

# **Fostering Professional Excellence through an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization**

NCURA Region IV Meeting  
April 16-20, 2011  
Cleveland, Ohio



**NORTHWESTERN**  
UNIVERSITY

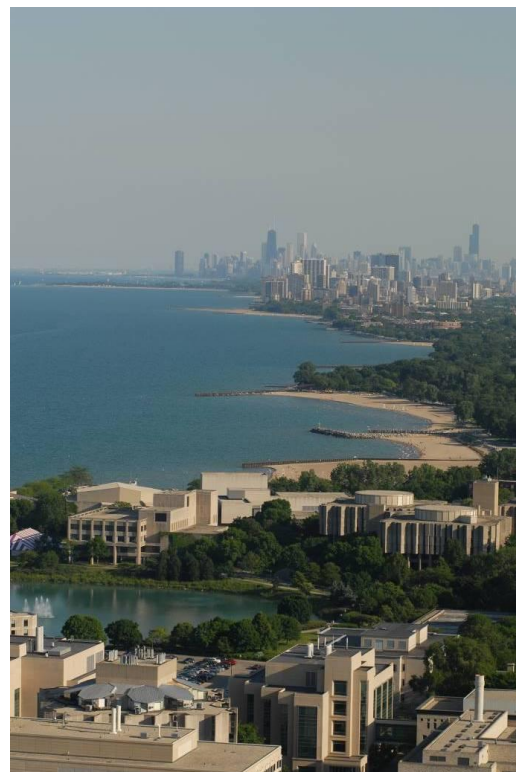
# Presenters

- Lori Palfalvi, President  
Research Administrator 3  
Department of Medicine,  
Feinberg School of Medicine
- Dan Rademacher, Membership  
Committee Co-Chair  
Research Administrator 3  
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center
- Elizabeth Adams, Steering Committee  
Director of Research Administration  
McCormick School of Engineering



# The Big Picture

- Institutions are competing more fiercely than ever before for research dollars
- Sponsors' expectations are growing
- Research is becoming increasingly multidisciplinary and interdepartmental
- Research administration is becoming increasingly decentralized; local expertise is essential
- Research administration has emerged as a bona fide career path



# Research as an Institutional Priority

- Research quality and volume is closely associated with institutional reputation
- Sponsored funding represents a significant source of support for research institutions
- The ultimate goal of research is to *change/impact the world*



John Pople, 1998 Nobel Prize in Chemistry (top)

Dale Mortensen, 2010 Nobel Prize in Economics (bottom)

# Research Administration as an Institutional Priority

- July 2006 *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey inquires on faculty time commitments; 42% total professional time spent on administrative matters
- December 2008 *Science* editorial: “The administrative burden on practicing scientists has grown tremendously over the past decades and is limiting their ability to get important scientific work done.”



Alan I. Leshner is the chief executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and executive publisher of *Science*.

## Reduce Administrative Burden

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ON PRACTICING SCIENTISTS HAS GROWN TREMENDOUSLY OVER the past decades and is limiting their ability to get important scientific work done. As the United States prepares for a new president to take office, there is an opportunity to take a fresh look at many of the government policies and regulations that concern the conduct of science. How might we find ways to reduce the administrative burden while still ensuring accountability to science funders, appropriate safeguards for human subjects, and broader societal protection from real dangers that can accompany some scientific research?

A 2007 survey by the U.S. Federal Demonstration Partnership (A Profile of Federal Grant Administrative Burden among Federal Demonstration Partnership Faculty) found that 84% of faculty in the United States believed that the administrative burden associated with federally funded grants had increased significantly in recent years. Most notably, the study indicates that of the total time that faculty devote to research, 42% is spent on pre- and post-award administrative activities. Some activities respond to university or host institution policies, whereas others respond to an array of governmental rules that are poorly integrated. The most time-consuming research-related activities include: too-frequent progress report submissions, navigating the complex and disparate rules for project revenue management, and institutional review board protocol development and revisions. The need to respond to new post-9/11 security concepts such as “dual-use research” or “sensitive but unclassified science” has also added substantially to the workload.

Virtually all of the issues underlying the governmental and institutional rules merit serious attention. Ensuring animal welfare and human subject protections are vitally important. Scientific fraud of any kind is intolerable. Conflicts of interest are inappropriate in any setting. Some science can be misused, and we owe society appropriate safeguards. Citizens deserve assurance that the scientific community is attending to these issues, and they are entitled to full accountability for the use of their investments in science.

However, as the U.S. National Academy of Sciences’ 2007 report *Science and Security in a Post-9/11 World* pointed out very clearly, we also need to prevent overreaction. We must maintain the openness that has so productively characterized the science and technology enterprise in the United States. We also need to be certain that our approaches to scientific regulation are as cost-effective as possible. A Council on Government Relations study (Report of the Working Group on the Cost of Doing Business, 2005) reported that for each of 25 surveyed U.S. institutions, the cost of compliance activities had increased some \$3 million per year over 5 years.

An ideal goal would be for every science-related rule or regulation to be rationalized and streamlined. As a group, they should be integrated as much as possible so as to reduce unnecessary duplication. New versions should address the lack of uniformity across agencies. Because the policies are currently the responsibility of federal and state governments and of research-conducting institutions, this streamlining will require a joint effort of all sectors. The Federal National Science and Technology Council, representing the leaders of the U.S. government’s science-supporting agencies, created a Research Business Models Subcommittee in 2003 to work on this problem. Their findings and efforts have not yet been felt extensively in the field, but this subcommittee might be an ideal cosponsor for this broad rules review.

Whoever takes the lead in reducing administrative burden might consider a somewhat unorthodox approach to reviewing and revising existing regulations. Rather than starting with the evaluation of each existing policy one at a time, it might ultimately be better to start anew from an integrated list of all the issues that must be addressed, and then take an entirely fresh look at what rules and regulations should be applied. Although this might trigger fears of “reinventing the wheel,” it also might prove the point of another old adage: “Never underestimate the value of ‘square one.’”

—Alan I. Leshner

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## THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION



# Research Administration as an Institutional Priority

- Sponsors' requirements are growing
- The stakes (audits, disallowances and damage to institutional reputation) are growing
- The need for talented, informed, experienced research administrators is growing

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Daniel R. Levinson  
Inspector General

November 2009  
OIG-09-07-00700



# Research Administration as an Institutional Priority

- Faculty productivity must be protected
- Risks must be managed
- Research institutions must have a commitment to the development of their research administrators



# Why an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization?

- Provides visibility and community to research administrators in a decentralized, crowded institutional environment
- Recognizes the significant breadth of relevant information needed by research administrators, including the development of “soft skills”
- Integrates policy and operations; pre-award and post-award; places premium on sharing best practices
- Delivers free training to all research administrators and prospective research administrators
- Creates a space for networking, mentorship, the development of pre-existing relationships
- Increases interest in the field and job satisfaction
- Offers a forum for research administrators to hone leadership skills, serve institution as well as their peers





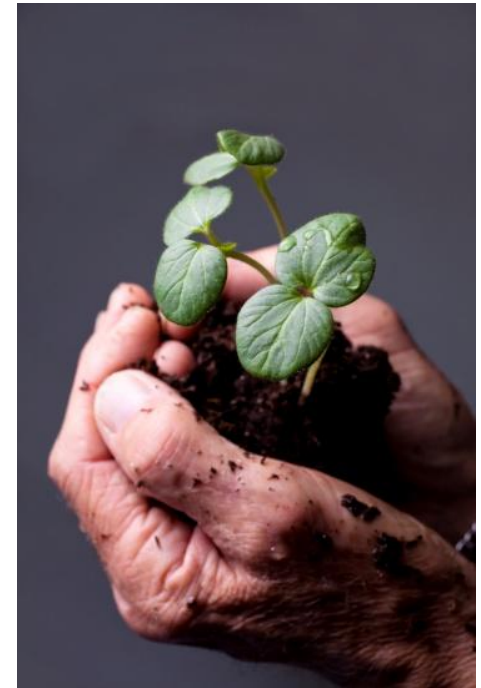
# Who Benefits?

- Staff (prospective, new, intermediate and senior research administrators)
- Faculty
- Students
- Alumni
- Sponsors
- The entire research enterprise



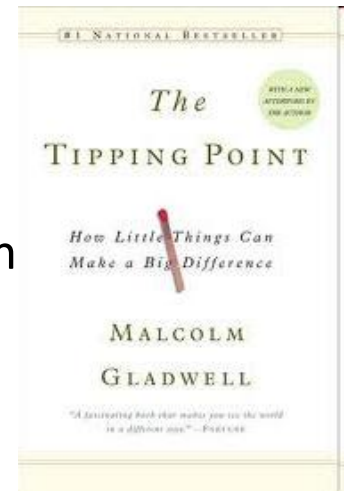
# The Seed of NURAP

- For years research administrators had talked about the development of an organization that would serve RAs on campus
- NURAP began informally—among a handful of research administrators campus-wide who knew each other
- Operating assumption: we would be greater than the sum of our parts



# The State of Research Administration at NU (2008-2009)

- ~\$477M in sponsored funding, more than double 1999's figure
- ~\$2.2B in proposal volume, which was unprecedented
- Number of research administrators at an all-time high
- Institutional need for research administrators at an all-time high
- Degrees (or institutional certificate) in research administration not available
- Senior officials at NU recognized the value of research administrators
- University strategic plan called for the development and communication of best practices, as well as the identification of “ways in which the central administration can facilitate and support various individuals’ and groups’ efforts to create a stronger sense of campus community”



# NURAP Kickoff and Timeline

- Steering committee convened Nov '08
- Officers elected Jan '09
- Bylaws ratified Feb '09
- VPR funding secured April '09
- First call for members May '09
  - 200+ staff signed up for NURAP before the first event
- NURAP listserv created May '09
- First Networking events June & July '09
- First Brown Bag Session Oct '09

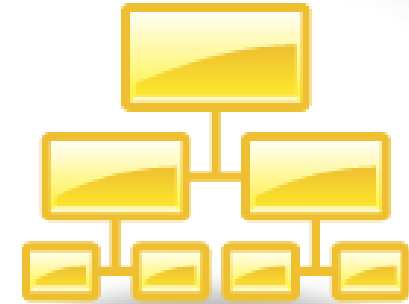


Jay Walsh, NU VPR



# NURAP Structure

- Steering Committee (representative body of 11)
  - Executive subcommittee
    - President, Vice President, Secretary
  - Standing subcommittees (led by Co-Chairs):
    - Programming
      - Brown bags focused on issues of importance to membership
      - Collaboration with central administration offices in the development of best practices
      - Soft skills emphasizing professional development, customer service, stress management
    - Information
      - Web presence, newsletter, listserv, and dissemination of critical information
    - Membership
      - Recruitment, networking events, travel awards
- Ad-hoc Subcommittee Members (volunteers)
  - Prospective Steering Committee members
  - Recruited from across the University





# Current NURAP Steering Committee

- **Lori Palfalvi** (*President*), Department of Medicine
- **Alden Chang** (*Secretary*), Office of Research Development
- **Elizabeth Adams**, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science
- **Sheri Carsello**, School of Communication
- **Deb Cundiff**, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science
- **Frank Cutting**, Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs
- **Kathy Mustea**, Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs
- **Seletta Nichols**, Department of Medical Social Sciences
- **Katherine O'Donnell**, Office for Sponsored Research-Evanston
- **Daniel Rademacher**, Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center
- **Gretchen Talbot**, Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences
- Currently, 1 center administrator; 2 department administrators; 4 school administrators; 4 central administrators; broad range of viewpoints



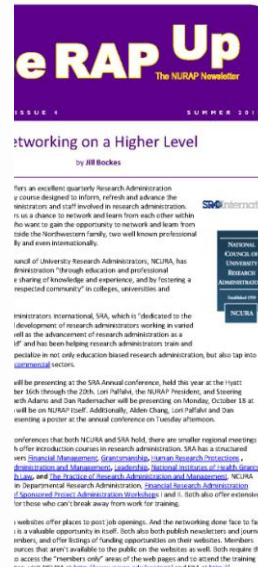
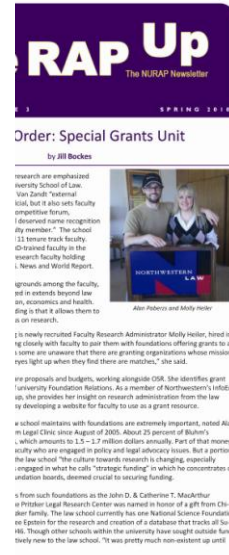
# Programming

- ACUC/IRB Overview
- Foundations 101
- Technology Transfer for the RA
- Effort Reporting Updates
- Sponsored Project Closeout
- Budgets for Beginners
- Subcontracts vs. Consultants
- Stress Management
- Social Networking
- New in 2011: CRA study sessions



# Information

- Website (<http://research.northwestern.edu/nurap>)
- Newsletter
- Listserv (including open RA job postings)



# Membership

- Development of logo in order to develop a “brand” (distribution of promotional items)
- Recruitment/retention
- Events dedicated to networking
- Travel awards
- Quarterly and annual surveys





## Current NURAP Demographics

- 336 current members
  - 13 Schools and Major Units
  - 41 Individual Departments, Centers, Offices
- From Department Assistants to Deans
  - 95 Financial job titles
  - 98 Research job titles
  - 78 Administrative and other job titles
  - 65 Deans, Faculty, Directors





# Lessons Learned

- Pioneering organizations need to take time to develop buy-in
- Originally anticipated about 75 members; the market was much bigger
- NURAP quickly became an agent of change on campus; research administrators are now a very visible group
- Employ multiple methods of communication to reach members
- Duplicate events on each campus, even though this can be challenging
- Critical to steward important relationships (i.e., with senior/sponsoring officials in central administration and dean's offices)



## From the Members...

- *“NURAP trumps all my other professional organizations with its relevant and timely presentations. Bravo!”*
- *“Great stuff, I benefited from [the session] a lot.”*
- *“Sessions like these are very positive and proactive. Thank you, I will attend future sessions.”*
- *“I really appreciate NURAP. It’s a wonderful organization for the Research Administration community.”*
- *“This was a fantastic session, very helpful and informative. Thanks!!”*
- *“This type of presentation would be great for all staff- not just the NURAP group.”*



## From the NU Provost

... a staff initiative that embodies the One Northwestern spirit is NURAP (Northwestern University Research Administration Professionals). NURAP is a newly formed campus organization that represents research administration and support professionals from across all areas of the university. The mission of NURAP is to improve institutional cohesiveness and provide a forum to exchange best practices. This self-organized group is a great example of community building, and one that can be replicated in other administrative areas that could benefit from increased interaction...



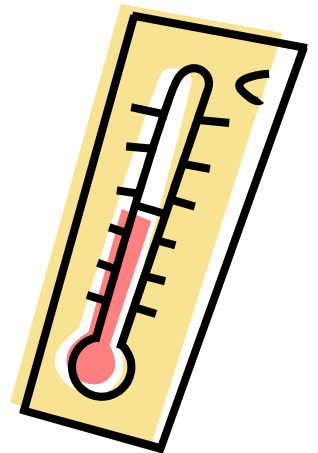
## Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- Inventory the research administration offices and leaders at your institution
  - Central
  - Schools/colleges
  - Research centers
  - Departments
  - Programs



# Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- Gauge the research administration climate and resources at your institution
  - Is research a priority at your institution?
  - Is the volume of research funding at your institution increasing?
  - Are faculty asking for more administrative assistance on grants/contracts?
  - Are research administration positions or roles increasing?
  - What training is available in research administration?
  - Have you experienced some challenging audits?





## Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- Identify key senior officials who would sanction and perhaps fund an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization
  - President
  - Vice President for Research
  - Provost
  - Controller
  - Finance and Administration



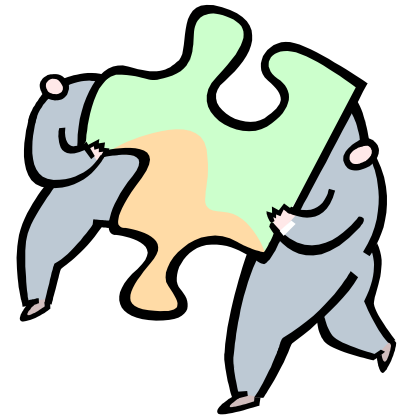
# Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- Develop a proposal
  - Steering Committee identification and structure
  - Mission statement
  - Bylaws
  - Budget (potential cost sharing from constituent groups)
  - Align organization with institution's strategies and aspirations



## Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- If at first you don't succeed...keep making your case
- Timing can be important--it can be difficult to win funding in a tight budget climate or off-budget cycle
- Even an informal (read: zero budget) organization of research administrators develops morale, community, productivity



## Developing an Institution-Wide Research Administration Organization

- When you do succeed...this is when the real work begins!
- Have a high-visibility kickoff that shows off senior-level support
- Measure quantitative (and qualitative) data and report annually
- Regular meetings of organizational leadership are indispensable



**Questions?**

**Thank you!**

