

NCURA Region IV

M I D - A M E R I C A R E G I O N N E W S L E T T E R

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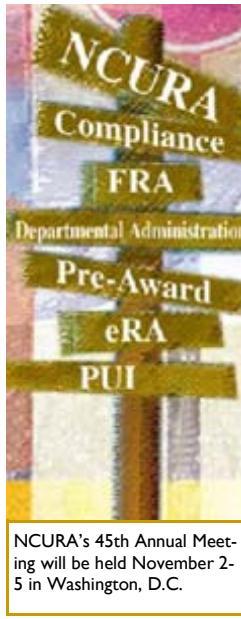
Fall 2003

Won't You Be My Neighbor in the NCURA Community? NCURA's 45th Annual Meeting

Alice Breemer, Des Moines University

The theme for this year's Annual NCURA Meeting is "Connecting our Neighborhoods and Building the NCURA Community." I thought about that theme for a while and realized that the late Fred Rogers had it right. He taught most of us, and our children, that neighbors, working and playing well together, produce functioning, successful, happy communities. Now that we're grown up—at least most of us are—it's all too easy in our deadline-driven jobs to forget Mr. Rogers' sage advice. We tend to get isolated because our workloads are heavy, and the time to break free to attend professional meetings is increasingly scarce.

Well, how important is it to use your precious time to join your professional neighbors in the NCURA Community at least once a year? Let me tell you, in our line of work, IT CAN BE CRUCIAL. The older we get, the faster things change—things like federal agencies and regulations, compliance responsibilities, faculty needs, insti-



tutional rules, grant guidelines, contract language and consortia opportunities. Since these are the things we get paid to deal with daily, having the most current information about them is essential to our job performance and to the academic research standing of our institutions.

The latest information from experts in all these areas will be available at NCURA's 45th Annual Meeting this November. In addition, you'll learn a great deal during the coffee breaks between sessions and in the after-hours regional hospitality suites just by listening, asking questions and sharing experiences. And what a terrific stress reliever it is to discover that lots of your colleagues experience the same pitfalls and triumphs as you, and they aren't any crazier than you.

This year's program is separated into six tracks and various levels of experience. *Continued on page 3*

An Inside View: A Day in the Life of a Departmental Administrator

Tanya Cobb and Petra Schroeder, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Until we held positions as department administrators for large departments with active research programs, we didn't really understand the multitude of balls that are juggled daily in a department office. Not least among these is managing a staff that performs the day-to-day activities that are often invisible but critical to the functioning of the department: payroll, purchasing and accounting, student services, course coordination, facilities and equipment maintenance.

Then come the tasks for which the administrator is directly responsible: budget planning, grant proposal preparation and human resource management, to name a few. In addition, projects may be assigned by the Chair or other faculty or developed on your own in response to problems with processes and procedures.

This nearly endless list ensures that each year brings new challenges, even after completing the full cycle of the academic year and grant procedures many times.

On any given day one or more of these activities is in full swing; it may be graduate student admissions season, a budget crisis in a laboratory, fiscal year end or a week of multiple grant proposal deadlines. The department administrator steps in and out of each activity and lends guidance and hands-on help as needed; she/he works with the staff to find strategies for approaching and resolving issues in the future. Perhaps you have held a position like this and have become accustomed to switching hats repeatedly throughout the day as faculty, students and staff come to you with their questions and concerns. *Continued on page 4*

In this issue: Transitioning from academia to administration and planning tips for D.C.

Academic to Administrator: Why the Switch?

Jennie Lovett, Midwest Regional Center of Excellence for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases Research

Why would someone with a PhD want to be a research administrator? Although Chancellors, Deans, Directors of Sponsored Projects offices, and many other roles are occupied by former academics, administrators are not typically fresh out of their thesis programs. Is there a role for the new PhD in research administration? I believe so, and this article contains my view of how academics and administration can mutually benefit from a newly minted PhD.

During the PhD process, virtually everyone goes through a period of angst-ridden questioning about what they will do next. Relatively few know what route is best for their talents, interests, and skills. Most start evaluating their options, leading to a greater appreciation of what an academic research career entails: freedom to pursue independent research, challenges of seeking grants and publications, and the demand of keeping track of the latest technologies. But this understanding doesn't stop the consideration of

other careers, including patent law, consulting, writing, and teaching. Research administration has lots to offer the new PhD contemplating alternate careers: commitment to excellence, purpose-driven work, involvement with research in many forms, and process improvement challenges. University administrative offices don't typically recruit PhDs but might find excellent candidates already familiar with their institution's faculty and research.



During my own investigations of administrative positions at NSF and NIH, a department manager asked if I had considered working for the University. Suddenly I was exposed to the inner workings of the University research process ...something I had wrongly assumed began and ended in labs. My

availability was coincident with an opening in Sponsored Projects for a funding specialist. Although I lacked administrative experience, my scientific knowledge, ability to communicate with faculty, and experience giving talks were seen as positive attributes.

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**Management is doing things right;
leadership is doing the right things.**

~Peter Drucker

Plan Ahead for the Spring Meeting! Now's the time to get involved...

Theme: Research Administration from Start to Finish

Meeting Partner: Society of Research Administrators—Midwest Section

Dates: April 24-27, 2004

City: Indianapolis, Indiana

Hotel: Crowne Plaza Hotel at Union Station

Located in the heart of downtown Indianapolis adjacent to the Circle Centre Mall, the Grand Hall and Conference Center at Crowne Plaza Hotel Union Station will transport you back to the turn of the century when

railroads were in their heyday. Built in 1888 as America's first "union station," the Romanesque Revival-styled structure now houses a fine conference hotel—complete with thirteen 1920's Pullman railway cars converted into hotel suites!

Make plans to get on board what promises to be a memorable spring meeting.



The Crowne Plaza Grand Hall is adjacent to this year's Region IV conference hotel in Indianapolis.

If you have an idea for a **Concurrent Session**, contact Ellen Rogers at rogers.5@nd.edu to see if your session might be incorporated into the spring meeting program. To view the workshop presentations from the 2003 Spring Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio, check out the NCURA Region IV web site at <http://146.163.5.85/ncura4/spmtg2003.html>.

If you would be interested in serving on the **Nominations Committee**, contact Deborah Galloway at gallowdj@ucmail.uc.edu. Please contact Deborah even if you added your name to the volunteer sign up sheet at the 2003 spring meeting. The Nominations Committee is responsible for identifying potential candidates for the Region IV Board.

If you would be interested in serving on the **Awards Committee**, contact Sue Carlson at carlson@uwccc.wisc.edu. Please contact Sue even if you added your name to the volunteer sign up sheet at the spring meeting. The Awards Committee selects recipients of such awards as the Kevin Reed Outstanding Professional Award, the Distinguished Service Award, and the Meritorious Contribution Award.

Neighborly activities at this year's NCURA National Meeting in D.C.

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The tracks include about 120 concurrent sessions and discussion groups on pre-award issues, financial research administration (FRA), electronic research administration (ERA), compliance, departmental administration and predominantly undergraduate institutions (PUI). The identification of levels of experience for each session helps determine which of the numerous sessions and discussion groups are most appropriate for you.

Region IV members are involved in presenting 43 sessions at this year's annual gathering, which may be a new record. That we have so many of our members active at the national level is certainly a real testament to the widespread expertise in our midst.

Newcomers to our neighborhood are very welcome, and

"In truth, most of us are still asking the 'what if' questions because nothing ever stays the same for long in research administration."

you'll feel that inclusiveness right from the beginning of NCURA's 45th Annual Meeting. On Saturday, November 1, you'll be greeted with an orientation especially designed for new members and move right on to a one-hour "Night of Networking" reception at which no questions are considered foolish. Those of us who have been around awhile thrive on questions that begin with "What do you do when...?" In truth, most of us are still asking the "what do you do when...?" and "what if...?" questions because nothing ever stays the same for long in research administration. The annual meeting's final program is now available on the NCURA website at <http://www.ncura.edu/conferences/45/>.

This November, could you be...? won't you be...? will you be my neighbor in the NCURA Community in Washington, D.C.?

Academic to Administrator: Why the Switch?

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In hiring me, the University took a bold step towards narrowing the traditional divide between academics and administrators. New PhDs seeking to enter the world of university administration bring a range of assets to the organization. They have been trained to solve problems efficiently. They have a user's perspective on research and the role of academic policies and practices. And they are rarely satisfied with simply standard performance. On the other hand, PhDs will typically demand higher salaries, clear advancement opportunities, and successively more challenging projects. Without these, an office risks losing the PhD to a more attractive opportunity. The combination of research and administrative experience is rare in a young employee and can lead to an array of jobs in university, hospital, commercial and government settings.

"Research administration has lots to offer the new PhD contemplating alternate careers."

In the many interactions between researchers and administrators, who better could appreciate the complexities than someone who has worked on both sides?

I continually am impressed by the dedication and resilience of administrators I meet both at my own and at other institutions. My switch from academic to administrator has been one of the most satisfying career decisions I have made. I look forward to developing my administrative skills and welcoming more PhDs into research administration.

Jennie Lovett received her PhD in Microbiology at Washington University in St. Louis in 2002. After a year in Sponsored Projects at WUSTL as the Funding Resources Coordinator, she will assume the role of Project Manager for the Midwest Regional Center of Excellence for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases Research (MRCE) on 10/6/03.

An Inside View: A Day in the Life of a Departmental Administrator

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If so, you have probably also had a day like the fictional example that follows. On this sample day in your life (the departmental administrator), crises of epic proportions are looming, or so the messages on your voice mail seem to indicate. . . .

You've just arrived in the office and stopped to say hello to each of your staff members. After listening to your voice mail messages, you evaluate the urgency of each call against the rolling "to do" list you already had on your desk for the day. The call from Dr. Sodor seems to rise to the top of the list, as she states that a grant proposal must be FedExed today. Before heading off to the Sodor lab to get more information about her proposal, you shoot a quick email message off to the technician, Liz, who had called to say that she needs to discuss a problem in the lab, and let her know that you'll be able to talk to her in the afternoon.

When you reach the Sodor lab, you immediately sense the tension in the air, but a little anxiety is not unusual for a grant deadline day. As the lab personnel are rushing around, there's no time for pleasantries. Dr. Sodor pulls you into her office and asks tensely, "How far are

"When you reach the Sodor lab, you immediately sense the tension in the air, but a little anxiety is not unusual for a grant deadline day...."

you with the proposal?" Unaware of the proposal until you heard the voice mail message, you now realize that one ball has already been dropped this week. You quickly ask for the details you'll need (the RFA, staff list, equipment quotes, etc.) and try to calm Dr. Sodor by stating that you'll quickly pull together the budget. After she responds that her technician, Liz, should have given you this information already, you begin to wonder if that is why Liz left you the message earlier. So you stop by Liz's lab bench on the way out to ask about the equipment quotes, and she asks furtively, "Did you get my message? Can we talk now?" She is clearly anxious, so you agree and she follows you back to your office.

"May I close the door?" This question always makes you take a deep breath. You respond, "Of course, please sit down." Liz proceeds to tearfully explain that the past three years of working for Dr. Sodor have been very difficult, that the emotional stress has just become too much for her, and that she can't cope with the situation any longer. You ask yourself why this has to happen on the day of a grant deadline, hand her a box of tissues and advise her as best you can about the resources available to her.

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She seems a bit calmer, and you feel this is your chance to refocus the discussion on the looming specter of the grant deadline.

You carefully mention that Dr. Sodor had asked you to get assistance from her in putting together figures for the proposal budget. This prompts her to return to her previous subject (and to the box of tissues). It becomes clear to you that Liz is unable to help with the grant budget in her current state of mind, and you resign yourself to putting it together on your own. Liz finally returns to her office, and you run through the rest of the day in your mind: put together proposal budget, other support documents, identify appropriate protocol approvals, run the proposal through the dean's office and central sponsored

programs office for approval. . . . You step out and explain this to your student services coordinator, Ameen, and beg off on the meeting that you had scheduled (already rescheduled once) with him for today.

At this point, Dr. Sodor walks in and asks, "May I close the door?" She explains that Liz has not completed the experiments necessary to confirm the preliminary results being described in the grant proposal. "As soon as we get the proposal out the door," she says, "we must talk about terminating Liz's appointment."

. . . You get the picture. No, every day isn't as hectic. In fact, along with the chaotic feeling is the excitement of helping to pull it all together. But this story is intended to illustrate a point. Department administrators are

pulled in many directions at the same time. As we try to keep all the balls in the air, we must make choices about what we will attend to at any given time. We know that paying just enough attention to the right things at the right time is key. We also know that when we choose to focus our attention in one area, something else is inevitably being neglected. The chal-

lenge each day is determining which items need our attention, and which ones can stand a little neglect.

What we have learned after working through situations like the one illustrated above is that understanding the human factors in our work environment and continually building our relationships with our colleagues are the most basic and important balls for us to keep in the air.

It is easy to become too task-oriented, knowing that the grant deadline is tomorrow, and the FedEx plane leaves at 8 o'clock. We need to pay attention to our relationships with those around us, and the relationships between those individuals, as well, because those relationships are at the root of everything we do. The time and effort invested will pay dividends, and we will be in a stronger position to resolve problems because of the relationships we have built.

Even when we try to do our best for our departments and our institutions, we will face crises and we will drop some balls. When this happens, we need to take the time to think about what went wrong, not just in terms of process, but also from the perspective of each player. What could have been done prior to the day we've described to anticipate or prevent these problems? Was something neglected too long in a key area? How best can we balance the needs of Liz, Dr. Sodor, and Ameen with the tasks that need to be accomplished? What needs our attention most, and what do these individuals need in order to accomplish their part of the goals we all share?

These questions are harder to ask and answer than task-oriented questions such as "What forms need to be completed for this proposal and who will complete which ones?" Our challenge as department administrators is this: appreciate the human factors in our work, ask ourselves the difficult questions, and build the relationships that will encourage open communication and help provide the answers.

Tanya Cobb is the Administrative Program Manager at the Laboratory of Molecular Biology; Petra Schroeder is the Assistant Dean for Research Administration at the Graduate School; both are at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Planning for D.C.

Once again, the Hilton Washington and Towers at 1919 Connecticut serves as the host hotel. For D.C. travel information and events be sure to check out the following sites:

NCURA meeting web site

<http://www.ncura.edu/conferences/45>

DCPages.com

<http://dcpages.com>

Washington, DC Convention and Tourism Corporation

<http://www.washington.org>



In the Neighborhood

The Phillips Collection: About a 15-minute walk from the hotel, the collection includes 20th Century art from the Impressionists on. Currently, the Special Exhibit is *Surrealism and Modernism*: <http://www.phillipscollection.org>

Kramerbooks: Located down the street from the hotel: <http://kramers.com/>

Restaurants

Search by type of cuisine and find dining coupons at <http://dcpages.com/Dining>.



Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington <http://www.ramw.org/diningguide.cfm>

Transportation

The Metro

<http://www.metroopensdoors.com>

The closest Metro stop to the conference hotels is the Dupont Circle station on the Red Line. The location is very convenient for walking trips to the Mall and other trips around town. However, if you're coming from the airport, you'll be lugging luggage uphill four blocks to the meeting hotels unless you get a cab at the Dupont Circle station.

For other transportation options, check out <http://dcpages.com/Travel>

Washington Events & Exhibits

Blues & Dreams

In honor of the 40th anniversary of the March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech this year, D.C. museums, theatres, and restaurants will celebrate the city's African-American heritage through exhibitions, performances, special menu items

with ***Blues & Dreams: Celebrating the African-American Experience in Washington, DC.***
<http://www.washington.org/bluesanddreams>

The Smithsonian <http://www.si.edu>

The National Gallery of Art <http://www.nga.gov>

The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
<http://kennedy-center.org>

National & Region IV Networking Opportunities at the 45th Annual Meeting

SATURDAY

7:00P-8:00P Night of Networking
 9:00P-12:00A Region IV Hospitality Suite Open #5174

SUNDAY

5:00P-6:15P Region IV Hospitality Suite Open for Newcomer's Reception

6:15P-7:00P Pre-Banquet Reception

7:00P-10:00P Opening Banquet

10:30P-12:00A Region IV Hospitality Suite Open #5174

MONDAY

7:30A-8:30A Continental Breakfast

10:00A-10:30A Refreshment Break

12:00P-1:30P Region IV Business Luncheon

3:00P-3:30P Refreshment Break

5:00P-6:00P Newcomer's Reception

6:30P-? Dinner Groups

9:00P-11:30P Region IV Hospitality Suite Open #5174

TUESDAY

7:30A-8:30A Continental Breakfast

10:00A-10:30A Refreshment Break

12:00P-2:00P National Business Luncheon

3:30P-3:45P Refreshment Break

6:30P-7:00P Leadership Development Institute Reception

7:00P-12:00A NCURA Block Party

10:00P-12:30A Region IV Hospitality Suite Open #5174

WEDNESDAY

7:30A-8:30A Continental Breakfast

10:00A-10:30A Refreshment Break

12:00P Adjournment

Compiled by Robert Aull, Indiana University

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