NCURA MAGAZINE
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The Art and SCIENCE of Communication

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE
- House Subcommittee Hearing on Examining the Overhead Cost of Research
- Navigating International Research
- Annual Meeting Recap

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The outcomes. It is an absolutely necessary skill for a successful research administrator.

Thomas B. Spencer and Michael Castilleja’s “The Art of Communication in a Digital World” focuses on messaging that blends technical information with a positive human touch. Melanie Hebl’s “Know/Feel/Do: Three Questions to Improve Communication” encourages us to ask ourselves three simple questions to organize our message and improve our communication outcomes, a technique that is easy to remember and implement. In “The Magic of Communication” by Suzanne Araujo, she highlights seven ground rules for survival, including simple rules such as “Don’t jump immediately to no” and “Get to know your PIs.”

Increased international collaboration results in increased complexity and the need for communicating across a diverse range of constituents, as outlined in Kristin Anderson’s “So You’ve Got a Ton of Peanuts Stuck in Chinese Customs? Let’s Talk…” “Communication and Research with a Positive Human Touch” by Melanie Hebl’s “Know/Feel/Do: Three Questions to Improve Communication” encourages us to ask ourselves three simple questions to organize our message and improve our implementation. In “The Magic of Communication” by Suzanne Araujo, she highlights seven ground rules for survival, including simple rules such as “Don’t jump immediately to no” and “Get to know your PIs.”

Finally, you will find highlights from NCURA’s 59th Annual Meeting themed “Exploring the Possibilities…Navigating into the Future.” Check out Tanya Blackwell’s “Between the Ellipses” in which she reflects on her personal experience with the keynote speaker, Dr. Mae Jemison, and her reflection on the benefits of attending the annual meeting.

Denise Moody is Co-Editor of NCURA Magazine and serves on the NCURA Board of Directors. She is the Senior Director of Research Compliance, Faculty Arts and Sciences, at Harvard University and can be reached at denise.moody@fas.harvard.edu

Interested in contributing an article? Visit www.ncura.edu/PublicationsStore/NCURAMagazine/Submissions.aspx
MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By Barbara Gray, NCURA President

This issue of NCURA Magazine focuses on communication. This topic started me thinking about how we communicate within NCURA, and I quickly realized that the organization and its members communicate many types of information in many ways.

Much of NCURA’s communication relates to professional development. Through traveling workshops, webinars, and annual/regional meeting workshop and concurrent session offerings, we communicate the basics of what research administrators need to know to be successful in their jobs and careers. Through our informal networks, organized NCURA Collaborate communities, meeting discussion groups, and this magazine, we communicate best practices, new ideas, important updates that impact our work, and happenings in our regions. Through committee reporting at regional meetings, members receive information about the business operations of their region, upcoming meetings and activities, member support programs, and, from their regionally elected board member, updates on undertakings and accomplishments at the national level. Through email, we communicate upcoming events and calls for volunteers. Through NCURA YouTube Tuesdays, we give you short, no-frills lessons on diverse topics in research administration. And through the Monday Magazine e-Xtra, we communicate the latest developments in the sponsor world and even share “cool science!”

In fact, there is so much communication of information that we don’t have enough time to read, listen to, and absorb everything that comes our way. That’s why it’s important for our members to be familiar with the various ways we communicate about educational offerings, current initiatives, volunteer opportunities, and organizational governance. When you know what kind of information is most important to you, you can focus your attention on the NCURA communication channels that will best meet your needs.

We routinely use annual and regional meetings to update members on NCURA programs and business. If you missed the 59th Annual Meeting in August, here are just a few highlights:

- The third annual Research Administrator Day was September 25, 2017. Members designed new research administration greeting cards this year. If you missed Research Administrator Day, don’t despair, some of the new greeting cards are blank so they may be used through the year for other purposes. They are available at the NCURA Store, proceeds will benefit the NCURA Education Scholarship Fund.
- Speaking of the Scholarship Fund, thanks to the generosity of regions who sponsored year-long fundraising events and AM59 attendees who opened their pocketbooks wide, we have met our $100,000 goal! The Education Scholarship Fund Committee is currently developing guidelines and application materials so that we can soon offer the first scholarships for individuals pursing a degree in research administration. Thank you to everyone who has supported this fund. We hope you will keep NCURA on your charitable giving list in the years to come.
- NCURA will be presenting a general research administration workshop in two locations in Cuba in late October and early November. Cuban university officials and research faculty are eager to learn about research administration so that they may more effectively collaborate with universities in other countries and support their own researchers. This initiative began in 2016 when a NCURA delegation, hosted by the Cuban Ministry of Superior Education, visited several Cuban universities. Later in the year, Cuban officials met with NCURA representatives in Washington, DC, to execute an MOU that laid the foundation for future collaborations and exchanges that we expect as US-Cuba relations continue to evolve.

Although we sometimes must safeguard NCURA’s intellectual property, NCURA’s leaders strive to be open and transparent about our activities and governance. We hope that any member who has a question or a suggestion about our programming, our governance, or volunteer opportunities will communicate with the officers, board members, or staff. I can promise that we will listen carefully—a hallmark of effective communication—and we welcome constructive feedback from any member at any time.

Barbara Gray is NCURA President and serves as the Director, Office of Sponsored Programs at East Carolina University. She can be reached at GRAYB@ECU.edu

Barbara Gray
In research administration, the sheer volume of communication we receive can be overwhelming. The phone is constantly ringing, email clutters our inboxes, and someone is always at the door needing “just a minute.” As a brand-new departmental administrator, I found myself overwhelmed by the constant influx of information and the demands on my time that came with it. I began defaulting to “no” when a request seemed out of the ordinary, rather than taking the time to ask questions and make more nuanced decisions.

Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it.

– Albus Dumbledore
This came to a head one afternoon when one of my principal investigators pushed back against a decision the central office had made concerning one of his projects. On the surface, it seemed like he was pulling an end-run around our institution’s policies, but at that point in my career I lacked both the experience to tell what he was trying to accomplish and the words to explain the true purpose of the policy in question. Unwilling to back down, we fired emails back and forth from our respective offices—five doors apart—until the central office jumped in to suggest an alternative solution and détente was reached.

I went home that evening completely drained and exhausted. He was a jerk, the job sucked, and I was clearly in the wrong line of work. Over dinner, I hashed over the incident with my husband, who innocently replied “why didn’t you go talk to him?”

Talk to him?! Leave the safety of my office, walk 30 feet down the hall, and talk face-to-face? He obviously didn’t understand office jobs… or was he on to something?

In the days that followed, I read and re-read the email thread. With fresh eyes, I realized that the PI and I were really on the same side of the issue, but we chose completely different words to describe our thoughts and we proposed very different—though equally valid—solutions. Had I taken a step back at any point in the email exchange and popped into his office to say, “I think we actually agree, let’s figure out the best way to resolve this,” it would have been over in 15 minutes. Instead I’d damaged my credibility with this PI and stressed myself out over nothing. It wasn’t my proudest moment as a research administrator, but it was absolutely pivotal in my career.

I took some time to decide what kind of administrator I wanted to be. Yes, it’s a stressful job. Yes, the task list is never-ending. Yes, my email inbox is overflowing. Yes, people interrupt all day long. If I wanted to prevent burning out within the first year, I would need to set up some ground rules for my own survival.

1. Don’t jump immediately to “no.” No matter what the PI proposes, I never say no as a first response. I’ll say “that’s interesting, tell me more about it,” and try to draw out as much information as I can in order to find out what the actual goal is and find a solution. It may not be what the PI initially envisioned, but it’ll get the job done in a way that meets institutional and sponsor guidelines.

2. Be kind. If the answer does ultimately have to be “no,” there are helpful and constructive ways of saying it. Explain the reason behind the decision, and why it’s not possible. Show the PI that you’re on his or her side, and remember that what to you is an obvious decision based on regulations and policies, to them is an administrative roadblock in the way of their research.

3. Answer every email, even if it’s just to say that you’ll be able to complete the task another day. I learned that, except for the simplest of requests, my PIs aren’t generally expecting an immediate resolution. They know that certain requests may take time to complete, and they just want to be kept informed of the timeline.

4. Remember that your out-of-control task list is probably not the PI’s fault, they just happened to need something when you were already having a busy day. Let them know when you’re swamped, and let them know when you can reasonably answer their question.

5. Don’t jump to conclusions. My PIs will regularly email at all hours of the night and over the weekends, not because they expect a response right away but because they’re working an overnight shift and have a spare moment to get a little work done. They’re not being disrespectful of my time, they’re using their own time wisely.

6. Switch modes of communication, especially if things start to get heated. If I had walked down the hall to chat with my PI, we would both have been spared a lot of stress that day! A friend once told me that email is for information, not communication; it’s far too easy to assume a tone that isn’t there.

7. Get to know your PIs! I am lucky to work with an amazing, enthusiastic, and dedicated group of researchers (you probably are, too!), but they are all incredibly different. As I got to know them as individuals, I learned the best way to communicate with each of them; I stopped defaulting to my own preferences (email) and started calling, texting, and dropping by offices when that better suited them. I’ll probably always hate picking up the phone, but sometimes it gets the job done.

Ten years later, it’s still a stressful job. My task list is still never-ending, my inbox is still overflowing, and people still interrupt all day long. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Building relationships and learning to understand what (and why) my researchers do what they do has been rewarding for everyone. My amazing PIs know that they can count on me, and that I’ll work with them to find creative solutions to their quirkiest situations.

And that one “difficult” PI from early in my career? It honestly took months of me going out of my way to recover my reputation with him. Finally, after an incredibly stressful R01 submission where he saw me coming in early and staying late in order to keep up with last-minute changes and make it happen, he came around. In the years since, he’s become a friend and a colleague, and someone I can count on to offer a different and fresh perspective on any situation I’m facing at work. He regularly steers junior faculty members my way when they decide to join “Team Research,” and instructs them to get me in the loop before they do anything crazy.

I’ll call that a win. ■

Suzanne Araujo, MPA, CRA is a Research Program Administrator in the Department of Emergency Medicine at Rhode Island Hospital and will be Secretary-Elect of NCURA Region 1 in 2018. Suzanne’s responsibilities include overall management of the department’s research program, including all post-award and financial activities. She can be reached at saraujo@lifespan.org
How do we effectively cover all the bases so that everyone is on the same page and understands each other?

Though the written word can provide documentation for future questions that may arise, emails and texts can undermine efforts to communicate successfully. The most effective communication occurs in real-life, real-time discussions. However, as we all know, the tasks that we carry out on a daily basis limit our ability to rely solely on one-on-one conversation. What should we do to ensure we take care of the needs of our principal investigators, sponsors, departmental accountants, auditors, and so on?

Know Your Audience

It is extremely important to know your audience when providing information. Research administrators and principal investigators tend not to speak the same language; even Offices of Sponsored Programs and Contracts and Grants Accounting do not always use the same terminology. There is no magic manual to use when trying to decipher what the other party is saying. It is not like hitting the translation button on Facebook to read the Spanish status update. When learning French, you can use a French-English dictionary or you can simply Google the text. There is no such dictionary for different departments involved in research administration.

The difference in generations can also hinder communication in the workplace. The Greatest Generation (born before 1946), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), and Generation Y or Millennials (1980-2000) each bring a different set of experiences and expectations to the table.

Cultural differences can pose a problem with effective communication. Language barriers, differences in expectations about personal space and physical contact, and the various levels of context or explanation required by different cultures should be considered when communicating.

Discover Personality Differences

I always like to consider the wise words of the Dalai Lama, “If you can, help others; if you cannot do that, at least do not harm them.” Sometimes, personalities among coworkers just do not seem to mesh well. Humorous or serious, laid-back or strict, compassionate or indifferent, adventurous or cautious, persistent or hesitant, humble or egotistical, and so on. Before you can learn to communicate with people with different personality types, you must first identify yours. You can read more about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator at www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/home.htm?bhcp=1. According to the Myers-Briggs Foundation webpage, “the goal of knowing about personality type is to understand and appreciate differences between people.” It is important to become tolerant of other personality types. Most people do not try to annoy you or hurt you on purpose. Their actions can be products of their personalities and not acts of hostility.

Learn How to Recognize and Deal with High-Conflict People

There are always a select few people who are considered unreasonable, difficult, and high
No matter what you say or type, you are wrong and they are right. There are those that send a request via email and call you two seconds later to demand your attention right away. There are also those that undermine regulations and attempt to get around them. It is best to handle these situations as calmly as you possibly can. Sometimes you have to step away from the keyboard or phone and take deep breaths, vent to a co-worker, or just go eat cake. Cake always helps! Once you have gathered your thoughts together, go back to that issue with a clear mind. If there have been more than a couple of emails exchanged regarding the same issue with no resolution in sight, pick up the phone or schedule a face-to-face meeting.

In dealing with high-conflict people, do not respond to their contempt with scorn. Avoid negativity. Do not overload them with too many instructions. Provide BIFF (Brief, Inforamative, Friendly, and Firm) responses. You can learn more about dealing with high-conflict people at www.highconflictinstitute.com.

**Listen and Read Carefully**

Effective communication requires careful listening/reading, comprehension, and compassion. Stick to the facts to reduce the chances of misinterpretation. When identifying a problem, be sure to propose a solution. Keep personality and cultural differences in mind. Separate the person from the issue. Show that you are interested in the perspective of others without interruption or the need to be right.

**Positivity and Confidence Go a Long Way**

Whether you are speaking face-to-face, on the phone, or via email, stay positive and confident. There is no shame in not knowing all the answers all the time. There have been many times in my career that I have had to use the grand knowledge of Google, the university website, more experienced co-workers, or listservs. Explain that you will need to get more information, and forward the answers to the requesting person as soon as possible. This builds trust and leads to better partnerships.

**Why Do We Do What We Do When We Do It?**

At the end of the day, we are all working towards the same goal. We are working towards submitting the best proposal, choosing the best resources to perform the scope of work, ensuring we are compliant with all regulations, or creating an allocable, allowable, and reasonable budget. Knowing who handles which tasks will help us have a successful outcome.

Whether communicating with a group of people from different cultures or generations, or speaking to those in other departments or your coworker in the office next door, it is important to maintain dignity, respect, and consideration. If there is a lack of understanding after two email cycles, pick up the phone. If the phone call still leaves either person with questions, schedule a meeting involving others who can help resolve the issue. Depending on the issue and people needed to answer all questions, determine if a conference call or group face-to-face meeting would be more convenient for all parties.

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**Research Administration Memes**

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The Art of Communication in a Digital World

By Thomas B. Spencer & Michael R. Castilleja

Both in research administration and in our professional lives, we rely on successful communication.

*Did I describe the regulation correctly?*
*Did the program officer understand my question?*
*What did she mean when she said, “it depends”?*
Through effective communication, we succeed, and through poor communication, we fail. As the profession of research administration defines itself, we often rely on our ability to communicate to get the job done. It is a priority because in the end, we all share common goals.

This article focuses on digital written communication. As our universities expand across multiple schools and funding agencies, our need to communicate often falls outside of the confines of conference rooms and business hours. We must be able to rely on digital communication such as email. While there are no fast and hard rules for the art of communication, the items below will help serve to ensure our professional messages are received and understood.

Two truisms: Diamonds are expensive and emails are forever. Every email that you have sent is most likely stored on a server. Ask the local IT guru! They will note that although you may have deleted an email, the company may keep backups and therefore we need to plan as if every letter is carved in stone. To that point, when sending emails, treat them like a post card. Know that they may be shared and forwarded to anyone without your knowledge. The author must be clear and direct in their messages, and be prepared to be accountable for its content.

Unlike most forms of communication, emails have a subject line that helps the recipients understand what is contained in the body of the message. Useful subject lines can define action items, questions, and help to distill the message and raise awareness of a situation. Be careful not to send mixed messages. Once you have picked a subject, stick to it and do not cover multiple topics in a single message.

Once the subject line is complete, the actual content of the message may start with a greeting. A salutation is the first line to be read and can set the tone of the entire professional message. Lack of a proper salutation or a misspelled name can distract from the content of the message. A misspelled name shows overall carelessness on the part of the author, and in some cases can derail the importance of the entire message.

You can’t expect a useful response if your message is not clear. Clarity in communication helps to convey a message; writers must be aware of a few common mistakes.

The content itself should be concise and to the point. Keep the message short and the subject simple. Avoid flowery prose and multiple threads. Including multiple requests can lead your reader to “pick and choose” their topic and delay or prolong a response. A large block of text can seem daunting to the reader. Keep your message to around 250 words; anything more should be sent in an attachment.

Sarcasm, slang, and lingo should be limited or outright avoided in the interest of clarity. In research administration, like many other professions, use shorthand to communicate within the group which may not be appropriate for a wider audience. We recommend never using emoticons or acronyms. This clutters your message and could be misunderstood by the recipient. Remember, your emails could be pulled for review during an audit or site review. Email messages are not texts, so use complete sentences and thoughts. If you must use your mobile device, be careful with autocorrect. You don’t want to have to explain the smiley face J emoticons or why the Department of Education (ED) conversation.

Beyond clarity of messaging, humans have emotions and get tired. These two aspects of life are a natural part of who we are. However, they should never be visible in our professional communications. Sending an email when emotions are running high is a great way to be invited to Human Resources for a chat and again, drastically reduces the chance of a useful response. Be aware of emotional and physical states. Hit your pause button and send that email tomorrow morning. The Business Writer’s Handbook suggests, “wait until you are in a better frame of mind so your message focuses on the issues rather than a personal attack.”

When bad news must be delivered, direct communication can make the difference between an angry response and progress. Sometimes that means that a message must go out stating that something went wrong, addition clarification is needed, or a request cannot be fulfilled. Provide as much support as you can to explain the situation so that the recipient doesn’t misconstrue the message as a personal attack.

Knowing how to respond professionally is a carefully crafted skill. Remember, the goals of a professional message are to address issues and to convey clear and concise information. The author should not assume the recipient has all of the information needed, so provide complete information to help the recipient understand your purpose.

Instead of saying “no,” offer alternative suggestions that may guide your reader to a better answer. If the goal is to correct someone, instead of stating that they are “wrong,” offer additional solutions or ask for clarification. The reader may have a different interpretation and may be thinking of a different solution. Remember, “it depends” is always a better response than “no” or “you’re wrong.” Stay as positive as possible even when delivering negative news.

Research administration is very complex and our professional messaging and communications must be tailored to serve our needs. This may be best accomplished with messaging that blends technical information with a positive human touch.

Finally, remember that the more eyes the better: Find a partner or mentor whom you trust, and if you have an important communication, ask them to review your work before hitting the send button. There is no “unsend” button. As with all art, the best way to improve your skills is with practice.

References


Thomas B. Spencer, PhD, MBA, is a director for operations for Academic and Administrative Information Resources at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. He is a lecturer for both the Research Administration Master’s Degree at Johns Hopkins University and the Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences School at the University of Texas, Dallas. Thomas joined NCURA in 2007, completed the ELP program in 2014, has served in several regional roles including chair of the Publications and Communications Committee, and was chosen as chair of Region V in 2017. He can be reached at Thomas.Spencer@UTSouthwestern.edu

Michael R. Castilleja, MBA, is a grants accounting manager at the University of the Incarnate Word. He joined NCURA in 2002 and has been an active member and volunteer for Region V. Michael was chosen as chair-elect for Region V in 2017. He can be reached at micastil2@uiwtx.edu
This year’s Annual Meeting had a record number of international attendees (86 members from 26 countries and 7 embassy dignitaries) and provided myriad of networking and educational opportunities for more than 1800 attendees and presenters. The enthusiastic energy of the attendees was evident everywhere.

The range of educational offerings assured there was something for everyone, from concurrent sessions, panels, forums and discussion groups, to topic-specific Genius Bars where participants met with experts one-on-one. Our well-attended pre-conference workshops provided a venue for the “deep dive” into cutting-edge topics. As always, our expert peer research administrators shared their knowledge, strategies, best practices, resources and experiences through 300 offerings in more than a dozen time slots. This year’s poster sessions allowed our peers to showcase their research efforts and resulted in two winners.

One of the meeting highlights was the inspiring keynote address by Dr. Mae Jemison. A former NASA astronaut, the first woman of color to go into space, and the Principal for the 100 Year Starship Project, Dr. Jemison raised insightful questions, such as “What do you do with your place at the table” and “Do you use that place to build an extraordinary future?” She shared her passion for building a better world today for a better future. The lunchtime keynote speaker was Kelly O’Donnell, Capitol Hill Correspondent for NBC News. Her expert analysis gave us an opportunity to reflect on governmental actions that impact our work.

The annual meeting provides outstanding networking opportunities, and this year was no exception, starting with the Ohana Night opening event to set the tone of NCURA as our “professional family.” The Night at the National Air and Space Museum followed by Club NCURA and Netzone at the Hilton was a great hit! We want to thank our generous members who supported the NCURA Education Scholarship Fund through contributions and sales of NCURA greeting cards, the cookbook and the children’s book, The Best Job of All, penned by NCURA’s very own Robert Andresen.

In closing, we extend our sincere thanks to those that made this meeting a success, including the AM59 Program Committee, the session presenters, the sponsors and vendors, the regional leadership, the multitude of volunteers, and the NCURA leadership and staff.

Mabalo and Aloha!
1. AM59 Program Committee

2. 2017 Board of Directors
Seated: Georgette Sakamoto, University of Hawaii; Laura Letbetter, Georgia State University; Shannon Sutton, Western Illinois University; Barbara Gray, East Carolina University; Denise Moody, Harvard University; Agatha Keller, ETH Zurich/University of Zurich. Standing: Toni Shaklee, Oklahoma State University; Scott Davis, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center; Susan Zipkin, University of New Hampshire; Tony Ventimiglia, Auburn University; Craig Reynolds, University of Michigan; Kathleen Larmett, NCURA; Bob Andresen, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Mary Louise Healy, Johns Hopkins University; Julie Guggino, Central Washington University; Bryony Wakefield, University of Melbourne. Not pictured: Ralph Brown, Colorado School of Mines; Julie Cole, Duke University; Lisa Mosley, Yale University; Leslie Schmidt, Montana State University.

3. Executive Committee:
L-R: Georgette Sakamoto, Vice President (University of Hawaii); Shannon Sutton, Treasurer (Western Illinois University); Tony Ventimiglia, Secretary (Auburn University); Kathleen Larmett, NCURA Executive Director; Bob Andresen, Immediate Past President (University of Wisconsin–Madison); Barbara Gray, President (East Carolina University)

4. 2017 NCURA Distinguished Educators:
Pamela Webb, University of Minnesota; Dick Seligman, California Institute of Technology; Gunta Liders, University of Rochester.
1. **Keynote Speaker**  
*Dr. Mae Jemison.*

2. **Past NCURA Officers**  

3. **Luncheon Keynote Speaker**  
*Kelly O’Donnell*  

4. **Past NCURA Presidents**  
*Seated:* Dave Richardson, Patricia Hawk, David Mayo, Pam Whitlock, Michelle Vazin. *Standing:* Dan Nordquist, Judy Fredenberg, Steve Hansen, Kim Moreland, Denise Clark, Vivian Holmes, Dick Seligman.

“My favorite part about this meeting is that it combines first-class learning opportunities with networking and fun in a way that both honors and celebrates research administration.”
Meeting and networking with peers from across the country is truly invaluable!”
The breadth and depth of knowledge in one place was amazing and inspiring.”
Exploring the Possibilities...Navigating into the Future. This was AM59’s theme, and it conveys so much in just seven words. As research administrators, we are responsible for assisting the country’s best and brightest in securing and managing funding to explore possibilities and navigate into the future. NCURA encourages its members to do the same. Attending this year’s Annual Meeting granted me an opportunity of a lifetime, and between the ellipses, I found immeasurable joy and satisfaction. While I enjoyed serving on the Tech Team, reconnecting with my colleagues, establishing new relationships, and attending workshops and discussion groups, the highlight of my AM59 experience certainly was meeting and talking with Keynote Speaker Dr. Mae Jemison. Though brief, this encounter has left an indelible impression on my spirit.

In 2006, I received my bachelor’s degree in Aerospace Engineering from Georgia Tech at the end of a long, winding journey that included the birth of my son, Warren. I shelved my aspirations of working for NASA and sought a career that would allow me to excel as both a parent and a professional. Never could I have anticipated that research administration would lead me right back to my first love and bring me face-to-face with a lifelong role model. In her poem “won’t you celebrate with me,” Lucille Clifton writes, “born in babylon, both nonwhite and woman, what did i see to be except myself?” Who better to show me—a woman of color—how to bridge the gap between exploring the possibilities and navigating into my future than Dr. Jemison?

At Region III’s Spring Meeting in Savannah, Georgia, I had the privilege of sharing a table with Georgette Sakamoto, who shared in my excitement about Dr. Jemison’s upcoming keynote. Georgette promised me that if I made it to the conference, she would make sure I had the opportunity to meet her! Despite AM59’s coinciding with my children’s first week of school and on the heels of a job change, I still managed to make it to Washington, DC. True to her word, Georgette introduced me to Dr. Jemison, and in the span of a few minutes, my life was forever changed. I not only got to meet and hug Dr. Jemison, but she also signed my copy of Hidden Figures, a book that shares the stories of three African-American women who broke racial and social barriers so that our nation could do the same in science and space exploration.

While Alan Shepard, John Glenn, and Neil Armstrong are revered as American space heroes, their travels (and those of Dr. Jemison) were made possible by the intelligence and tenacity of Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn, and Mary Jackson. All of these women remind me that a path has been paved for me to explore the possibilities, and it is my duty to navigate into the future in a way that opens a path for others. Dr. Jemison reminded AM59 attendees that in order to achieve interstellar travel, we must employ the full breadth, depth, and brilliance of humanity. By including more than scientists and engineers, we expand the possibilities. Such an expansion leads to the advancements in technologies that impact our lives here on Earth. I am assured now, more than ever, that my role as a research administrator is a vital one! My aerospace engineering degree isn’t going to waste. Rather, I am a solid research administrator because of it. By bringing the full range of my humanity to my job, I catalyze change in the collective human experience. I can be both nonwhite and woman; I can be a mother and have a career; I can love math, science, music, art, and literature. Dr. Jemison’s message to me? “Purpose!” Between exploring the possibilities and navigating into the future is that one word: Purpose! It is my mission going forward to always look for and find my purpose between the ellipses.

A special thanks to NCURA, Georgette, and all those who made this monumental moment possible.

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Tanya Blackwell works in the Office of Sponsored Programs at the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. She has worked in the field of research administration for 12 years and is currently pursuing her Masters in Research Administration from Johns Hopkins University. She greatly looks forward to graduating in May 2018. She can be reached at tanya.blackwell@choa.org
Dave Richardson received the Outstanding Achievement in Research Administration Award at the 59th Annual Meeting. This is NCURA’s most prestigious award given to a member who has made a significant contribution to the profession and demonstrated noteworthy service to NCURA. The following is his acceptance speech:

Michelle Vazin, thank you for your nomination and for your kind words and thank you to Pat Hawk, Dan Nordquist, and Tony Ventimiglia for your supporting letters! Thank you to my many colleagues with whom I’ve had the great pleasure of collaborating over the course of my career. And thank you to NCURA the organization and to the Nominating and Leadership Development Committee. This award means a lot to me and I wish to share with you a few career lessons that I credit for placing me in front of you this morning.

Like many of you, my path to our profession of research administration was indirect. Having married into an academic family nearly three decades ago, I found myself searching for a career that would permit me to accommodate my spouse’s academic career. I followed my wife to the University of Georgia so she could pursue her doctorate. While looking for employment on campus, I ran across a job posting in the Office of Sponsored Programs for a Grants Officer position. While I had no idea what either a sponsored program or grants officer was, I felt my prior experience working for the State of Missouri Courts Administrator would qualify me for the position. I was fortunate to compete and be selected for the position. It turned out that managing court caseloads and the judges that presided over them prepared me for managing sponsored projects! I had been in the University of Georgia Sponsored Programs office for just a few months when I was informed that the assistant director could not attend the annual meeting of the National Council of University Research Administrators and the office could not cancel the NCURA registration without
forfeiting the funds. The director of the University of Georgia Office of Sponsored Programs asked if I would be willing to attend the NCURA annual meeting instead of having to forfeit the registration fee. This was on the Wednesday prior to the annual meeting, had no idea what NCURA was but I said yes, and neither NCURA nor myself have been the same since!

LESSON: When an opportunity knocks, answer, for you never know what is waiting on the other side! While serving as a Grants Officer at the University of Georgia, I inherited the oversight of a new multi-million dollar United States Agency for International Development (USAID) award that involved about forty subawards of which thirty or so were issued to entities outside of the United States. While the thought of being responsible for such a large award with little experience was intimidating, in retrospect, it turned out to be the perfect award for me to manage. I quickly became an “expert” in dealing with foreign subrecipients while working in close collaboration with the Principal Investigator and his administrative team. While this was but one of the many awards I managed, I worked diligently and often went above and beyond my defined job duties to assist given the scale and high profile of the award. After four years into my research administrative career, I was recruited away from the central sponsored programs office to work directly on the USAID project as the Business Manager overseeing all business aspects of the USAID program, and ironically, directly managing all of the subawards I had negotiated years earlier.

LESSON: Treat others, even Principal Investigators, as you wish to be treated yourself for you never know who may end up being your boss in the future!

In 1998, I left the University of Georgia to join my spouse at Virginia Tech and accepted a job with the Office of the Vice President for Research working on special projects outside of the area of sponsored programs. About two years into my tenure there, the Office of Sponsored Programs suffered the unexpected loss of their senior leader and I was asked to temporarily serve as the interim director of the office. I worked very hard during my interim assignment in improving the pre-award and post-award operations but was informally told the Vice President for Research had a more seasoned administrator in mind for the permanent replacement of the Director. After about six months of serving as the Interim Director, I had acclimated myself to the Office of Sponsored Programs and felt I could make a positive difference if given the opportunity. When the director’s search announcement was released, I applied for the job knowing that I had to convince the search committee and more importantly the Vice President for Research to trust that I could not only manage the position but improve the operations. I applied, made the cut, and was interviewed for the position. Unbeknownst to me, upon conclusion of the interviews the search committee strongly favored my appointment over the Vice President’s preferred choice. However, months went by before I was eventually offered the job. Not long thereafter, the Vice President for Research left the university and I finally found out what unfolded behind the scenes that ultimately led to my selection. It turned out the faculty members on the search committee formally rebelled against the Vice President by refusing to endorse his preferred candidate and adamantly advocating for my selection.

LESSON: Believe in what you are doing and maintain your faith in the invisible guidance of others. About ten years ago I was a member of the NCURA traveling faculty teaching the introductory course on the Fundamentals of Sponsored Programs in New Orleans. As a presenter, I would make an effort to get to know the workshop participants over the course of the three days by talking to them during the breaks between the formal presentations. I noticed one of the participants was from the University of Kyoto and I was curious as to what he had hoped to gain from the workshop. I introduced myself and spoke with him for a few minutes. I walked away impressed by his sincerity and inquisitive nature on how best to support faculty in pursuit of sponsored projects. While my engagement with the workshop participant was brief, it ultimately led to another encounter approximately seven months later. I received an email from him inquiring if I would assist him and his University of Kyoto colleagues in setting up visits to a few institutions in the U.S. to learn more about sponsored programs administration. It turned out he was a founding member of the Kyoto University Research Administration (KURA) and his office was the recipient of a large grant from the Japanese Ministry of Education to support Kyoto’s centralization of research administration. I invited the University of Kyoto staff to Penn State University and secured visits to the University of Maryland at College Park and Johns Hopkins. These visits in turn led to the growth and expansion of collaboration between NCURA, the Kyoto University Research Administration office and many NCURA colleagues and ultimately led to a speaking engagement at the University of Kyoto and lifelong friendships.

LESSON: Take time to broaden your network by engaging other research administrators, for you never know the impact it may have on your career and your friendships!

The University of Illinois has the current misfortune of being located in the State of Illinois. As many of you may be aware the State of Illinois has the worst credit rating of any state, billions in unpaid bills, a massive unfunded pension, and a state legislature that just passed their first budget in two years. These last few years have been some of the most challenging times to serve as an administrator at any of the State of Illinois’ supported universities as we struggled to absorb the state’s financial responsibility. However, this has not stopped us from working together to improve our collective support of the externally sponsored portfolio nor does it negate the fact that our institutions retain strong academic reputations with excellent faculty and staff who are conducting research that impact the world. In light of or in spite of the State of Illinois fiscal crisis, we have continued to improve our operations and advance the research mission of our institutions.

LESSON: When you encounter events beyond your control, tune out the negatives and keep focused on your long-term goals.

I will end by saying that many people who have worked with me have indicated that I have been lucky. I completely agree. However, to be lucky you have to be prepared to take advantage of it when luck presents itself. Never let an opportunity pass you by that could change the course of your career!
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It can happen to even the strongest communicator: The email that you invested an hour impeccably constructing brings back a dozen questions for clarification. The message that you shared at the staff meeting produced stoic expressions and glazed eyes. The conversation that you had with a colleague gets misconstrued and results in rework and lost time. It is true that strong communication skills are imperative to the success of research administrators, so you likely already have them. However, most of us rely on what comes naturally and will continue to practice the same communication approaches even when we find they are not working. What if I told you that by asking yourself three simple questions you could quickly organize your message and improve your communication outcomes?

An important part of your job as a research administrator is to effectively communicate important information to others. Opportunities to share information present themselves on a daily basis, whether on the phone, during a scheduled meeting, or in a brief hallway conversation. Regardless of your specific research administration role, you have information and knowledge that is highly valuable to others. You may know the Uniform Guidance like the back of your hand or understand how to quickly navigate a specific sponsor’s website. You may understand reporting requirements, state law, university policy, and sponsor guidelines. You may understand dozens of different systems that are required to pull data and forecast spending. This is arguably your greatest asset as a research administrator. You have all of this valuable knowledge and it is your job to share it. Serving as a knowledgeable and experienced resource on campus can be rewarding, but it is only truly worthwhile when you have the ability to successfully transfer your knowledge to others. As research administrators, communication is one of our most important jobs, but we do not always have the time to put effort into developing these skills.

In 2016, after nine years in research administration, I took a new position as education coordinator for the UW-Madison Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Though still in the field of research administration, it sometimes feels as if I have completely changed careers. Instead of negotiating awards, issuing outgoing subawards, and setting up account numbers, I now spend my days designing educational courses, organizing learning events, creating presentations, and meeting with subject matter expert groups. To prepare for this new education role and increase my likelihood of success, I have been striving to learn as much as possible about effective presentation skills and communication. I now find myself in a place where it is my job to put the time and effort into developing strong communication skills, and I have learned a few things from educators that I believe easily translate to research administrators.

**Know/Feel/Do:**

By Melanie Hebl

**Three Questions to Improve Communication**
We can learn a lot from educators about effectively exchanging information, and we can greatly improve our communication skills by following some of their reliable methods. Successful educators realize that their jobs are about much more than just sharing information—they also want to increase deep understanding and motivate their audiences to act. To do this, they realize that it is essential to identify their audience and then adapt their message appropriately. Research administrators have similar goals of increasing deep understanding and motivating others, as we often act as liaisons between parties with conflicting perspectives and goals. As research administrators, we communicate with these different parties on a daily basis—from principal investigators, department chairs, subrecepients, preaward colleagues, postaward colleagues, students, sponsors, and more. Different audiences require different messages, even on the same topic.

When designing course content or presentations, educators commonly use a Know-Feel-Do technique to focus their message on three things: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes. This technique requires them to ask three targeted questions about their audience during course development. Next time you are gearing up for a critical conversation or drafting an important email, use this approach and ask yourself the following three questions:

- **What do you need her to know?** You need her to know that she has a progress report due on Friday. You need her to know that the sponsor of her award has very strict deadlines and will reduce her next year’s funding by 10% for a late progress report. You need her to know that you have indeed witnessed this negative outcome, given your experience working with this sponsor.

- **How do you want her to feel?** You want her to feel understood. You understand that she has conflicting priorities at the moment. You want her to feel supported by knowing that you are very familiar with the sponsor’s website and will be in the office all day Thursday and Friday to assist when necessary.

- **What do you need her to do?** You need her to send the progress report by noon on Friday to ensure successful submission to the sponsor.

You might start your email by saying “I realize that this is a very busy week for you with the big NIH deadline coming up. It is unfortunate timing, but your current award’s progress report is also due this week on Friday. The sponsor has a very strict deadline and will reduce your budget for next year by 10% if the progress report is late. That reduction would be detrimental to the success of the project. I have worked with the sponsor for many years and I am certain they do not offer any flexibility here. I have the financial report prepared and ready to go. I need you to send me the progress report by noon on Friday. This will give me enough time to upload it into the sponsor’s system and submit it by the deadline. I will be in the office all week if you have any questions or concerns and I am more than willing to assist in any way that I can. I’m certain that by working together we can get the reports submitted on time.”

This correspondence seamlessly addresses the three questions: Know, Feel, and Do. By focusing on the targeted questions, you stay on point, avoid confusion, and increase the likelihood that the message gets through to your recipient. Your PI knows what she needs to do and why. Perhaps most importantly, you have also made her feel supported and encouraged to get the report to you on time.

As Cicero, an ancient experts on communication, said over 2,000 years ago, “if you wish to persuade me, you must think my thoughts, feel my feelings, and speak my language.” Like educators of our time, he understood the importance of identifying his audience and relating to his listeners on both the mental and the emotional level, which is what the Know/Feel/Do technique does.

It may seem like a simple approach, but as all good educators know, most techniques work best when kept simple rather than made complicated. Know/Feel/Do is easy to remember and easy to implement. I encourage you to consider this technique next time you enter into an important conversation. You may be surprised that it leads to better results.

This technique is not limited to educators, and it is effective whether you are speaking to a large group or having a personal conversation in your office. When we approach conversations using the Know-Feel-Do technique, we create clear messages that meet the needs of our individual listeners because we focus our attention on the specific person or group with whom we are communicating. This approach also helps us quickly construct an effective message and remove unrelated information that may not apply to our specific audience.

It is very likely that you already focus key messages around knowledge and action, but how often do you intentionally consider the feelings that you want to evoke? How often do you prepare for the emotional impact of your words (Jenson, 2003)? When you add the “feel” question, you show the listener that you care about their needs and you may even influence the way they feel about your message.

Let us consider using this method with a communication scenario that may sound familiar to you. You have an award in which future year funding is contingent upon successful submission of a financial and progress report. The sponsor’s policy is to reduce the future year budgets by 10% if the reports are late. The report deadline is Friday, two days away. You have your financial report completed, but you are struggling to get the progress report from your PI. Your PI is usually responsive and timely, but at a recent staff meeting, you heard that your PI is currently preparing to submit a large NIH center proposal that is due next week.

What do you know about your PI (audience)? She has not responded to your recent inquiries about the report. She is busy preparing a large proposal for an upcoming NIH deadline. She is usually responsive and timely. In drafting your message to her, whether in an email or preparing for a conversation, answer those three targeted questions.

References:
The Bob Pike Group – Instructional Design Course, 2016

**Melanie Hebl** is the education coordinator in the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She currently serves the UW-Madison campus by designing and developing learning opportunities and educational resources for research administrators. She can be reached at Melanie.Hebl@wisc.edu.
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I am going to do something a little unusual for a discussion of data visualization and the power it has to communicate even the most complex data sets: I am not going to be showing any images. My goal here is not to dazzle you with beautiful visuals, arrays of colors, or intricate charting. There are thousands of examples readily available on a Google Image search for data visualization as well as samples from your favorite visualization software package. Some of them are stunning. Nor am I going to tell you to use this kind of chart or that color scheme. That is a study on its own.

Instead, I want to take a different route and have you think a little more about your experiences with data visualizations. What has worked for you and what has not? For Creators the goal is to be sure you are mindful of what you are creating and why. For End Users the goal is to help put a finger on why certain visuals do not exactly work for you and how you can work with the Creators to better it.

**You are (probably) a data analyst, whether you realize it or not**

To begin I want to discuss a little about just who these Creators are. One question I like to ask of research administrators is, “Are you a data analyst?” By and large the answer I get is an emphatic “NO!” Eventually I had one very astute person answer, “Well, aren’t we all in a way?” YES!

Do you download data from your local systems, be it reporting, proposals, or awards? Do you create a pivot table? Do you use that data in a shadow system to help your faculty or administrators better understand a current or projected financial state? Do you ever convey your work in a line or bar chart? Do you present burn down rates or year-over-year changes? If you do then I would call you a data analyst and you should recognize and appreciate that role. Even if you do this infrequently there are some things you can do to ensure that what you do produce provides the best communication of the analysis.

**Why do we do what we do?**

Why is it that we do these things? Partly because few or perhaps no faculty or high-level administrators will ever go download a report directly from a central reporting system, so you are providing access to information. However, the larger reason is the rows and columns you download are in and of themselves nonsensical. They are your starting point, but you would never think of showing a pure data table in an email or slide. I challenge you to send your boss or faculty a report that is purely a data table. I think you can anticipate their reaction. It needs to be transformed into a useable product.

**Communicating Data**

Communicating data probably sounds boring and dry and for a long time it was. Clunky, slow, ugly and unwelcoming central reporting systems were not anything that most would find inspiring. Communication though, by its definition, is to transmit information. To that end, even the systems of yore whose means may be lacking have a useful end even to this day.

I have found that the most useful considerations for effectively communicating data don’t even have to do with chart type or colors; it has to do with taking a step back and considering the 5 W’s (by my order of importance) before you even begin. Doing this alone often leads to a fantastic output, with the intricacies of the visual simply being the icing on the cake. Remember, the main goal is to effectively inform your audience.

**WHY:** Why are you doing this? Consider the needs of the end user — why do they want this to be produced? Try to see this from their perspective to gain clarity in purpose; you may even be able to anticipate follow-up questions and answer them in advance or at least have your underlying data ready in anticipation so your follow-up time is reduced. The more you can understand the purpose the better your results will be.

**WHAT:** What is the message you are trying to convey? What story are you trying to tell? This, more than anything, is where I suggest you spend time actually thinking and considering. It can be inviting to just jump right into a job you are doing and pop out some lines and charts, but is that really the most effective approach? Can you enhance your narrative through some mathematical expression such as transforming your data to be elicited as a percent? For example, if your goal is to show what portion a certain school or department contributes to the whole, then perhaps making that department the reference against which all other units are measured is a more useful end result than simply showing raw values and leaving it to the end user to eyeball the size deltas. Nailing this is often the key driver to getting an “ah-ha” moment out of the reader.

**WHO:** Who is your audience? If you have a confined set of local users who you can spend time with, then you can take some liberties in assuming they know certain aspects of your business. This will allow you some freedom and flexibility in not needing to include detailed legends or explanatory elements like labels that can be clutter. If you have a broader or global set, though, make sure your charts are self-explanatory to the outsider. This may mean you need those labels limiting how much you can fit into a visual before it becomes too cluttered. If there is no way to reduce the visual clutter, you may need a set of reports instead of just one.

**WHEN:** Here I am going to suggest you think about how often the reporting needs to be repeated and when are people going to be asking for this. Considering frequency will often lead you to a certain tool. If you need to repeat this often, do not spend too much time on fancy footwork unless you can program it to be repeatable. The last thing you want is to be on the hook for a very complex visual that requires a day’s worth of data aggregation behind the scenes for data that are requested often. If it is a one-time effort or rarely needed then go for it, but be sure to document your process so you can repeat it after a year of not looking at it.

**WHERE:** Where are you going to disseminate this? This is largely going to influence the tool of...
choice. Is it going to be a PowerPoint image or hosted on an external facing website with live data?

If you get the above all correct, you will often find that people will begin asking you for new analyses beyond what you have done. They will see something in the chart that begs another question and you begin a journey of deeper and more meaningful exploration of the organization than was ever done before. That is the ultimate goal.

In with the art
Now you are ready to put that icing on the cake. You have an impactful visual and want to give it some flare and pop. Some of my favorite tips are:

Use orange and blue, not green and red. Aside from the Christmas effect, a large enough portion of the population is red/green colorblind and may not be able to digest the visual as easily as you would like.

Use grayscale for everything but the one element you want to highlight. If your goal is comparing years, than a varied shade of gray for all but the current year which appears in a brilliant color is a very easy way to lead the reader where you want them.

If you have more than four or five lines on a visual, it is too much. Nobody wants to look at spaghetti unless it is dinner time.

Make your own custom color palette. Some programs allow you to save these colors. If you cannot save them, make a simple text file with color codes in them for reference. Your reports will stand out as different and unique. I like the color palette from Google’s Lollipop operating system. System colors like this are often extensively researched so take advantage of them.

Pay keen attention to how data are presented in news articles. Infographics are very common these days and they are designed to supplement the story being told. How have they arranged their data or chart selection to enhance the reader’s understanding? If it left you with questions, what could have been done better? Read science articles as they often have the best visuals trying to help explain very complex information.

In Practice
Finally, I wanted to share two quotes with you from real users of my own reports. The first comes from our Associate Vice President of Research Administration, Russell Brewer, who is looking at university—wide trends and data:

“Access to accurate, real time information makes assessing the health of the organization very easy to do on a daily basis.”

The second is from an Assistant Director of Pre Award Operations, Caroline Jones, who is using visuals to help assess her team’s workloads:

“Whether you talk about workload management or strategic planning, being able to support decisions with data through transparency allows management to communicate a clearer message and allows all to better understand the vision.”

John Markley is the Assistant Director of Organizational Insights for Stanford University’s Office of Research Administration. His duties include data preparation, analysis, and the creation of visualizations that help drive a deeper understanding for the organization and community. He also works closely on electronic research administration system design. He can be reached at markley1@stanford.edu

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Effective communication is much like a unicorn; it is something that we all desire but it also seems to be a fantasy. Consider the strategies below when trying to capture this evasive creature, “Communication.” Effective communication, while elusive, is critical and achievable in a research enterprise.

**Communication within an Office**
Before you worry about being successful communicators with others on campus, make sure you are communicating effectively within your own office. Efficient communication is paramount and critical within your own office and any sister offices. Without a good relationship with your colleagues, your role in the research process is stunted, and PIs might struggle to trust you.
Within an office:

1. **Talk every day:** This might sound trivial, but communicating daily allows you to keep things from falling through the cracks. Consider a 15-minute stand-up meeting where no one can sit down and get comfortable to chat about anything other than work. Continuously talk in person, via email, and/or online chatting. Know what is happening in your office and what is going on with each other, PIs, and proposals.

2. **When in doubt, talk it out:** Unless you are in a meeting or on a conference call, consider keeping office doors open. This eliminates barriers and allows you to talk through an idea or a problem that has popped up quickly and easily. Not all issues can be solved this way, but many can. Few people understand what research administrators do; we are each other’s best and most supportive sounding boards.

3. **Be clear about responsibilities and acknowledge strengths:** Knowing what each team member is responsible for is critical. It prevents duplicative work and keeps everyone on the same page about goals. Strive to divide work equitably and according to each person’s strengths when possible.

Among sister offices:

1. **Participate in the conversation:** Seek opportunities each week to sit in on other office staff meetings. You can be part of discussions about potential upcoming proposals and share other information that will benefit the offices present.

2. **Create electronic shared files:** Important deadlines can affect everyone in a research office. Consider creating a shared Google spreadsheet with grant deadlines and outline responsibilities so each person involved is on the same page.

3. **Visit the proverbial water cooler/microwave/coffee pot:** Get to know your colleagues. When you know and trust your co-workers, lines of communication feel less forced and you tend to work better together.

4. **Copy (CC) everyone:** When your office’s business turns into another office’s business, work hard to make sure everyone who has a “need to know” stays in the loop.

5. **Communicate outside of the office:** Meet after work or attend campus events together. Get to know the people you work with to create a better working atmosphere.

**Communication with Faculty**

1. **Variety is the spice of life:** Make contact with faculty and staff who are doing research across a range of mediums. Think emails, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings (Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts), blog posts, and campus announcements. Target each communication to a unique audience as much as you can.

2. **Meet on their turf:** Offer to meet faculty in their office, at a coffee shop, or online. Their schedules tend to vary more than staff and administrators. It sometimes helps to meet on neutral ground too!

3. **Follow up, follow up, follow up:** Research is only one of the things faculty do on a daily/weekly basis. Research administration may be the only thing we do. Schedule follow-up dates on your calendars (yes, really) to make periodic contact with PIs with whom you are working.

**Target practice:** Be intentional with your communication; do your best to make the faculty member feel like they are not a copy/paste email job. Do not send every announcement to every person. Step outside of routine, ask them to talk to you about their work, and take the time to listen to them whenever you run into them. This builds trust around the relationship.

**Communication with the Greater Campus Community**

1. **Be everywhere:** Okay, so it is not actually possible to be more than one place at once (maybe unicorns can do it) but what we mean here is get involved! Be visible on campus. Attend as many research-related presentations, leadership-sponsored events, and social networking opportunities as you can. Make sure people on campus know who you are. This makes them much more likely to utilize your services or recommend your office to colleagues needing research assistance.

2. **Shameless self-promotion:** Anytime you hear about something awesome for research within your campus community, shout it from the rooftops. Post it on your website, tell your university communications team, and print it in your newsletter. Congratulate faculty with an email or phone call. Congratulate your fellow Research Administrators on their accomplishments (passing CRA exams, grant awards, presentations, etc.).

**“Be intentional with your communication.”**

Communication gets easier with practice and doesn’t have to be a fantasy. Using some of these strategies will assist in identifying where the weaker links are in your office communication so that you can strengthen them and move forward as a stronger research enterprise. Each office and institution is different, and the above strategies can be modified for any office size. Do you have any other strategies that work? We’d love to hear what works and what doesn’t in your offices and on your campuses (grs@appstate.edu).

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Facilities and Administrative (F&A) Costs, also known as Indirect Costs, are a key component of research funding. Unfortunately, they often are misunderstood by many in our community as well as by leaders in the Federal government.

On May 24th, 2017, I had the opportunity to address concerns at the House Subcommittee Hearing on Examining the Overhead Cost of Research, sponsored by the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and the Subcommittees on Research and Technology and Oversight. Lisa Nichols and David Kennedy from the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) assisted me in preparing for the testimony which can be found at: https://youtu.be/ucdE56ycPK (see minute 18:50).

Together, in this article and in a subsequent article(s), we will provide historical context into F&A costs, the criticality of their funding as essential research costs, and dispel myths about how these funds are used. Dialogue from the article(s) can be used for internal discussions with your faculty and institutional leadership, as well as a resource for your Federal Relations staff as they advocate for sound research funding policy locally and in Washington DC.

F&A Under Attack
Like clockwork, there seems to be renewed focus on F&A costs every five years: What they pay for, how they are determined, and how they can be reduced to allocate more funding to direct costs. With the new administration, this topic once again became the focus of national discussion stemming from the President’s FY18 Budget, which suggests capping F&A costs at 10% and subsequent statements from both Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price as well as a few members of Congress. However, while capping F&A reimbursement could be a short-term solution to rein the federal budget, it would create long-term, irreversible harm to the U.S. research enterprise.

“...while capping F&A reimbursement could be a short-term solution to rein the federal budget, it would create long-term, irreversible harm to the U.S. research enterprise.”

History of the Partnership
As stated in many forums and in my written testimony, academic institutions have been working in partnership with the Federal Government for decades to advance national security, health and prosperity. In 1945, Vannevar Bush,
then Director of the White House Office of Scientific Research and Development published his seminal work, *Science, the Endless Frontier: A Report to the President on a Program for Postwar Scientific Research*. In this document, he emphasized that the partnership has yielded tremendous results. The United States leads the world in scientific innovation, which has led to significant economic benefits and job growth, advances in human health and defense, and an improved quality of life for all Americans. This investment in university-based research serves the dual function of:

- Generating ground-breaking discoveries that are the foundation for technological and medical breakthroughs; and,
- Training the next generation of scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs.

Historically, no other partnership has been able to do this so effectively and it is a model that is emulated across the world. This partnership has allowed for significant cost efficiencies where the government is unbound from maintaining its own facilities and personnel. Universities currently contribute 24% or more of academic research funding ($16.7 billion in FY15), which is the fastest growing share second only to the federal government, according to National Science Foundation (NSF) data; $5 billion of these university contributions was attributable to unreimbursed F&A costs.

**Testimony Preparation**

In the spring of 2017, as the discussion on F&A costs continued, House Research and Technology Subcommittee Chairwoman Barbara Comstock (with support from Minority Leader Dan Lipinski) and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Darin LaHood sought a formal hearing to explore F&A costs at NSF, including ongoing work by the Government Accountability Office on how NSF negotiates rates, how the agency’s rates compare to those of other agencies, and the extent to which rates have fluctuated over time.

In contrast to the September 29th, 2016 testimony on administrative burden, this testimony was anticipated to be more contentious due to the complexity of the topic and the diversity of understanding and perspectives. No one likes administrative burden and it’s easy to say it needs to be reduced; however, F&A is different because there are many myths about what it is and its criticality to the research mission.

In support of the hearing, the following had to be submitted within 48 hours of the hearing:

- An oral statement not to exceed 5 minutes in length
- A written statement of any “reasonable” length with supplemental materials and a Short Narrative Biography
- A one-page summary of key points

The challenge was to take highly complex materials, extract the highlights, reduce the nuances that would create further confusion, and deliver an oral presentation in 5 minutes.

Critical to the preparation was developing an understanding of how the other witnesses would approach their testimony. Witnesses included:

- Mr. Dale Bell, Division Director, Institution and Award Support, National Science Foundation
- Mr. John Neumann, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Government Accountability Office
- Dr. Richard Vedder, Distinguished Professor of Economics Emeritus, Department of Economics, Ohio University; Director, Center for College Affordability and Productivity

**The Testimony**

Based on our anticipation of the other witnesses and their likely focus, my testimony highlighted the following:

- The F&A reimbursement process is highly regulated and transparent.
- The Federal Government’s share of F&A hasn’t changed as a percentage of direct costs in decades; at NIH, 28% of all expenditures are attributable to F&A.
- Federal regulatory burden is driving up universities’ share of costs, but much of it is well beyond recovery because of the 26% cap on administrative costs.
- Most universities subsidize all aspects of F&A, both on the facilities and administrative side.
During the Committee’s Q&A, issues were raised, many of which we will address in a subsequent article(s):

- Private Foundation and Disease Organizations are subsidized by federal funding because of their lower F&A rates (NOT TRUE! The reimbursement process is based on allocation of real costs).
- Universities “make a profit” on F&A and are financially encouraged to construct buildings because of reimbursement (ALSO NOT TRUE! As discussed above, universities contribute over $5 billion of F&A costs and over $16.7 billion overall).
- F&A costs are real costs (TRUE! F&A reimbursement is reimbursement for costs already incurred and research could not occur without them).
- Capping F&A would not impact research or the university (ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE! As burden increases, public funding for state-supported institutions decreases; and, as tuition containment is a mandate, many universities are at a tipping point where any more forced subsidy of research will have a catastrophic impact).

**Conclusion**

First, a special thanks for the support and coordination from the Duke Federal Relations team of Melissa Vetterkind and Chris Simmons. Their insight into how to navigate a congressional testimony was superb.

Second, and as I stated in the testimony, “any reduction in federal funding, including funding for research infrastructure, will result in less research, slower scientific progress, fewer medical treatments, fewer jobs, and likely fewer universities conducting research and undergraduates and graduate students educated in a research setting.” This is a crucial message that must be embraced across all stakeholders in the research community.

In the next article(s), we will address the myths related to F&A costs, the national perspective on F&A recovery, including the status of the federal budget, ongoing advocacy around F&A, and what the future might hold.

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During my first six months at the Georgia Institute of Technology (“Georgia Tech”), I was having a difficult time communicating with a researcher’s staff member over the phone (we had already given up on emails). We were reviewing numerous emails and spreadsheets created before my arrival at Georgia Tech and getting nowhere fast. As we talked, her volume got louder and her tone became more frustrated. At my previous employer, I frequently visited my researchers and their staff, so I immediately offered to visit the college to sit down with this staff member, review the project file, and hear her concerns in person. Once she heard I would pay her a visit, the volume of her voice and the tone of her remarks were immediately quelled. She greeted me with a handshake and a smile and took me on a quick tour of her department. We sat down with the file, spread all the documents out on a table, and quickly found a
mutually agreeable solution. Having the visual aids (the file) and being in the same room together helped turn what could have been a volatile situation into an amicable solution as well as a long term professional relationship between this departmental administrator and me. I later learned that this person’s researcher was one of the top five producers of research dollars at Georgia Tech. The staff member and I solved the problem and even ended up being good friends!

While this experience occurred during the post-award stage, the majority of my frantic calls and emails arrive during the preaward stage. Solicitations can be overwhelming and confusing and are oftentimes deadline-driven. The experience above illustrated two principals that have had the greatest positive impact on my communication skills. The first is Steven Covey’s 5th habit of highly effective people: “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Why do my customers (researchers and their staff) call and email me? Usually to find a solution to a time-sensitive problem. My customers call or email when they don’t understand something or when they have hit a roadblock.

When talking to my customer, I focus on what the customer is saying, not the questions I can ask. I have to practice listening and figuring out exactly what my customer’s needs are first. I’m tempted to interrupt them to get my questions answered immediately but make a concerted effort to keep my mouth shut. I want them to feel I am here to help them move through obstacles, solve problems, and understand seemingly complex issues, not create them. Moreover, if I let them continue, they may even provide information that preempts one or two of my questions anyway. Once my customer has had the opportunity to explain his or her need or concern fully, I repeat it to her for confirmation that I truly understand it, as well as to convey that I am focused on seeking to understand.

Seeking to understand my customer relates to Dale Carnegie’s tried-and-true advice in his book, How to Win Friends and Influence People. He discusses the value of being a good listener and notes that the best way to be a good conversationalist is first to be a good listener. He found that the more a person listened, the more favorably the listener appeared to his or her conversation partner. The more a person listened, the higher the conversation partner rated the quality of their discussion. To be a good listener, I must care about what my customer has to say. The more I listen, the more interesting I will appear to the person with whom I am communicating.

One afternoon I was visiting with an old friend who has had a long career as a human resources director in a large, northeastern city. We were discussing the power of listening. At the end of the conversation, he remarked that managers who tend to do all the talking during a job interview typically comment on how qualified and interesting the candidate seemed! My friend’s observation was ironic, but the point about the power of listening is not.

Being responsive proves to my customer that I am listening. I want my customer to know that I have received his or her email and that it’s on my radar screen. When I’m covered up, I always try at least to tell my customer that I’ve received their email and will have a response, if not a solution, that day. Everyone loves to know that their request has been received and noted, not fallen into a black hole. They like to be recognized and acknowledged. And if your customer is a departmental administrator, then even a brief response enables him or her to be able to tell the PI that there is movement.

A simple but oft-forgotten element of active listening is remembering your customer’s name. Most will not admit this, but one of the sweetest sounds to anyone is the sound of their name. Using your customer’s name will create a positive atmosphere where solutions are more likely to emerge.

While email meets our seemingly inexorable demand for documentation, it lacks my voice inflection, intonation, and cadence and shows none of my body language or facial expressions. This can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. If I feel a customer is starting to get frustrated through emails, I pick up the phone and call them. This usually results in a positive outcome. When the phone call doesn’t work, I offer to immediately stop by for a visit. A face-to-face visit improves almost any situation by creating a space for me to be a good listener and seek understanding. Visiting, listening to, and being interested in my colleagues and customers builds relationships, and solid relationships have created success, satisfaction, and fulfillment in my research administration career.

**References:**

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As research administrators, one of our greatest challenges is to communicate with a multitude of audiences, each with a different perspective based on their role in the research administration process. Principal investigators have the major responsibility in the completion of the programmatic objectives of their research projects, but they are not exempt from the responsibility of appropriately managing grant funds. Despite this great duty, not all PIs are aware of nor have in-depth knowledge of the myriad rules and regulations applicable to their grants. Would most of your PIs know what you mean when you mention 2 CFR Part 200, a close-out, or the difference between Grants Online and Grants.gov? In addition to our main job roles, whether we work in the financial management of a grant, submit proposals, or help PIs identify funding opportunities, we are also educators. Every chance of communicating with our PIs is an opportunity to help them better conduct their research. But to be effective we must keep in mind how communication takes place. Without being a communications expert, I endeavor to highlight what I believe are the basics of effective communication with our PIs.

Individuals have different perspectives, so the effectiveness of communication will depend on those that convey and receive the information. Their experiences may differ significantly and each one will interpret information based on their previous activities. If a PI has not been involved in an audit, for example, he or she may not understand why the research administrator emphasizes appropriately documenting each transaction or providing a detailed budget justification. Without some basic scientific knowledge in the PI’s field, the research administrator might not understand why a PI constantly needs to send samples overseas for analysis or needs to use a specific courier to send these samples. Points of view may differ and the willingness to listen to the other person and comprehend his or her perspective is of utmost importance.

The information being transmitted and how the message is transmitted is another significant element of effective communication. Getting to know your PIs is a good way to have a sense of the depth of their research administration knowledge and how technical your communication needs to be. But we don’t always have a chance to do this. If you don’t know your PIs so well, err on the side of providing too much basic information. If your PI wants to include the university’s lab or office space as part of cost share in a project’s budget, and insists that the research cannot be conducted without the use of this space, this might be a good opportunity to explain the difference between direct and indirect costs. But what happens if the PI insists that the space is directly related to the project? Explaining that direct costs must be explained and quantified in the budget and budget justification, along with the basis used to quantify the use of this space, may be enough deterrent. Keeping the message simple without de-emphasizing the importance of compliance with applicable regulations is usually a good strategy. The media used to communicate with your PIs will also affect your communication. Although written communication may be necessary (or in

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw
The importance of communication helps protect it, or why a certain microorganism may be important to the health of common people. So, embrace communication with your PIs, get to know them and their work—you will certainly have something to learn from each other.

Step One:
When you attend a training session where you gained value information, walk up to the speaker and let them know that you enjoyed their session. Ask for their business card and if you may contact them if you have questions.

Connection: You now have a subject matter expert contact, and you made a new friend.

Step Two:
You noticed your new friend standing with a group of people. Walk over to the group and reiterate to your new friend that you enjoyed their session. Consider also asking them if they are teaching another session. Most likely your new friend is going to introduce you to the people in the group (NCURA presenters are known for their politeness). Ask for their business cards and give them yours.

Connection: You just grew your network by capitalizing off of your new friend.

Step Three:
As soon as you get back to work send a friendly email to your new friends and stay in contact.

Connection: You build relationships by taking the time to maintain them.

As Dr. Woods challenged us, if you are not networking, you are not working. Your networking goal is to grow and nurture mutually beneficial relationships. Who are you going to connect with today?

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Historically, universities are slow to adopt change, in part, because the change seems disruptive to the deeply ingrained institutional processes. However, in the face of today’s rapidly evolving technologies, universities must be more adaptive to technological disruption to remain competitive in the educational marketplace. Key to this transformation are well-conceived and well-executed communication plans informing the target audience of the impending change, its timing, and a realistic perspective on how the change will impact the day-to-day activities of the university workforce.

Michigan State University (MSU) is a large research-intensive university with an extensive portfolio of externally funded projects. In 2015-2016 the University received nearly $589 million in federal, corporate, and foundation funding. To grow and manage this research portfolio, the University supports a large infrastructure of faculty and administrative staff. These individuals are often reluctant to embrace administrative changes that they believe will be inconvenient or may impair the University’s prospects for current and future funding.

Recently MSU implemented the enterprise software application, Kuali Coeus, tailored to increase the efficiency and reliability of the grants submission and grants management process. As part of the implementation process, the Research Administration Project staff created a Communications and Change Management Plan with goals to raise awareness and to build understanding and commitment to the system. Key objectives included preparing leaders to advocate for the project, creating clear and consistent messages, supporting implementation of changes, and bolstering the skillset of personnel through meaningful training programs and interactive learning environments. Communication activities played a key role in working toward both communications and change management objectives.

To accomplish the communications and change management goals, the university employed strategies to inform a variety of stakeholder groups and specific individuals, so they could convey the message in their respective units and departments. Stakeholders were defined in the Communications Plan as any person, group, or organization having an interest or concern in the topic, or who is affected by it. In a research intensive institution, the potential impact and interest in the implementation is broad and far-reaching.

To facilitate communications across stakeholder groups, the communications team identified and utilized existing university committees, groups, and listservs that were drawn from faculty centered groups such as the Council of Research Deans and the Deans, Directors, and Chairs listerv, from business centered groups, such as the Administrative Data Users Community group, IT Exchange, and the Sponsored Programs Advisory Committee, and from research/department administrator groups such as...
the Sponsored Program Research Opportunities & University Training (SPRO UT) committee and the Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) listserv. To streamline research/department administrator participation and to establish a network of change champions, the communications team created a committee of thirty-one research, department and central office administrators, called the Research Administration System Implementation Committee (RASIC). RASIC was established 14 months prior to implementation and met monthly to review the system and to discuss implications of conversion and process changes, as well as reporting challenges and opportunities. Members of this group represented the initiative and communicated back to their respective colleges, affiliated departments, and business offices to share information and to seek input that could be brought back to the group for discussion. A subset of this group was also trained to deliver systems training campus-wide to help others with the transition to the new system.

Communications about the Research Administration Project were delivered in a consistent and systematic fashion through websites, campus mailings such as memos, newsletters, postcards, and posters and through presentations delivered by project team members to units on request. Communications continue as the campus community is kept abreast of recent changes and updates to Kuali Coeus through weekly updates delivered via email to the Sponsored Programs Administration website and listserv. A diagram of the flow of communications to stakeholders is illustrated to the right in Figure 1.

The Research Administration Project team developed and managed communications plans for each Phase of the implementation. Each phase included communication deliverables, descriptions, delivery methods, frequency, intended audience, and timeline for completion. The team also tracked presentations and demonstrations delivered to various stakeholders. This provided a mechanism for the team to manage and document campus-wide communications and ensure that no group of stakeholders was overlooked. The communication strategies that MSU employed have been successful in bringing awareness and understanding about the Research Administration Project to the broader campus community. By continuing its communication efforts and offering new users a variety of learning materials, MSU continues to move toward campus-wide support of the new Research Administration System. As the project communications team reflects on their experiences from managing these communications, they have identified several lessons they will use for future system or program implementations, as summarized below in Figure 2.

Implementing a new enterprise-wide research administration system in a large decentralized institution is not an easy task. However, a strong communications and change management plan with regular delivery and tracking of communications with all stakeholders can help facilitate the successful implementation and adoption of a new system.

**FIGURE 1**

| Council of Research Deans |
| Deans, Directors and Chairs Listserv |
| Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) Listserv |
| Office of Research Facilitation and Dissemination Listserv |
| Unit Meetings |

| Administrative Data Users Community |
| Sponsored Programs Advisory Committee |
| SPA Listserv |
| IT Exchange |

| Office of Sponsored Programs/Contract and Grant Administration Staff |
| SPA Listserv |
| Research Administration System Implementation Committee (RASIC) |
| Sponsored Program Research Opportunities & University Training (SPRO UT) |
| Unit Meetings |

**FIGURE 2. LESSONS LEARNED**

- Survey members of each stakeholder group to determine how best to reach target audiences.
- Avoid using technical language to make communications understandable to all audiences.
- Listen to different stakeholders to understand how best to target and deliver communications to each group.
- Expect to encounter changes in the software and implementation timeline, and to communicate these changes quickly to impacted audiences.
- Utilize website analytics and surveys to understand the popularity and usage of educational materials.
- Have a long-term vision rather than an incremental one to keep the big picture at the forefront.
- Understand the current processes as well as the new system to better communicate how changes will impact the audience.
- Be specific about which systems are being replaced and when they will no longer be used for business processes.

**References:**
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As we become a more global community of researchers, it is ironic but perhaps not surprising that the challenges to conducting international research are increasing and not converging. Sharing resources across international boundaries is important for a broad range of studies on topics from climate to disease to energy. For these and other reasons, metrics associated with international activities are included in those used to determine university rankings. In a 2011 survey about international research infrastructures at U.S. research institutions, 39 senior international officials ranked the need for greater integration and coordination of campus resources supporting international research second only to the need for additional funding opportunities.

Conversations with many research administrators across multiple academic and biomedical research settings reflect that international research touches on more regulatory issues than any other category of research. At a 2017 presentation at the National Organization of Research Development Professionals with over 50 research administrators in attendance (Mulfinger, Whitmer, Konsella-Norene), significant interest was expressed in developing supporting infrastructures but few felt they had succeeded in creating well-developed research navigation systems. The complexities that must be addressed in a single application are many (see Figure 1, based on Sites, 2006) and require the collaboration of units across the institution such as Tax, General Counsel, and Human Resources to name a few. Paradoxically, the university machines that have developed to help address the many regulatory, safety, and ethical concerns usually leave the well-intentioned principal investigator who is driving the project feeling like an insignificant blip on the radar (Figure 2). Many, if not most, institutions have left the responsibility of leveraging these university resources entirely to principal investigators, which poses a significant compliance risk. A few institutions have developed comprehensive guidance such as international project start-up guides.
Figure 2
Institutional Units Supporting Needs and Compliance Requirements for International Research

Figure 3
Percentage of International Collaborators on Publications Affiliated with the NFS HERD Top 30

1. Johns Hopkins University
2. University of Michigan
3. University of Washington
4. University of California at San Francisco
5. University of California at San Diego
6. University of Wisconsin
7. Duke University
8. Stanford University
9. University of California at Los Angeles
10. Harvard University
11. University of North Carolina
12. Cornell University
13. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
14. University of Minnesota
15. Columbia University
16. Texas A and M University
17. University of Pennsylvania
18. University of Pittsburgh
19. University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center
20. The Ohio State University
21. Yale University
22. Pennsylvania State University
23. University of California at Berkeley
24. Georgia Institute of Technology
25. University of Florida
26. University of California at Davis
27. Washington University St. Louis
28. University of Southern California
29. Northwestern University
30. University of Texas at Austin

Percentage of International Collaborators on Publications Affiliated with the NFS HERD Top 30
In the early summer of 2016, Penn State University and Huron Consulting Group began to look at the benchmarks appropriate for assessing international research. Because joint presentations with international collaborators is a metric used by some ranking systems (Buela-Casal et al, 2007), the team decided to use SciVal’s collaboration tool to look at the frequency that collaborative publications attributed to any specific institution include international co-authors (expressed as a percent of total publications by affiliated institutional authors) as a reasonable metric of international activity. As an initial benchmarking exercise, this metric was assessed for the top 30 institutions in the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) 2015 Higher Education Research and Development Survey (HERD). The results showed that the frequencies of foreign collaborators on publications attributed to authors at these institutions ranged from 19% - 46%; however, there was no correlation between these frequencies and the institutional ranking by expenditure level (Figure 3). With this finding in hand, the team decided to conduct a survey to determine what if any other institutional variables might correlate with enhancing this metric of international research activity.

**METHODS**

A survey was designed to collect metrics and characteristics that define research-intensive institutions interested in advancing international research. The survey included questions on: 1) total research awards, 2) awards from Non-U.S. agencies, 3) material transfer agreements (MTAs), 4) subawards given to non-U.S. based entities, 5) space lease agreements with non-U.S. based entities, 6) internal financial and infrastructure information, and 7) signature and approval levels for international agreements.

For each responding institution, our team collected complementary data from multiple sources including the HERD, USA Spending, SciVal, and the U.S. Patent and Trade database. The data from those sources was analyzed for correlations between research funding success and activities being completed with funding agencies outside of the U.S.

**RESULTS**

Sixteen institutions responded to the survey with extensive details of their institutional activities. Fourteen of these respondents were institutions of higher education with sponsored program expenditures (as reported in the 2015 HERD) in the ranges reflected in Figure 4. Two respondents were not organizations having expenditure reports included in the HERD.
One metric our team used to measure the research collaboration with foreign entities was the processing of MTAs. The number of contracts processed that govern the transfer of tangible research materials with a non-U.S. based institution is correlated to the volume of international research partnerships.

The average number of MTAs issued by participant institutions is demonstrated in Table 1. While there is no trend over the last five (5) years, our respondents’ results show a significant number of MTAs with international collaborators and make it clear that our respondents have the knowledge and infrastructure to process and track these types of agreements. It is important to keep in mind that these numbers may be compounded by materials purchased from businesses and not representing established research collaborations.

When considering sponsored programs, our survey focused on funding from non-U.S. sponsors. We found that while the percent of foreign awards over all awards is less than 3%, funding from international sponsors is on the rise among our respondents as reflected in Table 2. Table 3 shows that faculty from our survey respondents with foreign awards is also trending upwards. This suggests our institutions should keep a close eye on the number of resources knowledgeable in international law, risks, and research compliance to adequately support growth in the number of grants and contracts from non-U.S. sponsors.

Another metric our team used to measure collaborations with international investigators focused more on the programmatic research outcomes. International research projects or studies accordingly may result in joint patents with non-U.S. based inventors.
Our findings show that on average, 16% of our respondent's patents include a foreign inventor (Table 4). Our survey also lightly explored the internal funding and resources available at our respondents' institutions in support of international research activity. Table 5 reflects our respondents' institutions and their frequencies. Two of every three institutions (67%) have internally funded opportunities (e.g., Global Research Fund) to support international collaborations.

CONCLUSIONS
1. Survey data indicates a trend of steady increase in percentage of foreign awards as compared to all awards over the survey period (2011-2015). This conclusion is supported by Table 2. Because the data are normalized across institutions by being reported as a percentage of their entire award base, the increase may seem small. The significance of this increase over time and the adequacy of corresponding administrative support services may be a factor of interest for further study.

2. Co-authored publications are a readily obtainable metric of international research activity. Several commercially-available publication databases provide easily accessible metrics on the number of publications having authors at more than one institution, with the corresponding ability to sort the corresponding data by home institution and corresponding country of each author. This enables institutions to easily monitor this metric over time as a measure of international research activities at specific U.S. institutions.

3. A significant percentage of U.S. patents includes a non-U.S. based inventor. One out of every six U.S. patents (16%) includes one or more foreign collaborators. This statistic demonstrates the value of U.S. based investigators having teams with diverse and international resources and knowledge.

4. Preliminary data suggests a weak correlation between institutional research expenditures and the number of papers being published with foreign collaborators. An analysis by institutions of the relationship between FY 15 research expenditures (as reported to the NSF) and the percent of collaborative publications with international co-authors (as determined by using Scival) provides a correlation of $R^2 = 0.493$, arguably suggesting that institutions with larger expenditures have greater capacities to support international activities (Figure 5). One smaller institution (red circle) has a record of international co-authors that falls more than two standard deviation units above the mean (43.5% versus the average of 30.5%) and, thus, may be a target for further evaluation to determine if any unique attributes might be associated with the higher value of this specific metric. While the recommendation for the creation of an Institutional International Research Navigator position was not queried by this survey, the complexities described above point to the importance of such a function – whether formal or informal – to support faculty in their international research endeavors.

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NOTES:
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References:


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Schoolchildren in Singapore are learning mathematics through a teaching method called productive failure, in which they are presented with unfamiliar mathematical concepts and asked to work through them. Students receive no prior instruction in the formulas they are asked to solve, they are not shown the solution until after they have tried to discover it for themselves—and they significantly outperform students who learn mathematics from traditional teaching methods. The researcher behind the productive failure method hypothesizes that “struggle activates parts of the brain that trigger deeper learning,” and that “floundering first elevates the learning from knowing a formula to understanding it, and applying it in unfamiliar contexts” (Anderson, 2015).

The concept behind productive failure is simple: We learn from our mistakes. This is true in algebra class and in research administration alike. Like the Singaporean schoolchildren, many research administrators receive little to no formal training before we are asked to solve complex problems, and we make many mistakes on the path to proficiency. But unlike those students, we are not participating in a classroom learning experiment. Our mistakes have very real negative consequences for those who depend on us to do our jobs well. Principal investigators can’t explore their research ideas if their proposals are returned without review. Graduate students
need fellowships to fund the hands-on research experiences that complete their education. Postdoctoral researchers and staff members often lose their jobs outright if awards aren’t renewed. When the stakes are so high, it’s hard not to feel awful when you make a mistake, no matter how small.

If you’re lucky, you’re surrounded by experienced colleagues and understanding supervisors who can mentor and support you, and who can build you up with positivity and encouragement so you can fight through the bad days that leave you wishing you had never heard of the weird little field of research administration. Unfortunately, not all work cultures provide a supportive environment to learn from mistakes. In his TED Talk, emergency room physician Dr. Brian Goldman criticizes medicine’s toxic “culture of denial” around the inevitable mistakes made by even the best doctors. When your work is literally a matter of life or death, there is intense pressure to be perfect, but Dr. Goldman argues that this pressure is enormously counterproductive because it prevents doctors from acknowledging their failures and using them to learn and improve. After observing the negative effects of unrealistic perfectionism on himself, his colleagues, and his patients, he did something about it: He started talking about his own mistakes. This small act had an enormous effect on his colleagues as they finally felt free to talk about their own failures.

“They want to share their stories. They want to be able to say, ‘look, don’t make the same mistake I did.’ What they need is an environment to be able to do that. What they need is a redefined medical culture, and it starts with one physician at a time. The redefined physician is human, knows she’s human, accepts it, isn’t proud of making mistakes, but strives to learn one thing from what happened that she can teach to somebody else. She shares her experience with others. She’s supportive when other people talk about their mistakes, not in a ‘gotcha’ way, but in a loving, supportive way so that everybody can benefit. And she works in a culture of medicine that acknowledges that human beings run the system, and when human beings run the system, they will make mistakes from time to time” (Goldman, 2011).

It’s difficult, if not impossible, to improve at any task without identifying and learning from mistakes. A productive work environment acknowledges the value of mistakes in the process of continuous improvement. So, what can you do to foster a positive work culture that will enable the next generation of research administrators to struggle, persist, and develop the resilience they need to be successful in this challenging career?

If you’re a supervisor, you have the biggest influence on your office’s culture, and it is your responsibility to provide a supportive environment for your staff to learn and grow. The most important thing you can do is to lead by example: Start talking about being wrong. You make mistakes, and your employees absolutely see them, even if you don’t acknowledge them. Refusing to address and take responsibility for your mistakes may impress your own boss, but you will lose the respect of your staff, and they will follow your example by denying their errors and avoiding responsibility.

Although work ultimately needs to be done accurately, you can also take an honest look at how you correct your staff. When they make mistakes, do you take the time to educate them, or do you point out their errors only to criticize? When the heat is on and their slip-up has upset a principal investigator, do you protect them, or do you throw them under the bus to protect yourself? If the work environment is punitive and overly critical, it is not safe for your staff to speak up about their mistakes, so they won’t—and they won’t learn, either.

If you’re an experienced research administrator, you are in the best position to mentor your greener colleagues and help them overcome their mistakes to become proficient in the field. Mentorship is rewarding but time-intensive, and in our high-volume, deadline-driven profession, you may be reluctant to help someone else with their work problems while you struggle to manage your own. Resist the urge to shut your door to dive into your overflowing pile of emails and consider making yourself more available to those who come to you for help because they value your insight and advice. Provide a friendly ear and a safe space for coworkers to let their guard down and work through their mistakes with you. Your time investment will help create an office full of confident, efficient colleagues who will make fewer mistakes—and that makes your work life easier in the long run.

Unfortunately, in any work environment, some view success as a finite resource that they try to keep all for themselves, and these people are in constant competition with their coworkers (and are probably deeply unpopular at office parties). They are convinced that their coworkers make many errors while they themselves make none, and they love to draw attention to the mistakes of others to make themselves look superior, especially if the boss is watching. If you are competing instead of collaborating, not only are you a toxic coworker, but you are missing a huge opportunity to develop the leadership and interpersonal skills that could take your career to the next level.

If you’re a new research administrator, you can be proactive and positive about your own career development. Find a good mentor who is invested in your professional growth. (You may need to look for this person outside your own institution, and the NCURA community can help you make those connections.) Avoid people who berate you with your errors and seek out those who help you understand them. Remember that failed experiments and wrong hypotheses are an essential part of the scientific discoveries that your work enables (Firestein, 2015). Acknowledge your mistakes, but don’t dwell on them. Learn from your mistakes, and share what you’ve learned. Don’t become part of a “culture of denial” that makes it harder for you—and those who come after you—to be successful in the field of research administration.

References:

Jennifer L. Webster, MA, CRA and experienced mistake-maker, is a member of the Research Development Team at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She provides capture management and proposal development services that support large-scale or strategically significant research opportunities and increased federal agency engagement. For those in need of encouragement, sympathy, or a good strong drink, she can be reached at jwebster@utk.edu
For better or for worse—I lean toward for worse—most of my communication with colleagues takes place over email. The time difference between our Midwestern and Middle East campuses explains why I email my Evanston colleagues (though this is hardly a justification for every email sent among Doha-based colleagues, who are at most a staircase away). The compliance regulations for our primary funder require that questions about awards be resolved through the written record of an online ticketing system, rather than a phone call. Moreover, the ease of asynchronous communication with a faculty member who may or may not be working from home or in the classroom at any given moment leads to even more .eml files for the archive.

One could easily look at a pattern in emails from a senior administrator and link their brief and fast emails with a Sent from my iPhone signature to their packed schedules. However, what does a body of emails to and from multiple people within an organization, or more broadly, within a specific cultural context (primarily expatriate university faculty and staff operating in Qatar) tell us? “When inboxes are gathered, cracked open, and studied,” Heller (2017) writes, “they become a searchable, sortable atlas for the contours of our social minds” (para. 3).

An admittedly unscientific dive into my own email inbox and outbox reveals several patterns, which I outline here not simply for their revelatory value, but more importantly, for their communication value.

First, pretty much everyone except Americans are exceedingly formal and polite in their email communication in Qatar. Emails often begin not just with Dear, but with Dear Respected, and titles are routinely used alongside a first name, such as Dr. Darius or Ms. Meg. Additionally, emails are often peppered with variations of the word kind: Kindly be reminded, kind regards, and we kindly request, for example. I’ll admit that if I were in a strictly American context, I would roll my eyes at the obsequiousness of my correspondents, but in as diverse a cultural context as the one we all work in, and the tone-deafness inherent to the email medium, I not only understand the overreliance on formality, but I now also champion it! If you take the email medium at face value—which is an effective communication technique in and of itself—then better to be too polite and honorific, than not enough.

Second, more often than not, an email correspondent will include a pleasantry or additional salutation before digging into the business at hand. I hope you are enjoying your summer precedes We need to resolve the outstanding
issue of invoicing on your subaward. While my American instincts would skip that initial pleasantries, I’ve begun to quite enjoy that part of the correspondence. It serves as a written pause, a metaphorical deep breath that offers restorative power and reminds us of our lives outside of the workplace. With as much time as any one of us spends staring at our Outlook interfaces, that reminder is well received.

Third, regardless of cultural or linguistic background, organization is not highly valued in written email communication, which I attribute to two factors. Writing well is not a skill everyone learns. But everyone writes email. In addition, email writers do not look to etiquette cues from formal letter writing, but instead, to speech. And we tend not to consider organization in our spoken communication in the same way we might in our written communication (Lancaster, 2010).

I love sending emails with bulleted lists and multiple paragraph breaks, but I fear those nuances fall on deaf eyes, as responses won’t follow the same organizational structure or perhaps they ignore certain points altogether. It can be easy to simply bemoan the correspondent’s email inequities, but that doesn’t contribute to the ultimate goal of effective communication. Instead of sending one email containing multiple items, I could instead pick up the phone and begin a conversation by saying, ‘There are four specific things I want to discuss.’ Though if the list is four items long, an in-person meeting (when feasible) is an even better alternative.

Finally, only Americans use baseball idioms. We really need to cry foul on this practice. English is very idiomatic, of course, but native English speakers tend to forget the cultural specificity of those idioms and that for even a fluent bilingual English speaker, these idioms can really feel like they’re coming out of left field.

My biggest takeaway from this exercise has been reexamining the effectiveness of my own email communication. I was trained as a journalist and academic before I shifted into research administration, and I have always assumed my writing skills would continue to be a strength in this new field. Interestingly, the daily communication of email turns out to be an area where this isn’t the case. I can (and do, I’ll admit) write as many well-organized, researched emails with solid leads and plenty of citations as I want, but the truth is that recipients probably won’t read them. Though email is a written medium, it doesn’t serve the same purpose as a news article or a scholarly paper, and I need to adapt my technique accordingly. But I’ll always begin with, ‘I hope you’re doing well and enjoying your summer.’

References:

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How Much Information is
TOO MUCH, or Too Little?

A Practical Primer on Deciding What to Communicate and With Whom

This article focuses on communication at all levels and deals with the question of how much information might actually be too much, while also ensuring the information needed is included. In this day of ever-growing, rapid communication as well as the many available forms of communication, it sometimes becomes daunting to deal with the amount of information thrown at us at any given moment. This makes our jobs as research administrators more difficult, since we are dealing not only with daily transactional work and meeting deadlines, but also keeping up-to-date on new federal regulations, university policies and procedures, updates and timely news about research, compliance, and other relevant information.
In researching this article, the most common term resulting from online searches was “information overload,” a term popularized by Alvin Toffler in his 1970 book, Future Shock. This term continues to be quite relevant, especially with the multitude of electronic tools available and how connected we remain at all times of the day, mostly via mobile devices. There exists the expectation, now more than ever before, to be available and responsive at any given time. Some organizations, however, do a better job of ensuring their employees disconnect than others.

Regarding information overload in research administration, I will share my experiences at different levels within my organization. In my current role in the department, I am sometimes at the receiving end of information overload from faculty and research staff who occasionally provide far too much information about their proposed or ongoing projects than what is beneficial for me to efficiently do the job at hand. However, other faculty and staff do the opposite; they do not provide enough information and expect me to anticipate and facilitate their administrative needs without the full understanding of what actions are needed. It is usually an honest mistake when too little information is provided. The research staff are not purposely withholding information.

For my communication outward, I occasionally struggle with how much information to share with my Dean’s office and central office in order to avoid information overload on the person reviewing the transaction I need done. Similar to many organizations, my institution requires a budget, budget justification, and scope of work reduced the number of proposals that required follow up. However, situations still arise where someone may need more information to understand what exactly is involved with a project to be more effective at administering a grant or contract.

There is no great cheat sheet on what information to include or exclude but often more information is better than less. However, you do not want to create a situation of information overload, so it is wise to use your best judgment. Consider phoning and talking to the person who may be receiving the information. We are often too quick to use all the available electronic communication tools (e.g., email) and sometimes forget that phone or face-to-face communication can often expedite and more effectively explain what we need.

Lastly, your institution may have a similar policy requiring specific information such as budget and scope of work and possibly a checklist or other routing documents on all records that require institutional approval. Be sure to check with your institutional officials to understand what may be required to eliminate confusion, especially in larger institutions. More centralized smaller institutions may have less issues with too much or too little information but more difficulty understanding the scope of the project from the PI and research staff. They, too, may struggle with knowing the appropriate level of information to maintain and communicate outward.

In summary, it is a matter of knowing your institution’s needs and requirements, understanding the scope of the project and the sponsor’s requirements, and using your best judgment about what to communicate and when. New research administrators may need to schedule some time with their central office to gain a sense of the appropriate level of information to communicate. More seasoned research administrators should keep up with changes to internal policies and procedures to ensure they are including the necessary information to minimize follow up. Communication is one of the most important aspects of our roles as research administrators. Understanding what to communicate and when is important in making us effective communicators.

References:

Aaron Crandall is the Department Research Manager for the Department of Population Health Sciences in the School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has been in research administration at different levels for nearly fourteen years. You can contact him at aaron.crandall@wisc.edu
Let me start by posing a few project management questions for you, just for consideration, and then let’s talk about your question from a leadership coaching perspective:

A Matter of Project Management?
Does your business process redesign project have a charter and mission, including discussion of how to judge progress, listing commitments of leaders to provide people and money and time to ensure that project succeeds? Have your institutional commitments been kept and has the vendor kept theirs?

It is not quite clear how long the project has been going, but I assume it has been in place for less than a year. We also do not know the full scope of the project, whether it has phases, milestones, etc. Have you considered reviewing the original documentation as part of your fact-finding prior to recommending anything? Were the challenges that you are experiencing anticipated in some way?

How have you and others kept aware of the project and its ups and downs? According to regular schedule, periodically? Is project communication sufficient?

How have team members been trained, and how solid is the training?

Have you used your NCURA network to discover the paths and journeys most colleges and universities have undergone to create and implement new business systems? If so, how unique and similar is your campus’s journey?

A Matter of Leadership?
Your question reminds me of a quote that I saw recently, and paraphrased, it goes something like this: “Working hard at something you dislike is called stress; working hard at something you love is called passion.” Think of this quote in terms of leadership. Think of this quote in terms of the inevitable good days and bad days of large project systems implementations. How can you reframe some of the project management challenges in ways that move your team, and yourself, forward emotionally? Just asking, but, is it possible that things are not as bad as you may be perceiving? There may, indeed, be some fatal flaw in project design and in the vendor’s product… but this seems to be not highly probable.

What has been the experience with meetings on the project? Have there been no accomplishments? And, have accomplishments been celebrated in some way?

This is just to caution you, and others working with you, to the tendency to catastrophize, which means, roughly, to play out every fact, setback, challenge as signifying ultimate failure of the project. This is not to suggest that you or others be Pollyanna (that everything is great all the time and the world of the project proceeds with all green lights and happy faces). It’s actually about developing an operating style that will help this project succeed. What is that style that you believe needs to be in place? Cool, calm, and collected? Angry, disillusioned, and unhappy? Think about creating a motto or saying as a team that describes your values and describing operating style. For example, each problem we solve is one step closer to finishing our project successfully! (You’ll come up with better examples). I invite readers of this column to suggest additional motto!

Ask yourself: How is objective truth obtained and reported about the project? How are problems presented and received? Are these presented with possible solutions and approaches? Alternatively, are they presented at your doorstep with an expectation that you will solve them? When there are setbacks, what is your philosophy and the team’s in responding so that setbacks are addressed and corrected? How are the “messengers” of challenging news treated and respected?

What are you expecting of yourself as a leader of this project? When you are done, how do you want to describe yourself as a leader? What actions, words do you use to describe your better nature in leading this endeavor? Is this project part of legacy that you believe is important for your university and function, and for yourself? You may want to keep a journal to help you gauge project progress, to keep yourself balanced and forward-moving and to see the ups and downs for what they likely are: Temporary moments of reaction and creation.

Or, perhaps as Billy Joel might have written, to paraphrase “Summer, Highland Falls,” one of my favorite songs: It’s neither sadness nor euphoria. It’s just the ups and downs of a project.

Do you have a leadership question? Send questions to me at the email below. Thank you to those who have sent questions and comments!

Garry Sanders is an executive coach and graduate of Georgetown University’s Certificate Program in Leadership Coaching. Garry is a long-time research administrator and recipient of NCURA’s Distinguished Service Award. He can be reached at gsanders@assistleadership.com and (518) 588-0992.
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Communication Through the Lens of Student Recruiting Perspectives

By Yuuki Guzmán
Many of the readers are working as university research administrators (URAs), and have a lot of opportunities to communicate with faculty, students, and other university community members on a daily basis. I am currently working as a student recruiter under the Dean of the Graduate School, where I spend most of my time communicating with prospective students who are considering Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST) as their destination to earn their PhD. As a student recruiter, I will share some of the communication techniques my team uses, especially in social media, to connect and network with people outside of the university to achieve my team goal: Attracting bright student candidates to apply for our PhD program. Some techniques proved successful, but some still need improvements.

Welcome to OIST!
Before introducing any activity about my work and how I use “communication” in different settings as a student recruiter, I must provide a brief background about the institution that I proudly work for: OIST. The university began offering its interdisciplinary, fully funded PhD program in November 2011, with a mission to “conduct internationally outstanding education and research in science and technology.”

OIST is still very young; however, that is no reason to stop us from setting ambitious goals and establishing an international hub of scientists. Since its foundation, OIST has been drastically increasing the number of faculty and students, while simultaneously expanding campus facilities and laboratories. After five years of commitment and determination, OIST now stands on the brink of sending out the very first batch of successful graduates next year, hoping soon to share the result of the quality of education that we provide to our students.

In contrast to this exciting start, OIST also faces various obstacles as a new university. One of them is communicating and connecting with young talented students who are not aware of our PhD program. That’s where my team comes in. As a university that only takes about 40 students per year, the student recruiting team is assigned to find the top PhD candidates who would be fit to become the heart of the university. The student recruiting team attempts to connect with undergraduate and graduate students in and out of Japan, using both indirect and direct communication methods.

#SocialMedia @oistgradschool
University administrators can no longer ignore social media as an essential tool of communication today. When I first joined OIST in 2015, however, the Graduate School had no medium to interact with people through social media. To be more precise, the university had official Facebook and Twitter accounts that were managed by the Community and Public Relations (CPR) section, a group of communication and media experts. Yet, the way CPR operated Facebook and Twitter was somewhat different from the way the student recruiting team anticipated.

For example, the official OIST Twitter account often tweets formal topics that concern campus-wide matters, such as the announcement of new research publications, campus visits by important guests, OIST exhibition and concert news, etc. These are great examples to demonstrate university
activities, and should be shared with public worldwide. However, what the Graduate School wants to exhibit are more live illustrations of our student life and activities, or events and workshops that are organized by the Graduate School. From a curious candidate’s perspective, perhaps it would be more interesting to highlight student-specific topics of the Graduate School, so the candidate could visualize what it is like to be a PhD student at OIST. Moreover, we prefer to interact with our audience more informally, so they can approach and communicate to us in a casual manner.

As a result, after months-long discussions with the media section, the student recruiting team was granted to set up independent Graduate School social media accounts. Today, my team manages Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts to reach out to potential candidates across the world. So far, the Facebook account has the largest viewership and it is usually used to advertise Graduate School events, workshops, or admissions application deadlines. On the other hand, Twitter is currently being used as a casual platform to post our students’ daily activities or random trivial facts about OIST. The primary student recruiter in charge of the Graduate School Twitter account tweets with a frank tone of voice, often expressing her emotions with emoji. Lastly, Instagram serves the purpose to introduce OIST campus-wide activities, as well as Okinawa in general. For many, Okinawa is still recognized as the island of mystery. I could write books about its pristine natural beauty and breathtaking ocean, and all the entertainment and cultural activities that happen within. But Instagram allows me to simplify the process, illustrating Okinawa by snapping a photo and uploading it to share with the followers. An image speaks 1,000 words, and it is a waste not to take advantage of this useful social media tool.

Potential students could look for university statistics and images on the official website, but OIST offers so much more than just cutting-edge facility and research equipment. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow us to select different social media channels to strategically feed specific information towards our target audience.

**Workshop: A Communication Tool That Does All Communications**

One of the benefits of social media is that a post can be delivered to masses instantly. It’s fast and convenient. At the same time, however, digital communication can be shallow, and sometimes lacks a sense of human touch. In the end, the impact of face-to-face communication lasts longer in one’s memory, because interpersonal dialogue and experiences transfer more emotions and subtle nuances that are unique to each conversation.

We don’t expect an individual to apply to our graduate program simply by viewing our social media feeds. Social media is only an instrument to spread awareness and make the initial impression of OIST. But to provide the full experience of the university, we take careful measures to invest time in meeting young scientists in person and establish positive relationships. One of the ways to make this possible is organizing a workshop.

As a second strategy in student recruiting, a workshop serves as a direct recruitment opportunity where the organizer has the power to shape and structure its format and encourage interactions with participants. Every year, OIST’s Graduate School holds a week-long science workshop called the OIST Science Challenge. About 30 undergraduate and graduate students from different science disciplines are selected and invited to Okinawa, where they engage in a series of science lectures, discussions and experiments at OIST.

Fortunately, OIST showcases an extremely international campus. Our faculty, postdocs, students, and university administrators represent more than 50 different countries and regions worldwide. This is a tremendous advantage for student recruitment activities, such as the Science Challenge. What diversity brings is a unique identity of OIST research communication style. That is, although located in Japan, OIST is not defined by one dominant culture. Every member of OIST is to be treated equally, and forming hierarchical structures is strongly discouraged. As a consequence, people across different regions and scientific backgrounds openly welcome new members to campus, fostering interdisciplinary research ideas. This concept is still quite innovative in Japan, and difficult to express in words. Therefore, visiting OIST campus during a workshop and meeting our community conveys far more information than trying to publish a story in a magazine or online.

By actually seeing the OIST campus, people will soon realize the full potentials of this fascinating research institution fully equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and research facility. More importantly, having an active conversation with someone creates a unique experience that will last
longer than information sharing online. That is why the Graduate School student recruiting team particularly favors the traditional face-to-face communication method, which is more ideal than working with an agency or advertising companies to find the right candidates for our PhD program.

Final Words
No university is identical to the other, and thus every university has its own unique way of communication within and outside of the institution. Also, the definition of “communication” keeps evolving as technology and digital presence rapidly reshape the way people interact. Therefore, as a student recruiter representing the OIST Graduate School, I must stay up to date to understand how people define it to “communicate” and continue to explore new ways to connect and share ideas with potential student candidates as well as other research university administrators across the world.

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In June 2017, I travelled to Accra, Ghana, to represent NCURA at the 14th General Conference and Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Association of African Universities (AAU). AAU supports networking among 386 African higher education member institutions and external stakeholders to improve the quality of teaching, research, information exchange, and collaboration. NCURA and AAU have been discussing a number of partnership opportunities, including webinars and in-person workshops. Presenting at the conference was an opportunity to continue this partnership conversation. The theme of the conference was AAU@50: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects for Sustainable Development in Africa.

Almost 500 individuals from 40 countries participated, representing academia (many of them chancellors and vice-rectors), industry, governments, and development partner communities. In his opening remarks, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana, implored AAU members to engage more with the private sector, government, and development agencies. He encouraged them to appoint members to university advisory boards, and to develop goals that emphasize youth development, inclusive and equitable education, good governance, and accountability in education management. Over the four days of the conference, plenary sessions and panel discussions focused on five key higher education sub-themes:

1. **Promoting science, technology and innovation (STI) through higher education.** The African Union’s (AU) Agenda 2063, a strategic framework for the socioeconomic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years, emphasizes that Africa’s continuous growth, competitiveness, and economic transformation requires sustained investment in new technologies and continuous innovation in areas such as agriculture, clean energy, education, and health. The creation and transfer of scientific knowledge are critical to building and sustaining socioeconomic welfare and integration in the global economy. In the long run, no region or nation can remain a simple “user” of new knowledge, but must also become a “creator” of new knowledge. Closing the innovation gap is a necessary role of universities; innovation and technology transfer must become as important as teaching and research. Researchers must learn to communicate research results in non-technical terms; institutions must consistently collect and report data at national levels; and standards and guidelines for quality assurance must be development and implemented. Investment in STI in Africa remains low, ranging between 0.20% and 0.48% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2012, only three African countries—Malawi, Uganda, and South Africa—had fulfilled the 1% GDP allocation stipulation of the African Academy of Sciences. Because of this, higher education institutions continually underperform with respect to innovations that can build and sustain Africa’s socioeconomic welfare and integration into the global economy.

   Our panel offered a number of suggestions to advance STI: Leveraging university-industry-government linkages to raise needed investment for innovation centers and mentorship; allocating resources for universities to support trained research administrators as innovation intermediaries; providing effective protection of intellectual property rights; and improving feedback between universities and industries to drive innovation in areas of need. Additionally, we recommended that the AAU take the lead in identifying the indigenous technology and ‘frontier science’ that Africa can pursue through regional groupings to optimize research infrastructure.

2. **Curriculum reform as key to graduate employability and entrepreneurship.** Africa has about 20 million students in its higher education system (on average around 8% of its population), studying in around 2,000 institutions. Estimates are that for Sub-Saharan Africa, that figure will rise by 11 million students per year, requiring support of an additional 40-50,000 new institutions. Universities and colleges are resource poor (many do not have internet access) and are struggling to finance the demand for higher
education. There is little investment in research and innovation, particularly in high priority areas such as agriculture, natural resources, applied sciences, health sciences, engineering and technology, thus limiting capacity to integrate into the global knowledge networks and meaningfully contribute to Africa’s development.

Panelists focused on solutions such as how curriculum reforms can foster employability skills, and how entrepreneurship can result in new sources of institutional revenue. Thinking outside the box, leadership, creativity, communication, and team building were highlighted as crucial employability skills. The panel suggested that higher education institutions in Africa should establish entrepreneurial incubators, offer graduate programs that have practical components with clearly defined competencies, and apply ‘research for relevance’ (changing lives in the community) as a key criterion for funding research proposals.

Conference participants acknowledged that to compete with the developed world, Africa needs to educate its youth to use new technologies, develop new skills and tools, and promote job creation and entrepreneurship. There are insufficient well-trained teachers in the relevant disciplines, and industry feedback indicates that students are not being prepared for employment. In fact, half of university graduates in the region are not expected to find employment in the formal economy after graduation. As a side note, the term “informal sector” was coined in Ghana in 1971 by a British anthropologist who was studying the economic activities of low-income communities in Accra. The informal economy, as it is now called and defined, is comprised of self-employment in small unregistered enterprises and wage employment in unregulated and unprotected jobs. In Ghana today, informal employment represents more than 90% of total employment. Even with my limited travel in Ghana, this was easily apparent to me. In developing countries, informal employment comprises one half to three quarters of non-agricultural employment. In Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa, informal employment comprises nearly 80% of non-agricultural employment.

3. The role of higher education in managing the environment. Africa is dealing with many environmental challenges — severe air and water pollution, vast deforestation, reckless natural resource extraction and chemical and waste disposal, massive erosion, hazardous emissions, and mismanagement of wildlife. Discussions urged all African higher education administrators to work towards making their institutions ‘green campuses’ by ensuring that their infrastructures are (re)built in an environmentally sustainable way, and to consider how institutional policies are dealing with climate change. There are limited research and resources devoted to climate change research. People living in poverty are particularly susceptible to environmental hazards like flood, drought, pest attack on crops and livestock, and loss of biological resources. Higher education institutions could provide communities with access to training and information to expand the opportunities for people to invest in environmental improvements, as well as to expand their livelihood opportunities in a sustainable way and thereby reduce vulnerability to environmental hazards.

4. Higher education as a tool for promoting democratic governance. In the last decade, Africa has seen a surge in political pluralism, democratic governance, successful elections, and the decline in civil war. African higher education is expected to model and nurture the practice of good governance, conflict resolution, and respect for human rights. Higher education is the best space for promoting democratic governance. Discussions highlighted the differences between ‘democratic governance,’ ‘good governance,’ and ‘leadership.’ Student leadership and unions were cited as good examples of democratic governance. University administrators were urged to foster the capacity of students to learn and exercise the virtues of democratic values and human capital (political, religious, and cultural). Higher education

The creation and transfer of scientific knowledge are critical to building and sustaining socioeconomic welfare and integration in the global economy. In the long run, no region or nation can remain a simple “user” of new knowledge, but must also become a “creator” of new knowledge.
should play a role in investigating the type of democratic governance Africa needs in order to develop.

5. **Mobilizing resources for higher education in Africa.** Higher education is an expensive enterprise, requiring significant human, financial, logistical, and technical resources. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the pressure of having to simultaneously increase access to education and improve quality is heavier than in other regions. Further, there is the weak political will as well as the deflating effects of the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, the economic crisis of the mid-1990s, and the more recent international debt and resource crisis. Overlaying all of this is the ominous corruption that still pervades the continent. With resources not usually provided in sufficient amounts and in a regular or predictable manner, many African higher education institutions struggle to operate at an acceptable level of academic competence that is fitting for the competitive global knowledge economy of today. Discussions raised issues about how higher education administrators can leverage the expertise and entrepreneurial spirit within their institutions to generate significant finances for their operations. However, exclusive focus on revenue generation was recognized as being a potential risk that could detract from the research and education mission of universities (two institutions each own and manage a shopping mall as a revenue source, for example).

On the last afternoon of the conference, in the spirit of democratic governance, conference participants were tasked with reviewing and editing as a group the Conference Communique—a document that would carry forward the lessons learned from the conference urging AAU members to continue to be transformative and to collaborate more as a continent. In spite of the enormous challenges faced by higher education institutions in Africa, the conference closed on a positive forward-looking note. The strong closing message was that Africa should mobilize itself and not wait for recognition from other countries. ✨

Almost 500 individuals from 40 countries participated.

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**Gai Doran** is Director of Research for Yale University’s School of Forestry & Environmental Studies where she provides comprehensive grants management support to the School’s faculty, administrators, staff, and students. In 2016 she was selected as the NCURA/SARIMA Global Fellow to South Africa at the University of Witswatersrand. She volunteers for NCURA at both the regional and national levels. She is also Contributing Editor for NCURA Magazine. She can be reached at gai.doran@yale.edu

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How do you ship lizard DNA to Canada? Is it safe to do fieldwork in rural Kenya? How do we hire post-docs in Switzerland? Should we establish an office in India? As the volume and landscape of international research evolves, new challenges emerge. Traditional domestic approaches to these issues may not work abroad—at least not compliantly. The academic goals, however, must be accomplished, and thus the project forges on. So how do we communicate the nuances and tangled web of global operations across university departments?

In 2011, Harvard created Global Support Services (GSS) to address these challenges. We advise—and in some cases implement—solutions for international safety and security, operations, and entity establishment and administration across Harvard. Our mission is to assess and mitigate common international risks and find solutions that support and enable all 12 Harvard Schools’ international activities. Our role is to provide guidance, not be the final arbiter; each School decides how to proceed, which preserves School autonomy and respects the institution’s culture.

A Four-Step Communications Strategy

Working within Harvard’s decentralized structure, we developed a four-step communications strategy to build awareness among Harvard’s international program staff and travelers:

1. **Network, network, network.** Research doesn’t happen in a vacuum, and neither should its proposal and design. At Harvard, different offices address different aspects of a problem. For example, an export control administrator might be asked about shipments while a finance analyst is asked about international payments on the same project. A principal investigator will get answers, but often there are other aspects to address. In GSS, we focus on identifying and building relationships with the administrative personnel and offices that field these questions and facilitate research. This includes not only sponsored projects and research administration offices, but also human resources, finance, and environmental health and safety. These professionals frequently receive targeted questions (Is my shipment okay?) and then pass along the case to us for a broader look. Questions also flow in reverse, as we will refer a questionable equipment shipment to an export control officer for further review.

To supplement this network, we created several advisory committees composed of operational and faculty leaders from across the University. These committees meet regularly and help us remain aligned with the University’s and each School’s needs. They also play an important role in helping us develop, achieve buy-in for, and communicate new University-wide policies, such as student travel policies and an international hiring and payroll policy. Beyond our Harvard network, we’re part of a Global Operations Consortium with administrators from a dozen universities. We share international operations experiences, processes, and lessons learned over a listserv and at annual meetings.
2. Connect the dots. As a central administration department focused exclusively on international operations, we have insight into trends across the University, solutions that have worked, and emerging challenges in subject areas (e.g. hiring) and countries (e.g. India). Armed with this insight and our networks, we can take a comprehensive approach to questions and provide resources and connections for staff or researchers within their School or another School that has dealt with similar challenges. Because each Harvard School operates independently, the Medical School, for example, may not be aware of the Graduate School of Design’s activities, even if they’re operating in the same country. Our connections can lead to collaborations that make everyone’s job easier and sometimes more cost effective. We use Salesforce, a customer relationship management platform, to track case inquiries and resolutions so that we can build an institutional memory and facilitate these connections. For example, if a question emerges about employment in Argentina, we can easily search for groups who previously hired personnel in that location and review challenges and solutions so we’re not reinventing the wheel.

3. Build a portfolio of resources. Because our scope and audience are so broad, creating accessible and helpful resources is an ongoing priority. In 2015, we migrated our 40-page international program guidebook to a website making the information more accessible, integrated, and sharable. Having such a robust website also allows us to quickly adapt our guidance to respond to and advise on sudden changes in, say, U.S. immigration policy or the availability of cash in India. We update and add to the website annually, and we’ve used our contacts to get departments to link to our content from their websites and newsletters to increase awareness. We’ve also created checklists and short, topical guides and videos that we tout and distribute at our outreach events.

4. Have a ground game. As a small and relatively new office we have to think systematically about outreach. For students, we use our connections with student affairs offices and personnel to attend new student orientations in the fall and give pre-departure briefings ahead of peak overseas travel seasons. For faculty and staff, we engage human resources and faculty affairs personnel to insert our resources into orientations, trainings, and recurrent faculty or staff meetings. We’ve found it’s easier to integrate into existing meetings rather than schedule new ones. Each School has its own culture and administrative structure, so we tailor our approach accordingly and focus on those with large international research portfolios, often meeting with department administrators to share resources and understand their needs. To spread GSS’s broader message, we use our safety and security program—which is a major benefit to our travelers—as a hook. It’s an easy selling point to get our foot in the door to also discuss international operational challenges and resources that are less familiar and exciting. Other times, our specialized knowledge is the hook, and stakeholders ask us to present on a specific topic at their staff meetings to keep everyone current.

A recent case demonstrates how outreach translates into practical guidance for international research. We noticed a science department’s significant international research agenda and met with the department administrator to learn about their needs. Later, the administrator asked us to present on international safety, operations, and lab safety during a regularly-scheduled staff lunch. A few days later, researchers from the department contacted us with shipping questions about gas, equipment, and human specimens. After discussing the case, we worked with Harvard’s customs broker to identify a clearance agent in Kenya, the export control office to clear technical measurement equipment, and the environmental health and safety office and a specialized shipper to address the human specimen shipment. The specimen shipment was particularly challenging since it had to be frozen in rural Kenya and shipped frozen to the U.S. We also discussed hiring and road safety with the researchers to ensure all of their operational needs were met. The expedition occurred in June, and the team collected the data and specimens they needed to advance their research. Since then, we’ve consulted on other questions from the department. So one introductory phone call helped us to further a department’s international research while mitigating risks and showing our value to encourage future consultation.

Applying Our Strategy Elsewhere
While our examples and approach are unique to Harvard, there are broader approaches that any university could extrapolate:

1. Resources are available. NCURA conferences offer sessions that address these topics. Nearly all of our resources are on our website (globalsupport.harvard.edu); and similar offices at other universities (e.g. Boston University, Duke) also have excellent online resources.

2. Outreach is time-intensive, but invaluable. People can’t use your services if they don’t know about them. We’re all on email- and meeting-overload, and advertising to an internal audience is difficult. Getting on the agenda of regularly-scheduled meetings and using a standard presentation template or handout that can be easily tailored to a group saves valuable time.

3. Customer service is essential. This isn’t only showing value, but also setting the right expectations about the timing, process, and why you’re recommending a particular option. Empathy is important. Some solutions may be time-, money-, or resource-intensive, or may be unexpected. Demonstrating your understanding of both sides in how you communicate is essential to your success.

4. Ask the second question. If there’s one question or concern about a project, there are likely others. Connecting subject matter experts can help everyone do their job while aiding research administration.

5. Different universities need different models. Some universities may need a more centralized approach. Risk tolerances and ownership over decision making also vary by school. Examine your institutional culture, and start building a communication model that works for you and your audience.

“Examine your institutional culture, and start building a communication model that works for you and your audience.”

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The FD P’s new Chair is Dr. Richard (Dick) Seligman, Associate Vice President for Research Administration, California Institute of Technology, and the new Vice Chair is Dr. Michele Masucci, Vice President for Research, Temple University. This transition provides an opportunity for us to reflect on our initiatives and to share this information with colleagues in NCURA.

The 2018 Faculty Workload Survey is under development and scheduled for early next year. FD P member institutions are asked to take part and encourage their federally-funded researchers to participate in the survey. Survey results will help us update our assessment of the administrative demands placed on researchers and target which areas appear to be most in need of change. Our 2012 survey found that researchers reported an average of 42% of their time associated with federally-funded projects was spent on administration. This finding has been widely cited, including in reports on the need to reduce research administrative burden published by the Federation of Associations of Societies of Experimental Biology, the National Science Board, and the National Research Council.

These reports, in turn, have contributed to legislative efforts aimed at reducing administrative burdens in federally-funded research, including portions of the 21st Century CURES Act. The 2018 survey will provide a refined look at researchers’ views on the extent to which administrative responsibilities facilitate or impede the ability to conduct high integrity research. These data will be made available so that institutions, federal agencies, and other groups will be in a better position to determine how they can best support the research enterprise.

The Electronic Research Administration (eRA) Steering Committee actively supports FD P activities and initiatives in many important ways. Over the last year, eRA has actively worked with the Grants.gov Joint Application Development (JAD) group to provide input on applicant-facing aspects of Grants.gov. The JAD group meets regularly with Grants.gov and is developing a Workspace “best practices” guide, which should be a useful resource to many institutions.

The eRA has also been actively involved in activities related to the DATA Act. Together with the Open Government group, eRA has provided feedback to the DHHS Program Management Office (PMO) on the DATA Act Section 5 Grants Pilot, feedback from which will be reflected in the PMO’s report to Congress.

Another recent activity of the eRA Committee has been its engagement with the USDA to help provide feedback on the rollout of its ezFedGrants system. This system has been challenging for many institutions and it is expected that this cooperation will result in changes that will enable ezFedGrants to work more effectively for both USDA and universities.

The Research Administration Committee is composed of several active subcommittees and working groups. Two projects always of interest to research administrators are the subaward templates and tools and the expanded clearinghouse.

The Subawards Subcommittee continues to accomplish major milestones in reducing administrative burden related to issuing and negotiating sub-awards. The Subawards Templates are now updated annually by a working group dedicated to ensuring appropriate terms and conditions are included.
and that the templates are easy to complete. A crosswalk will be released this year to assist those institutions with systems that auto-generate FDP subaward documents.

The Guidance Document working group annually updates the Subawards FAQs, which assists the community on the use of the templates and outlines the expectations of FDP membership when negotiating subawards with one another. This past year, a working group began to focus on best practices related to the management of carryover for subrecipients. The resulting Carryover Guidance Document will provide best practices and options to Pass-Through Entities (PTEs) issuing subawards containing carryover funds and to subrecipients managing and negotiating carryover terms.

The Subawards Subcommittee also held free webinars on template revisions and FFATA best practices. Other working groups are updating the Risk Assessment Questionnaire (RAQ), the Foreign Subaward Templates, and the Subcontract Template.

The Expanded Clearinghouse Pilot was initiated to create a single-source for the institutional information necessary for PTEs to complete timely subrecipient monitoring and risk assessment, eliminating the need to send and collect various forms. Three cohorts of FDP member institutions, totaling 171 profiles, completed the entity profile, now an on-line process. The entity profile data includes demographic data, audit results, F&A rates, and other commonly required information. Pilot participants were encouraged to use the sample Letter of Intent that was developed for PTEs to gather transactional information while not duplicating data elements contained in the profile.

Pilot participants tracked their subaward activity with other pilot participants to measure the amount of administrative burden saved through the pilot. In just one 3-month tracking period, over 6,500 hours of administrative work was saved through use of the Expanded Clearinghouse. Having found clear benefits to having a centralized location for subrecipient reporting information, we plan to expand to the remaining FDP institutions containing carryover funds and to subrecipients managing and negotiating carryover terms.

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The Financial, Audit and Costing Committee has primarily operated through three working groups: Project Certification, Procurement, and Administrative Costs. Through these groups, university and federal partners work together to reduce administrative burden in the areas of costing, project certification, and procurement policies, without compromising accountability.

The focus in recent years has been on interpretation and implications of Uniform Guidance. For example, the committee analyzed procurement data from over 50 FDP institutions to demonstrate that the range of significant financial significance in procurement varies by the size and research intensity of each institution. This indicated that the micro purchase threshold in place when the UG was initially implemented was not likely appropriate for all institutions and that the proper balance between the number of transactions and dollar value of purchases should be further analyzed, possibly on an institution-by-institution basis.

The recent introduction of NIH’s Single Institutional Review Board (sIRB) requirement provided impetus for the Committee to explore ways to ensure sound costing methodologies to direct charge sIRB costs to appropriate studies. NIH and institutional representatives have worked together to analyze appropriate costing practices. Further, committee members are considering appropriate costing and direct charging principles for public data access requirements. This is in response to the 2013 directive from the Office of Science and Technology Policy to Federal research agencies to make the results of federally funded research freely available to the public, generally within one year of publication.

The Faculty and Compliance Committees continue to work together to explore opportunity for efficiency in a variety of areas. A group within the animal care subcommittee is planning on creating an online repository, the Compliance Unit Standard Procedure Sharing Site, where participating institutions can share within the animal welfare compliance community standard procedures to be used in animal care protocols.

Data collection for the IRB Wizard Pilot Project is complete and although evaluation of the findings is still in its initial phases, results thus far are promising, indicating that an investigator can use an automated system to determine exempt status, at least for a large subset of projects. Promising findings include the determination that of the 542 studies evaluated by both volunteer institution IRBs and the Wizard, there were fewer than 10% disagreements between the two and of those, approximately half indicated a less serious disagreement in which the Wizard judged the study non-exempt and referred it for additional IRB review, whereas the IRB judged the study exempt. Further analysis of the findings will take place before next steps are determined.

While Phase VI of the FDP is nearing its halfway point, plans are already under way for Phase VII, which begins in 2020. Information will be available well in advance for those institutions that are interested in applying for membership.

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### Management/Employee Expectations Ideas from a Pre-Award Office

#### What the Boss Expects from their Employees:
- Inform me of significant issues as they arise
- Brief me prior to meeting with others on sensitive issues
- Use common sense
- Think through a solution to the problem
- Challenge the process, appropriately
- Don’t take anything personally
- Be responsive and always do your best

#### What Employees Expect from the Boss:
- Actively listen to my issues and concerns
- “Let me do my work!” (Autonomy)
- Include me in problem-solving
- Be open to my feedback
- Communicate with me the boundaries and expectations
- Forgive my small mistakes
- Defend and support my decisions and work

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Cynthia Hope, Assistant Vice President for Research and Director of the Office for Sponsored Programs at the University of Alabama, is the Immediate Past Chair of the Federal Demonstration Partnership. She can be reached at chope@fa.ua.edu
At the very least, I would gain the experience of being on the other side of the grant application process by applying for my own award. I’d be able to find out for myself what it is really like to submit an application as a Principal Investigator. The fact that the fellowship was in Russia was also part of the allure. It had always been a dream of mine to stand in Red Square in Moscow, and perhaps there would be an opportunity to do so if I was successful. If I was selected as a fellow, this would allow me to really walk a mile in the shoes of the Principal Investigators, and complete a work plan stemming from an award. This would combine my personal passion for travel with a professional development experiment. I was excited to try and apply.

I began the process right after the opportunity was announced. I had four full weeks to apply. I read the online application closely. To apply, I would need to write a 5-page essay about what I envisioned the work plan of my fellowship to be, obtain a letter of commitment from my institutional leadership, and submit the online application form by 5 p.m. on Friday, December 15. I would also need to obtain travel approval from my supervisors, as the conditions of the grant specified that UMASS would need to cover any additional travel expenses above the $2,000 available from the grant. The University would need an idea of what their cost commitment would be, so I investigated hotel and flights costs online. I searched out the General Services Administration (GSA) travel rates for Moscow and St. Petersburg. While the host institution would be in either of these two cities, it would not be determined until an award was made. I ran low-end and mid-range pro-forma budgets for both cities. Costs to the University would only be in about the $1,800 range making this opportunity less expensive than attendance at a professional conference, which is how I tried to frame it to my supervisors. I began working on my essay in anticipation of approval.

Two days before the deadline, after much writing and editing, I had my essay ready to submit. I reread the online application and realized to my absolute horror, that I had misread the guidelines; the essay needed to be 500 words or less. Over the next day, I reworked my essay and honed it down with five words to spare! Finally...
confident that my essay was ready to submit, I was still waiting on the letter of institutional commitment requested some time previously. I think my supervisors were still ruminating on whether they should approve the trip, as travel at the University has been limited due to budget concerns. I finally did receive the letter on the morning of the due date. Five hours before the deadline, I finalized the online forms, and hit the submit button. Happily, I received an email confirmation that my proposal was complete and on time. With my proposal in for consideration, all I could do was wait until March, when the decisions would be announced. Regardless of the outcome, I was proud that I had tried.

However, I already had some lessons learned to share. It’s embarrassing to admit, but I should have been more careful in reading the guidelines. Letters of institutional commitment tend to take a long time to obtain and trying to submit an application is stressful. When I became a personal stakeholder in the process, I realized just how much so.

In March of 2017, I received an email from the NCURA/EF selection committee. While I was not selected to be the NCURA/EF Fellow, the committee was impressed with my application, and

“**If I was selected as a fellow, this would allow me to really walk a mile in the shoes of the Principal Investigators, and complete a work plan stemming from an award.**”

highly recommended that I apply for a Special Exchange Participants Fellowship, which is administered solely by Eurasia Foundation (EF). This was an invitation-only application, and the only way to be invited was to be chosen by the EF selection committee. Once I received the new proposal requirements, I had four days in which to apply. This application was shorter, and required a copy of my passport, which thankfully I had renewed in December in anticipation of a successful application. I also resubmitted the essay describing what I envisioned my fellowship would be.

**Lesson learned:** I had to act as though I believed I would get the award. I’d renewed my passport. Had I not, I would not have been prepared for the second application.

A week later, I received an email from EF asking what dates I would be available to travel to Russia. Though I knew this was not a formal award letter, I thought it a good sign of a forthcoming award. I spent the next 10 days in anticipation, until I received another email from EF asking “What about April 17-25 as travel dates? If the dates work, we’ll prepare your agreement form.” Once again, I needed to clear the exact dates for travel with my supervisors. It was agreed that these dates would work, so EF sent along the terms and conditions of the SEE Fellowship. The host school was determined. I would be going to my top choice of Schools: The Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences! The award documents were made out to me and not my institution, but my supervisors thought it prudent that the lawyer in the UMASS Export Control and Compliance Office review the terms and conditions. I had to keep postponing submission of the contract to EF until the contract had been redlined, and then that version was sent to EF. In the end, EF only accepted one edit, which was the contingency about receiving my visa to travel to Russia – if I didn’t receive it, then the contract would be null & void.

My supervisors also read through the final work plan that EF sent me, which was based on the essay I had written. I would send out a survey to my host institution on several research administration topics to determine the topics of most interest. I’d give presentations on the top three expected and is not always successful due to terms & conditions.

The next thing required for travel was to obtain a visa to travel to the Russian Federation. EF needed a letter of invitation from the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES). Once this was obtained, a humanitarian scientific exchange visa would be applied for with the assistance of a passport and visa company. I mailed my passport, Russian visa application, and a passport sized photo to the visa company. In the meantime, I tried to prepare written presentations in anticipation of the original expected travel date of April 19th. However, there was some delay in receiving my visa as the Russian Office of Immigration had a computer problem that affected their ability to accept a letter of invitation electronically. The departure dates were modified to the 21st, then the 22nd. When it was realized that my visa and passport wouldn’t reach my home via FedEx until late in the afternoon on Saturday the 22nd, thereby eliminating that day as a travel day, EF offered to fly me to Washington, DC on Friday the 21st, whereby the passport could be hand couriered to a Washington, DC location. I was amazed that instead of my passport being sent to me, I was being sent to my passport.

When I got to my DC hotel, my passport and the passport of my co-Fellow, Krista Ronzynskov of Stanford University, were waiting for me at the front desk. Until I had my passport back, I wasn’t 100% positive I would be flying overseas. I was also quite anxious that my passport had been out of my hands for so long. Passport in hand, I finally knew I was going to Russia! I met Krista as she was getting out of the taxi at the hotel. I knew she must have been as anxious as me to get her passport back, so I wanted to hand it to her as soon as she arrived.

**Lessons learned:** Even the best planned start dates can change due to unforeseen circumstances. Being flexible is a huge asset in working with sponsor agencies.

Monday, April 24 was our first business day in Russia. MSSES is in the university district of...
Moscow, and the hotel was within walking distance. On a cloudy brisk morning, we walked to MSSES to meet our host, Konstantin Kokarev, outside the campus. We would need to be on a guest list to get through the guard station and onto the School’s campus. Konstantin apologized that we were not yet on the guest list. We would have to wait until after 10 a.m. for the administrative office that issues guest passes to open. My fellow fellow Krista and I let Konstantin know, “It’s all right, we are flexible.” Konstantin said “No, it is not all right. Do you like coffee? Should we go get coffee?” We walked to Starbucks and chatted over caramel lattes while waiting for the passes. I realized that due to the visa delay, the schedule was not completely set, and I know challenges of trying to set meeting schedules. Shortly after 11 a.m., our passes arrived, and we went to Konstantin’s office on the 26th floor of the Administrative Building. Konstantin gave us a general overview of how MSSES was structured, and asked us our goals while in Russia. Krista and I agreed our respective work plans needed to be completed, which in my case was to give three presentations, administer surveys, take minutes and obtain meeting sign-in sheets. The next day, not knowing the schedule, I walked into what I thought was a meeting, until Konstantin turned to me and said “Ok, you can present now.” I presented the Power Point I had created the night before on “Roles and Responsibilities in the Research Endeavor at UMASS” and talked about the different services provided by offices such as Research and Development, the UMASS Innovation Institute, Research Compliance, the Research Business Manager Liaison Network, and the Office of Grant and Contract Administration. Presentations are less of a business technique in Russia than in the US. After each slide, Konstantin translated to the Russian faculty. After he translated, the faculty discussed and asked questions, which Konstantin then translated back to us. We answered and Konstantin translated back again. The Russian faculty seemed to be spirited in their discussion. While it seemed that the first presentation was going well in terms of the positive interaction with the faculty, I could not take minutes without being fluent in Russian. I had anticipated this prior to the trip, and had requested assistance from a student who might be able to take the minutes, but a student was not available. As I didn’t know I was presenting that morning, I also did not have my pre and post surveys. Without those, I would have no quantifiable data. Without quantifiable data, I now had no idea of what my article would be about. It certainly couldn’t be about how effective my teaching methods were. The faculty also changed their minds about which topics they wanted me to discuss. Instead of the topics provided in the survey I had sent, they now wanted to hear about our electronic systems for managing proposal data. I would have to write another Power Point presentation that night for presentation the next day. It was only the second day, I had jet lag, and I was becoming quite anxious about my work plan. I remembered my pro-forma budgets. I nervously emailed my EF contact after the presentation with an explanation of what had happened.

My EF contact was thankfully amenable to changes in the deliverables in the work plan. The other meetings I attended would count toward the deliverables in my work plan. I felt like the Program Officer wanted me to be successful.

**Lessons learned:** It is best to be in contact with the Program Officer if plans change, as they need to report on the success of their funding as well. Flexibility was a key in the successful interchange of ideas between American and Russian participants.

I had 10 meetings at MSSES that week. I met with Maria Neklyudova, Chair, Department of Cultural Studies and Social Communication. We talked about how publications by Russian academics need to be on a pre-approved list of acceptable journals known as the VAK list. She also indicated that she was teaching five classes, which in Russia is considered a half time teaching load. We met with Nikolai Grinster, Head of School of Advanced Studies and the Humanities, and discussed the requirements of reporting on research to the state sponsors, and that the reporting requirements kept changing from year to year.

We also had a meeting with Alexander Demidov, Supervisor of International Department at the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBH, formerly the Russian Foundation for Humanities). He discussed the process by which RFBH reviewed proposals they funded, which was a four step process: Two reviews by subject matter experts, one review of regional stakeholders, and one review by RFBH staff.

I also got to do some touring at nights after meetings, and I did make it to Red Square.

Once I got back to the States, I had my final report to write along with my promised publishable articles. The report took 14 hours to write, and the articles longer.

**Lessons Learned:** Accepting funding involves hours of writing to meet sponsor prescribed deadlines. This meant writing for entire weekends, multiple weekends in a row.

In the end, being a PI for the first time was an experiment. I now have insight into all of the work it takes to accept funding, and on what it takes to complete a work plan on a deadline.

### “Given all the work plan demands, the known stressors, and lessons I learned, I am amazed at all the PIs who continually seek grant funding.”

Given all the work plan demands, the known stressors, and lessons learned, I am amazed at all of the PI’s who continually seek grant funding.

This article was produced while the author participated as a special exchange participant, sponsored by the U.S. Russia Social Expertise Exchange. The program is administered by the Eurasia Foundation, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C.

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**References:**

NCURA-EF Fellowship Program Application Instructions (2016, November 17) from [www.ncura.edu/Global/NCURA-EFFellowshipProgram.aspx](http://www.ncura.edu/Global/NCURA-EFFellowshipProgram.aspx)

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**Kimberly Lowney, Pre-Award Grant & Contract Administrator at The University of Massachusetts Amherst, is also a graduate of The University of Massachusetts Amherst. Kim’s responsibilities at UMass include pre-award activities and training. She can be reached at klowney@research.umass.edu**
POLICY/REGULATION/COMPLIANCE NEWS:

Scientists praise energy innovation office Trump wants to shut down: The debate over the future of energy innovation in the United States was renewed on Tuesday when a panel convened by the National Academy of Sciences released an in-depth report praising a key research office that President Trump wants to eliminate. [source]

How NSF cut 11% from its budget: Last fall’s divisive presidential campaign was still underway when Jim Olds, who leads the biology directorate at the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Arlington, Virginia, began worrying that the agency could soon be facing a serious budget crunch. [source]

OMB disbands COFAR: The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has disbanded the Council on Financial Assistance Reform (COFAR), the interagency group created in 2011 to coordinate federal financial assistance and oversee the integration of uniform grant guidance, under a recent OMB memorandum to federal agencies aimed at reducing governmental burden. [source]

House Bill gives NIH 3% raise blocks cuts to overhead payments: The National Institutes of Health’s (NIH’s) budget would get a modest 3.2% raise, to $35.2 billion, in a draft spending bill released by a House of Representatives committee. [source]

INTERNATIONAL/GLOBAL:

King Baudouin Foundation awards 2016-2017 African Development Prize: The Brussels-based King Baudouin Foundation has announced the 2016-2017 winners of the King Baudouin African Development Prize. [source]

FP9, H2020 and the European Union: Europe’s next big science-funding programme urged to double its budget. [source]

AGENCY NEWS:

New Tutorials on Preparing and Submitting Your NIH Grant Application: New to the NIH grant process? Ever wish someone would explain and walk you through applying for NIH grants step by step? If so, we hope your newest resource will be the next best thing to joining you for an in-person lesson. [source]

Additional Change to the NIH/AHRQ/NIOSH Policy on Post-Submission Materials: [source]

FOIA and NIH “Proprietary Information”: How Does NIH Use the Proprietary Information Box on the Application? [source]

Say goodbye to legacy PDF: Grants.gov Workspace: Fast, Easy to Use and Secure. [source]

FUNDING NEWS:

Charitable giving increased 2.7% in 2016, ‘Giving USA’ Finds: Giving by individuals, corporations, and foundations totaled an estimated $390.05 billion in 2016, the latest edition of Giving USA reports. [source]

Gates Foundation announces latest ‘Grand Challenges’ Grants: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has announced grants totaling $2.8 million through its Grand Challenges Explorations initiative. [source]

TheDream.US Awards $30 Million in Scholarships to Immigrant Students: has announced scholarships totaling $30 million to more than twelve hundred undocumented immigrant college students - known as DREAMers - across the country. [source]

Rallying to Defend Grants for Grad Students: House appropriations bill eliminates funding for small but critical program supporting international research and travel by doctoral students. [source]

TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER:

Top Universities in Patents Awarded in 2016: American universities dominate a global list of the top utility patents (awarded by the U.S. for a process, machine, manufacture or composition of matter) awarded in 2016. [source]

NSF funded researchers demonstrate advanced network applications at 2017 Smart Cities Connect Conference & Expo: The National Science Foundation (NSF) has long been a leader in supporting research that has formed the basis for smart and connected communities, pushing sensor and networking capabilities beyond today's Internet of Things (IoT) to next-generation technologies able to revolutionize our lives in smart communities across the nation. [source]
Greetings Region I

I hope that everyone is enjoying a spectacular New England Fall. As I am writing this note, we have just returned from the Annual Meeting in DC. Thanks to the entire NCURA staff, the Hilton Hotel team, and our Region I officers and volunteers who worked to make the meeting a success. We are interested in your feedback concerning the Region I Netzone. As you know, we participated in the Netzone for the first time along with many of our colleagues from other regions. The Netzone proved cost-effective and easy to organize and manage.

Congratulations again to our 2018 elected officers: Chair-Elect: Donna Smith, Massachusetts General Hospital, Treasurer-Elect: Jori Barabino, Tufts University, Secretary-Elect: Suzanne Araujo, Rhode Island Hospital and National Board Member: Stacy Riseman, College of the Holy Cross. Thank you to everyone who ran in the election. As Chair Elect, Donna Smith will be planning the upcoming Spring meeting to be held in Portsmouth. Segue to…It’s not too early to start planning for the Spring meeting to be held from April 29, 2018 to May 2, 2018 at the Portsmouth Sheraton Harborside, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Portsmouth has the best of everything: great meeting hotel and conference venue, many fine restaurants, historic museums, shopping and, let’s not forget, the scenic New Hampshire and Maine seacoast. Experiencing the budget crunch at your institution? The regional meeting is a cost effective way to gain basic knowledge, refresh your knowledge on more complex issues and hear about emerging issues that haven’t made it into the agency policy manual yet.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Region I officers that have served with me during 2017. Lorraine Kiley, Treasurer, Boston University, Alice Ingham, Secretary, Broad Institute and Susan Zipkin, National Board Member. Thank you for a fun and productive year.

Region I recently held two workshops at Emmanuel College: Advanced Topics in Research Administration: Beyond the Basics and Essentials of Sponsored Research Administration. Upcoming: Clinical Trials Workshop to be held Wednesday, November 29, 2017. Please see more information, including links to register, here: http://ncuraregioni.org/workshops.html

As I write this article, we are planning our annual holiday RADG which will combine a timely topic of interest with a fun opportunity to network. Please check the Region I website and register now. The event is always a highlight of the year.

By now many of you are putting into action the best practices you acquired due to your attendance at many of the outstanding sessions at AM59. The multiple social activities provided members with an opportunity to catch up with friends and welcome our newest colleagues to NCURA and the profession. This year and in lieu of opening the Region II hospitality suite every night, we participated in the Netzone which was an astounding success; it provided individuals with a great opportunity to network with colleagues across all regions in one centralized area.

I would like to take an opportunity to congratulate the following individuals who are our newly elected officers: Chair-elect, Charles Bartunek (The Johns Hopkins University), Treasurer-elect, Ted Felskens (The Johns Hopkins University), and Secretary, Bryan Cacciotti (University at Buffalo). I am confident that as the region’s next leaders, you will continue to capitalize on opportunities that provide an invaluable experience for our members. Additionally, I would also like to congratulate Elliot Frank (University at Buffalo) and Liz Haney (St. Lawrence University) as the recipients of Region II’s travel award which provided them both an opportunity to attend AM59.

In case you missed the eBlasts that were sent several weeks ago, there are two professional development workshops slated to take place at the CUNY Advanced Science Research Center. Please visit the following URL http://ncuraregionii.org/pdc for more information and steps to register. If your institution is interested in hosting a future PDC workshop, please contact the PDC Chair, Jill Frankenfield via e-mail at jfranken@umd.edu or the PDC Co-Chair, Rebecca Hunsaker via e-mail at hunsaker@umd.edu.

Last, if you’d like to learn more about maximizing the benefits of your membership, exploring ideas for enhancing professional development and programming, or volunteering at regional and national activities, please contact me directly or through our website: http://ncuraregionii.org/contact. You can also follow us on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/groups/ncuraregionii and Twitter: @NCURAREGIONII.

Timothy Schailey, MS, serves as the Chair of Region II and is the Director of Research Administration at Thomas Jefferson University. He can be reached at Timothy.Schailey@jefferson.edu

Jill Mortali is the Chair of Region I and serves as the Director, Office of Sponsored Projects at Dartmouth College. She can be reached at Jill.M.Mortali@dartmouth.edu
Greetings Region III! Here’s an update on what we’ve been doing in the region!

**Exceptional Participation** After an outstanding spring meeting in Hilton Savannah Desoto, executive committee members and volunteers prepared for the AM59. As expected, Region III’s participation at AM59 was exceptional, with 323 attendees at the annual meeting. Congratulations to Region III’s AM59 Travel Award winners: Marie Penn from the University of Tennessee and Nathan Jones from UNC Wilmington!

**Education Scholarship Fund** Through donations and by selling shirts, mugs, and raffle tickets, Region III raised more than $1,800 for the NCURA Education Scholarship Fund. Thank you to everyone for the hard work and contributions. This demonstrates NCURA’s core values of integrity, excellence, inclusiveness, and collegiality!

**Networking Opportunities** Although the weather attempted to stop the show, Region III led the annual Flamingo Fun Walk and provided exciting networking opportunities at AM59, including a Night at the National Geographic Museum co-sponsored with Region V. Be thinking of suggestions for ways to top this phenomenal event next year!

**Spring Meeting 2018** The Region III spring meeting will be held at the Kingsmill Resort in historic Williamsburg, Virginia May 5 – May 9, 2018. Start making plans now to attend so that you won’t miss this spectacular opportunity!

**Continuing Education and Professional Development** We want to thank everyone for all of their interest in the Spring Meeting. The 2018 Program Committee will put together a program destined to meet everyone’s continuing education and professional development needs. Please be on the lookout for more details, registration information, and wonderful volunteer opportunities. As a reminder, we encourage you to volunteer. The contribution of your time and talents will make this a successful spring meeting!

**#ResearchAdministratorDay** #ResearchAdministratorDay was September 25. We are delighted that several institutions in Region III shared how they celebrated the third annual Research Administrator Day to show appreciation for the expertise and values provided by these professionals. Look for pictures on the Region III website at [www.ncurareregioniii.com](http://www.ncurareregioniii.com). You can also keep up with Region III via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Keep up the great work!

Steve Koogler, MBA, is Region II Chair and serves as Assistant Director, Office of Research and Commercialization, University of Central Florida. He can be reached at Steven.koogler@ucf.edu

Happy fall, everyone! Thanks for a great meeting in Washington, DC! Approximately 250 Region IV members attended. After attending a good number of Annual Meetings, I can still say that I learn something new (and extremely helpful) every time. I also thoroughly enjoy meeting new colleagues as well as seeing old friends.

Hopefully you have noticed changes to the Region IV website - [ncurareregioniv.com](http://ncurareregioniv.com). Many people have been working to update job descriptions for committee chairs and committee members. These descriptions are listed together in the “About” tab under “Governance.” The descriptions are also listed individually on each of the committee pages. We want to be transparent about the requirements for and responsibilities of the positions. To be honest, being on a committee is a fantastic experience. Please review the position descriptions and consider getting involved!

Updated descriptions for board positions have also been posted on the website. This is extremely timely as the Call for Nominations for board members will come out in mid-November. You can nominate someone else or self-nominate. Current and past board members are more than happy to answer questions and share their experiences with you.

The Membership Committee is in the process of developing a survey of Region IV members. This committee is charged with periodically surveying the regional membership to evaluate their impressions of NCURA and Region IV. Your input is critical! Please watch for the survey toward the end of this calendar year and make sure your voice is heard.

The Region continues to work on developing Travelling Workshops. The subcommittee charter is complete and committee members have been recruited. We are aiming to conduct the first workshop with a pilot institution in Summer or Fall 2018. Watch for more details!

Finally, make sure to save the date for our regional Spring Meeting in Des Moines this year! The dates are April 15-18, 2018 and the theme is “Nourishing Investigation, Fueling Discovery, Growing the Profession.”

Dr. Terry Wahls will be giving the keynote presentation. The 2019 Spring Meeting will be held April 27-30 at the Sheraton Columbus at Capitol Square in Columbus, Ohio. It’s never too early to mark your calendar! Our Site Selection Committee is currently working with Region III to plan a joint meeting in 2020.

Katherine Durben is the Chair of Region IV and serves as Executive Director of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at Marquette University. She can be reached at [Katherine.durben@marquette.edu](mailto:Katherine.durben@marquette.edu)
As we move into fall, we know that time continues to fly by, and your regional leadership team is working hard to plan for the next time we meet. Our 2018 regional meeting is in San Marcos, Texas…Where the River Runs Through! and we are getting excited as the program starts to take float.

Led by, Michael R. Castilleja, our Chair-Elect, he is looking for topics and presenters. micastl2@uiwtx.edu

We are trying a few new things this year and are happy to share the news with our members, so be sure to check the website. Remember, the meeting is a chance for Region V to meet and network with other locals. Let’s add some Southwestern flair to our meeting.

Becky Castillo, was elected as an at-large member of the Region V Executive Committee, and that allowed for an opportunity for a new Volunteer Coordinator. I am happy to announce John A. Valenta at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston as our new Volunteer Coordinator. John is on the job and looking for volunteers. His first task was to coordinate the volunteer signup for AM59, and we were happy to have his help. To learn more about what opportunities exist, please reach out to John. John.A.Valenta@uth.tmc.edu

We want to call out Region V member, Hollie Schreiber, from Oklahoma State University as Faculty for the NCURA National Departmental Research Administration Traveling Workshops. The two and a half day workshop focuses on unit-level administrators, or departmental research administrators (DRAs), who work at the department and college levels. Her most recent workshop was at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center in Memphis. Way to go Hollie!

Gail Davis has retired as Senior Director of Sponsored Programs at Lamar University. Gail remains an active member of NCURA and was our Region V 2012 Distinguished Service Award winner. We thank her for her years of service and support to NCURA and the profession of Research Administration. We will miss her knowledge and friendship and hopefully we can convince her to keep coming to the meetings Thank you Gail!

Finally, we are starting a digital scrapbook for Region V. If you have any photos or memories you want to add, please send them to: ncura.v.pictures@gmail.com or add them to our Facebook Group.

For those of you that were at the National Meeting in August, we were excited to have great Region V representation. We had a great meeting, and as always, baseball was the preferred event to relax after a long day of sessions.

Have a great fall, and we look forward for many great things to come.

Thomas B. Spencer, Ph.D., M.B.A., is Region V Chair and serves as Director for Operations for Academic and Administrative Information Resources at UT Southwestern Medical Center. He can be reached at Thomas.Spencer@UTSouthwestern.edu

Register now for the Regional VI/VII meeting November 5-8, 2017 in Portland, Oregon. Registration information is on the regional website: https://orso.or.wsu.edu/r6ncura/meetings.aspx.

The theme is “Navigating Research Administration: Pioneers Adjusting to Our New Future.” The conference program is posted and track offerings include:

- Contract Negotiation/Subcontracts/Industry Contracts
- Post Award
- Pre-Award
- Primarily Undergraduate Institutions
- Human Capital & Professional Development
- Systems, Management, & Operations
- Departmental Research Administration
- Compliance
- Federal & Agency

In the spirit of the NCURA Magazine “green” issue, the remainder of this article is focused on sustainability and a few simple things we are doing as a region to “go green.”

At the National Meeting level, for several years, NCURA has been using Guidebook, an app for conferences and events. Guidebook shows the schedule and sessions, the session tracks, presenters, exhibitors, maps of the hotel and meeting room locations, attendees, social media links and connections to NCURA Collaborate, uploaded presentation documents, things to do, a notification system, a personalized schedule and a place to rate the session and provide an evaluation.

At the Region VI/VII Meeting level, we have started using Guidebook. Switching to this technology has not only saved dollars for our region, but it has saved other resources (paper and time). We no longer print programs, but instead we send it out electronically prior to the meeting (for those who want to print it), otherwise it all can be found on Guidebook. Not having a printed schedule makes for an easier registration check-in process (no bags to stuff). For this year’s regional meeting in Portland, no printed programs means we can spend funds on something more meaningful for members as well as keep registration costs as low as possible.

We also have gone “green” with session evaluations. We used to have to print, organize and process evaluations for all sessions. By using Guidebook, we can capture and record them electronically.

Although having a green solution like Guidebook has many benefits, there are some drawbacks. Accessibility and training for volunteer regional officers and committee members can be challenging. However (and more importantly), the transition for conference attendees to start using Guidebook is vital. In order to make the switch, conference attendees need to embrace the new technology for program information as well as presenter and session evaluations. As an NCURA member, I invite you to embrace our region’s sustainability movement and use Guidebook in Portland.

Sinnamon Tierney, MPA, CRA, is Region VI Chair and serves as Associate Director of Departmental Research Administration, Sponsored Projects Administration at Portland State University. She can be reached at Tierney@pdx.edu
Hello Region VII!
I hope those of you that attended AM59 in Washington, DC are back into the swing of things! The Annual Meeting is such a great opportunity for learning and networking and reuniting with our NCURA ‘ohana, our family of friends and colleagues from around the world. It was such a joy to watch as Vicki Krell (Arizona State University) received the Julia Jacobsen Distinguished Service Award for her commitment and dedication to the members of NCURA. I was also extremely pleased with the large turnout of our newest members to our Regional New Member reception. Increasing our membership adds diversity and expertise that can be shared with others and I hope that those that participated are excited and encouraged to get involved in NCURA and begin enjoying the many benefits of membership of our organization.

Nominations for new officers are on-going at this time. Open positions include: Chair-Elect (2018), Secretary/Treasurer (2018-2019) and Member-at-Large (2018-2019). Information on the job duties and the nomination form can be found at our website: https://ncuraregionvii.asu.edu/announcements. We hope to announce our new officers prior to the meeting in Portland this November.

Registration and hotel reservation links are open for the Regional Meeting in Portland. Early bird rates are still live so be sure to make those plans! A preliminary program is posted to review sessions and workshop offerings (days and times subject to change). The planning committee is meeting regularly via conference call to finalize logistics of the meeting including on-site registration, receptions, entertainment, local restaurants, fun runs, etc., to make our meeting in Portland a wonderful experience. Many thanks to all of those volunteers! Not to worry, if you are itchin’ to get involved, we will definitely be in need of more volunteers in Portland as well. Contact Natalie Buys, Volunteer Coordinator, at Natalie.buys@ucdenver.edu to get your name on the list!

I began my NCURA experience as a National travel awardee and that opportunity changed my life and career for the better. Therefore I am so thankful that Region VII is able to provide travel awards annually to the national and regional meetings. The Awards Nomination and Election Committee, chaired by Member-at-Large, Ashley Stahle, has selected two travel awardees for the Regional Meeting in Portland, OR. I would like to congratulate, Rachel Norris of the University of Montana and Audrey Oberlin, from Colorado State University. We had several submissions and we are excited to be able to offer them this opportunity to experience NCURA at the Regional level.

Sandra Logue serves as Regional VII Chair and is the Administrator for the Center for Neuroscience on the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. She can be reached at Sandra.logue@ucdenver.edu

Do you remember your first AM? We asked our two Region VIII travel awardees to share their experiences and this is what they had to say:

“Attending the Annual NCURA Meeting for the first time is overwhelming, overjoying, comforting. AM59 made me realize how much knowledge requires to be a good research administrator and give the best service to the internal and external customers.

Meeting people who have similar problems and share with them ideas, solutions or points of view is one of the best learning experiences a research administrator can have. Taking part in this learning process has been particularly beneficial by joining the international community of NCURA.

The most valuable asset I took back home from the conference was the opportunity to listen to highly knowledgeable research administrators. The event itself is incredible as there are so many sessions to make sure all current aspects of research administration are covered. It is overwhelming to meet so many people passionate about their job that you can only leave the event energized and motivated.”
Carole Amroune, ISGLOBAL Barcelona Institute for Global Health

“AM59 was my first Annual Meeting and I became immediately hooked: It was fantastic! I acquired a lot of new information in the discussion groups and concurrent sessions. Apart from these more formal events I especially enjoyed the opportunities to meet colleagues from all over the world and talk to them about their experiences in US funding. The Netzone was excellent for this, as well as the Monday Night Dinner Group. Last but not least I very much appreciated the one day visit of the NIH, during which I could not only learn more about NIH funding from first hand, but could also see this famous institution live. AM59 gave me a brief but precise insight of NCURA as an organisation and of the International Region community of which I feel I am now a part.”
Luca Wacker, ETH Zurich/University of Zurich

The members of the International Region entering the NIH on Thursday, August 10, 2017.

Annika Glauner is Chair of Region VIII and serves as Senior Policy and Research Development Officer, ETH Zurich/University of Zurich. She can be reached at annika.glauner@sl.ethz.ch

Sandra Logue serves as Regional VII Chair and is the Administrator for the Center for Neuroscience on the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. She can be reached at Sandra.logue@ucdenver.edu
NCURA Member Milestones

Jing Bai is now Associate Director of and leads the Research Support Office at Duke Kunshan University, a new joint-venture Chinese university co-founded by Duke University, Wuhan University in China and the Kunshan Municipal government in China.

Tricia Callahan has joined Colorado State University as their new Senior Research Education and Information Officer. In her new role, Tricia will assist faculty and staff in analyzing and meeting their educational needs as related to sponsored research.

Jim Casey was elected a Wisconsin Bar delegate to the American Bar Association House of Delegates, for a two year term beginning September 1, 2017.

Miriam Campo has been promoted to Assistant Vice President for Sponsored Programs in the Division of Research at Florida Atlantic University.

Jing Bai is now Associate Director of and leads the Research Support Office at Duke Kunshan University, a new joint-venture Chinese university co-founded by Duke University, Wuhan University in China and the Kunshan Municipal government in China.

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Miriam Campo has been promoted to Assistant Vice President for Sponsored Programs in the Division of Research at Florida Atlantic University.

Csilla M. Csaplár is now the Director of Engineering Research Administration, which supports research activity in the School of Engineering at Stanford University.

Zoya Davis-Hamilton was promoted in April and is now Associate Vice Provost for Research Administration and Development at Tufts University.

Laura Letbetter is now Associate Director, Sponsored Research Development at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University.

Stephanie Scott is now the Director of Policy and Research Development, Sponsored Projects Administration at Columbia University.

Dave Schultz is now the Assistant Vice President for Research Administration and Finance at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
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Consuming moderate amounts of chocolate was associated with significantly lower risk of being diagnosed with atrial fibrillation (AF)—a common and dangerous type of irregular heartbeat—in a large study of men and women in Denmark led by researchers at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and in Denmark.

The study was published online May 23, 2017, in Heart.

“Our study adds to the accumulating evidence on the health benefits of moderate chocolate intake and highlights the importance of behavioral factors for potentially lowering the risk of arrhythmias,” said Elizabeth Mostofsky, instructor in the Department of Epidemiology at Harvard Chan School, a post-doctoral fellow at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and lead author of the study.

Previous studies have suggested that cocoa and cocoa-containing foods—in particular, dark chocolate, which has a higher cocoa content than milk chocolate—confer cardiovascular benefits, perhaps because of their high content of flavanols, which may promote healthy blood vessel function. But there has been only limited research on the association between consuming chocolate and the occurrence of AF—which affects millions of people around the world and is linked to higher risk of stroke, heart failure, cognitive decline, dementia, and death.

The study included 55,502 men and women participating in the Danish Diet, Cancer, and Heath Study. Researchers considered study participants’ body mass index, blood pressure, and cholesterol, which were measured at the time participants were recruited, between December 1993 and May 1997. They also looked at participants’ health conditions, including high blood pressure, diabetes, or cardiovascular disease, and data on their diet and lifestyle, from questionnaires.

Diagnoses of AF were identified from the Danish National Patient Register. There were 3,346 cases of AF among the study participants over a 13.5-year follow-up period. Compared with those who ate a one-ounce serving of chocolate less than once per month, men and women who ate one to three servings per month had a 10% lower rate of AF; those who ate one serving per week had a 17% lower rate; and those who ate two to six servings per week had a 20% lower rate. The benefit leveled off with greater amounts of chocolate consumption, with those eating one or more servings per day having a 16% lower AF rate. Results were similar for men and women.

“Despite the fact that most of the chocolate consumed by the study participants likely had relatively low concentrations of potentially protective ingredients, we still observed a significant association between eating chocolate and a lower risk of AF—suggesting that even small amounts of cocoa consumption can have a positive health impact,” Mostofsky said. “Eating excessive amounts of chocolate is not recommended because many chocolate products are high in calories from sugar and fat and could lead to weight gain and other metabolic problems. But moderate intake of chocolate with high cocoa content may be a healthy choice.”

Senior author of the study was Kim Overdahl of Aalborg University Hospital in Denmark. Murray Mittleman, professor of epidemiology at Harvard Chan School, was a co-author.

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