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
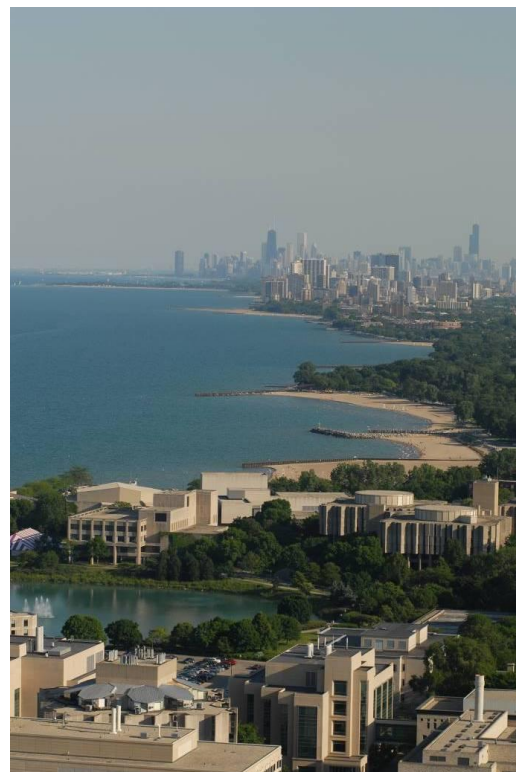
Research as an Institutional Priority

- 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)

Northwestern University

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."

EDITORIAL

Reduce Administrative Burden

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

Department of Health and Human Services
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

HOW GRANTEES MANAGE FINANCIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN RESEARCH FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
November 2009
OEI-03-07-00700

NSF Fraud Hotline!
1-800-428-2189

National Science Foundation
Office of the Inspector General
Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in NSF contracts and awards
Contact us at:
OIG.NSF.GOV or OIG@NSF.GOV
4201 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22230

The IG Act and other pertinent laws protect persons using the Hotline. Complaints can be made by NSF contractors, employees, or the public.

RECOVERY.GOV

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

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

NURAP
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION PROFESSIONALS

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

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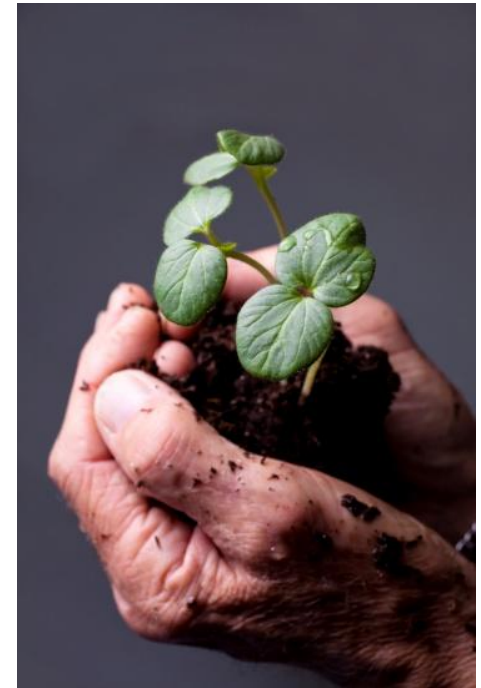
The State of Research Administration at NU (2008-2009)

- ~$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"
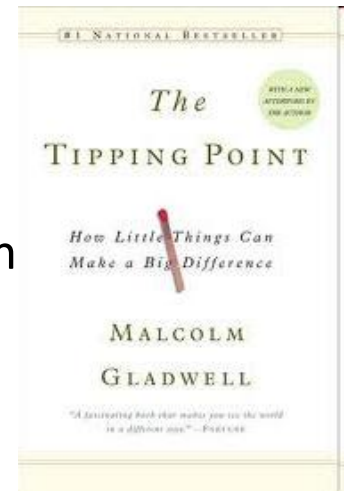
NURAP Kickoff and Timeline

- 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
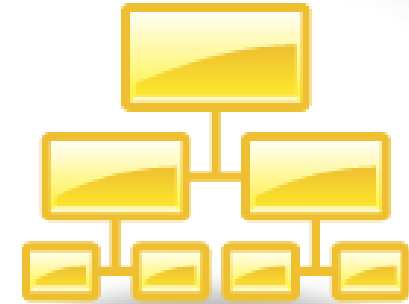
Current NURAP Steering Committee

- **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

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

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)
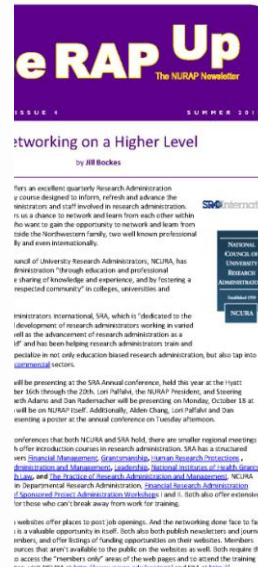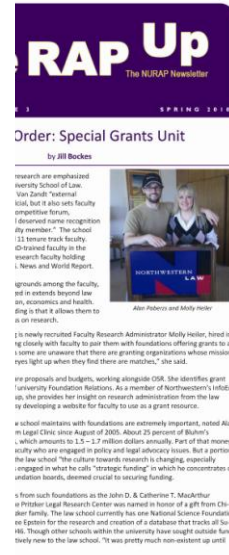
Membership

- 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."*

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

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...

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

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?

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY
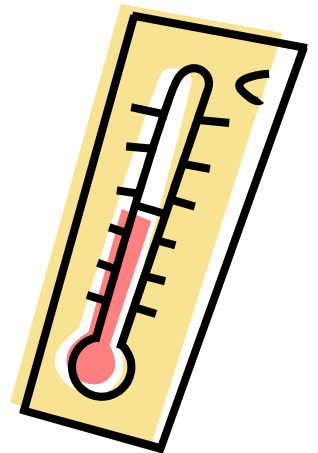
Developing an Institution-Wide
Research Administration Organization

- 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

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY
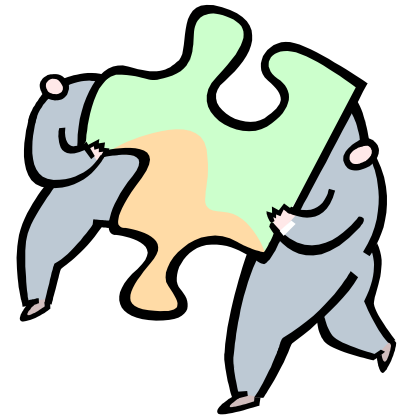
Developing an Institution-Wide
Research Administration Organization

- 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 indispensible

Questions?

Thank you!