them into small-business owners and business managers.

Since they sit on the decision-making bodies that award funding, professors should be troubled that the required standards are increasing, leading to reduced academic freedom. They should also be concerned by the frantic competition to perform, which depletes their energy and distances them from the other components of their workload. Professors are thus key players when it comes to resolving the issues that have been brought up and ensuring that research-creation once again becomes a passion for them. Together, they can put a stop to the dominance of the existing model that they have criticized.





Things can change.

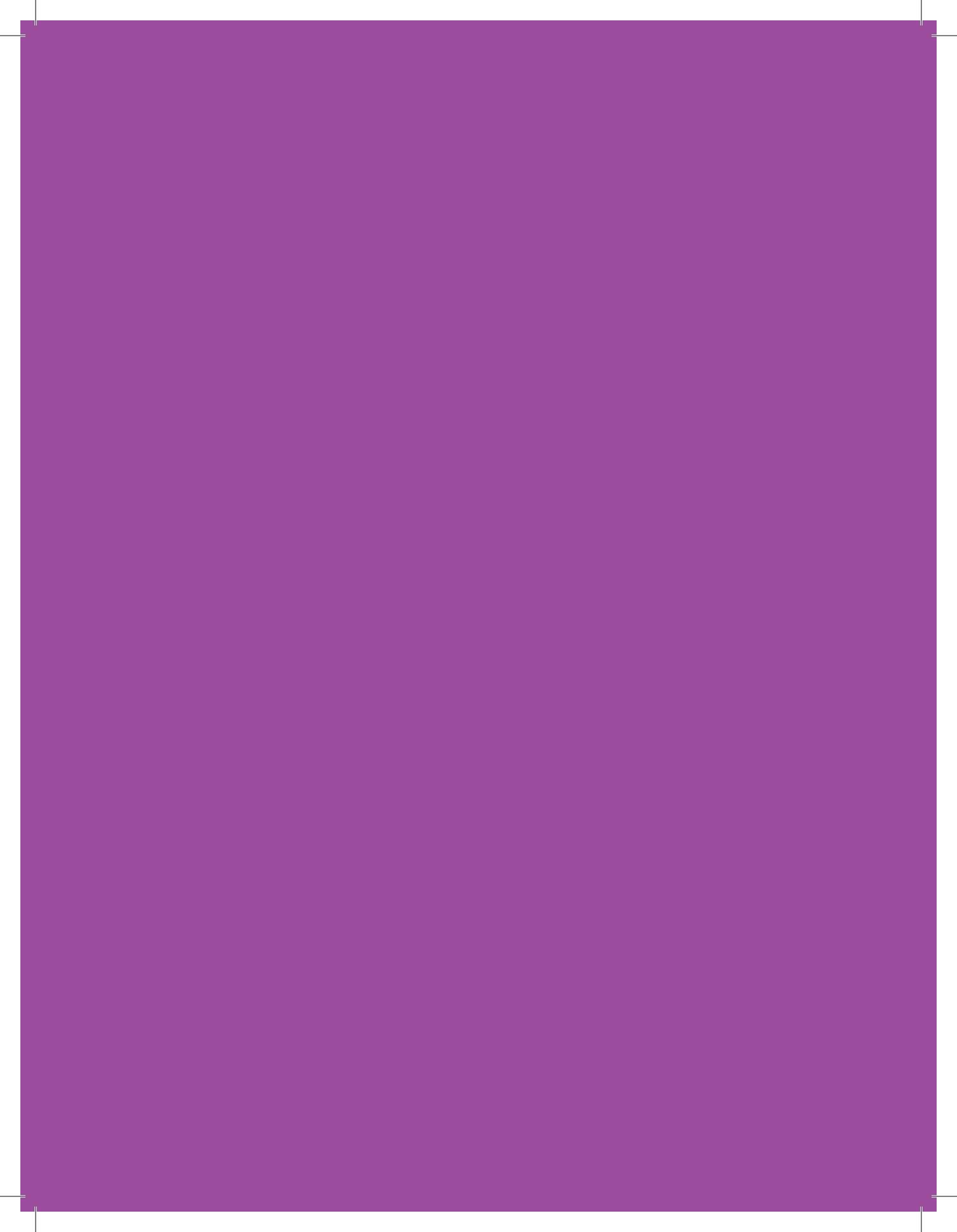
The FQPPU supports its members' actions that are aimed at promoting the diversity and academic freedom associated with research-creation.



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University professors are passionate about, but increasingly frustrated with, research and creation. Based on the results of a study of 145 professors in ten Quebec universities, this publication demonstrates how central research-creation is to the academic workload, as well as the issues that go along with it: frantic competition for funding, unhealthy competitiveness among colleagues, cumbersome administrative processes, targeted funding, funding that is held by a minority and whose allocation is controlled by a few colleagues, manipulation of activities by senior university administrators in order to compensate for small operating and capital budgets, etc. These issues require collective action.

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