



Best Practices for Introducing Students to Research Administration

Research Administration is not a career path many students think of pursuing during their time at their institution. However, Research Development and Administration Offices have a unique opportunity to engage students who hold interest in the line of work during these years. The following guide offers best practices for introducing students to research administration through student internships or on-campus employment. Please note, while this guide places a specific focus on student internships, much of this work can be replicated for those interested in developing a program aimed at recruiting staff members into research administration.

Recruitment and Job Descriptions

Qualifications:

- Excellent attention to detail
- Takes Initiatives
- Ability to problem solve and produce creative solutions
- Maintain confidentiality
- Desire to learn new skills
- Ability to work in a dynamic environment
- Ability to switch to new tasks as needed
- Good communication skills
- Basic math skills

While these qualifications are not requirements for hire, they should be used as guidance tools for offices as they begin their search process for a student employee. Additionally, the list should serve to give the prospective student an idea of what will be expected of them within the office and a glimpse of what research administration entails. Such that it is a fast-paced field where no day is the same.

Tasks

This same idea applies to describing tasks that the student will be expected to complete while working within Research Development and Administration Offices:

- Searching for funding opportunities
- Proofreading proposals
- Developing resources for the office website and training sessions
- Data entry
- Scanning
- Researching policies

Recruitment

Students can be recruited through multiple avenues such as job postings through university outlets and open calls to colleges and departments that may have students interested in this career path. It should be noted that postings should be open to all students, given the wide range of skill sets and backgrounds of those who have found themselves in the profession.

Hours Per Week & Length of Internship

One Semester

A semester internship may be beneficial for a student looking for an internship credit at their institution. This is also a great length of time for an office looking to introduce a student to the field and receive high level help from a student for tasks such as proofreading and searching for funding opportunities. During this internship, the student can learn about the profession and the different sectors that exist within the field (pre-award, post-award, compliance, etc.).

Academic Year

A student working throughout the academic year offers consistency for both the student and the office. This length of time offers the chance for more in-depth training and learning for the student, while also leading to an increase in responsibility. While some offices may find value in having someone work for a couple of hours each week during the academic year, the ideal number of hours worked per week by the student would range from 7 to 10 hours. However, it should be noted that this amount of time could be higher depending on both the needs of the student and the office. This ideal amount of time gives efficient time for training, shadowing, and completing tasks. A student working during the entire academic year will allow for an office to form a connection with the student and provide training over the course of weeks and months.

Summer

The summer allows students the opportunity to work more hours than allowed during the academic year. Summer hours allow a full-time student a chance to be assigned larger and more complex projects due to the additional time they must focus on work. An additional item to keep in mind is that students will need assistance throughout the summer. If this is a slower season for your office/dept., keeping the student busy may prove to be difficult. During the slower periods, you may want to use this time for additional training, process review, and cleanup.

Training

Training should be comprehensive and span the entire life cycle of an award, with a focus on the basics and fundamentals of the field. Students should form a familiarity with both pre- and post- award. Examples of trainings include:

- How to search for funding opportunities
- Mock proposal reviews
- Budget preparation training
- Reviewing and understanding how grant policies relate to current awards
- Researching funders
- Reviewing Request for Proposals

Additional training may cover research ethics such as Responsible Conduct of Research and Conflict of Interest training.

Students should have the chance to observe and shadow those who they will be working with the closest. Dedicated time should be set aside to give the student a chance to ask questions about processes and research administration in general. During this time, a close relationship that reflects one of a mentor and mentee should be established.

Daily Work & Projects

As the student becomes more familiar with the processes of the office and research administration their level of responsibility can increase. To begin, students can assist the office with reviewing requests for proposals, searching for opportunities, creating forms, and filing. Students should also become incorporated into meetings when appropriate such as weekly team meetings and grant management meetings.

As time moves on, it is important to give students the chance to tackle their own projects surrounding the needs of the office. As students become more familiar with the research enterprise, their responsibility should grow. Such projects may include:

- Helping write and/or review proposals
- Creating new office procedures
 - Updating the filing system
 - Developing a checklist system
 - Creating a database
- Writing and updating policies
- Re-development of the office's website

Over time is also important to engage the student with the grants currently awarded to the institution. Students should visit labs and studios where funded projects are being worked on. Visiting labs and having discussions with these PIs shows the students the results of funding and allows them to understand why they are doing the work they are doing. Additionally, students should attend on-campus poster sessions and research events centered around student scholarship and research. This is an opportunity for students to see the results of grand funded research, as well as the positive impact external funding has on their peers. Ultimately these forms of engagement will give the intern a glimpse into the research enterprise and show them what and who they are supporting.

Considerations for Remote & Hybrid Offices

If an office exists as primarily hybrid or remote, this guide can still serve as a starting point to developing an internship program for the office. However, there are additional considerations to consider and steps to take to create a successful program.

Open Communication and Frequent Meetings

Frequent meetings at the beginning of each term will allow for connections to form, expectations to be set, training to take place, and tasks to be explained. It is also important to find ways to incorporate learning outside of these set meeting times. For example, if you are working on a project, you may send the student a video link to share your screen and allow the student to shadow the process.

Additionally, when a student is working, it is important to share when you are unavailable to meet and answer questions. This can be done through either sharing calendars, sending messages when you will be unavailable, or scheduling set meetings to discuss projects and answer questions. This will help the student prioritize what questions to ask and when.

It is also important to incorporate the student into office group chats and other forms of communication. This will help enhance the connection between the student and the office, as well as allow the student to feel comfortable with asking questions and reaching out to other team members.

Conclusion

Creating an internship program or introducing students to research administration will look different for every office on every campus. However, we hope this guide has proved beneficial in laying out the groundwork and best practices to creating or enhancing your own program.