NURAP
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION PROFESSIONALS

FOSTERING PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

SHARING THE NURAP EXPERIENCE WITH SRA AND NCURA

Lori Palfalvi, Department of Medicine, President of NURAP

In recent months, NURAP has made its way into the national and even international spotlight! Elizabeth Adams, Daniel Rademacher and I have had the chance to talk about NURAP in two venues: the SRA International Annual Meeting in October 2010 and the NCURA Midwest Regional Meeting in April 2011. Additionally, Dan and I, along with Alden Chang, presented a poster at the SRA meeting. You can see a copy of the poster on the NURAP website.

As presenters at both SRA and NCURA, we developed a slide set that covered three main points about our organization. Elizabeth started out with a compelling discussion about the need for well-trained and networked Research Administrators in this age of increasing administrative complexity and interdisciplinary research. Per a July 2006 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* faculty spend an average of 42% total professional time on administrative matters! As the need for talented, informed and experienced research administrators has grown, Research Administration has become a bona fide career path.

Next, I followed up with our case study, the founding of NURAP at Northwestern. It was great to relate our short but fast-paced history, sharing the stories and highlighting our successes. I talked about how we thought we'd have between 50 to 75 members *at most*, but were pleasantly surprised (OK, *shocked*) to have 200 people sign up as members before we held our first event! We have made a real difference at NU – new staff feel secure knowing there is a professional group to welcome and assist them in their new jobs. Experienced Research Administration Professionals have the opportunity to share their knowledge, mentor their junior colleagues and keep up with what's new in the field. The NU research enterprise undoubtedly benefits in manifold ways from our reinvigorated interest and dedication to our field of work.

After Elizabeth and I got the audiences totally on board with the NURAP idea, Dan stepped in for the third part of our talk. He gave the do-it-yourself version, offering advice easily tailored to various types of institutions. He advised gauging the research administration climate and available resources at an institution, identifying key leaders who might sanction a group like this, and then developing a proposal. Dan explained that our proposal was similar to a grant proposal, complete with a budget, justification and plan of action. He stressed that it would be especially important to align a proposal with the particular institution's strategies and aspirations.

Both the NCURA and SRA audiences were very excited to hear what we had to say. They asked lots of questions and were genuinely impressed with our accomplishments. Several people told us they were going to start their own version of NURAP at their home institution. It was an amazing feeling both to share our wonderful story and to see others ready to take on the same challenge and make this happen at their own institutions. We're very proud of NURAP – both where we've been and where we're headed!

From the Editor

Alden Chang, Office of Research Development

Dear NURAP Members:

I hope all of you have had a fantastic spring so far.

I would like to take a minute to thank all of you who took a moment to fill out the annual membership survey and provide some helpful about the RAP Up. Your suggestions will be incorporated into the next editions of the RAP Up. I've also included some of the results of the membership survey on the back page of this edition of the RAP Up.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank our former lead reporter **Jill Bockes** for all of her hard work and service to NURAP. WCAS's own **Catherine Berardi** and **Candice Weber** will be taking over lead reporter duties starting in the next edition.

Speaking of new contributors, in the upcoming issues you'll notice some new faces and the return of some of your favorite contributors. Until then, I hope all of you enjoy this issue of the RAP UP and that you have a great rest of the spring and a rejuvenating summer!

Member Recognition
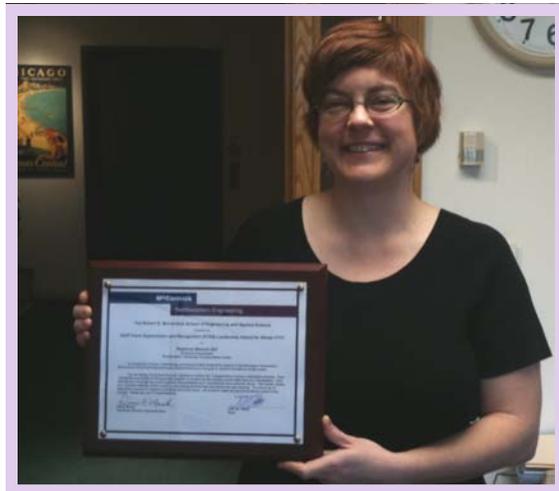
Rebecca Weaver-Gill (pictured above) received the McCormick Staff Team Appreciation and Recognition (STAR) Award in April.

Marta Russell was nominated for a STAR Award this past fall quarter. Her colleagues in Chemical and Biological Engineering note that she's experienced a particularly heavy workload recently but still found time to design a shadow system that allows more efficient tracking and projecting of effort. They also say that they are "continuously impressed by Marta's fortitude, skill, and ability to persevere through stressful times for a successful outcome ".

Seletta Nichols was a finalist for the 2011 Employee of the Year Award.

Michelle Suran (pictured left) received a Service Excellence Award in March for her work in the Chemistry of Life Processes Institute.

Angela Herrell and **Frances Crespo** in the Department of Preventive Medicine also received Service Excellence Awards.

Wendy Trocchio has accepted the position of Research Administrator 2 in the Department of Neurology and Neuroscience.

Membership Views

At a recent NURAP event on the Chicago campus, attendees were asked to provide their definition of good customer service.

Here's what your peers had to say:

To me, "customers" are defined as anyone I interact with during a business day; from co-workers, NU colleagues to external Sponsors. Knowing who are my customers is the first step in providing excellent customer service. After that, being a departmental resource on research, knowing and communicating accurate information or seeking out answers when I do not know is required for excellent customer service.

Wendy Trocchio, M.S.N., R.N., Administrative Manager for Neurology and Neuroscience Research

I define excellent customer service as anticipating an individual's needs and seeing the task to Completion.

Marc Irwin, Research Administration Specialist, NUCATS Institute

Providing excellent customer service, to me, means assisting my constituents the best that I can. This includes helping with proposal submissions, making sure that my departments have the most up to date NIH information, as well as information related to other sponsors, and being available to answer any questions in a timely manner.

Jennifer Hill, Grant and Contract Officer, Office for Sponsored Research-Chicago

I think it is crucial to be polite, accessible, and responsive. This ensures that everyone will have a pleasant encounter and will get what is needed within a reasonable timeframe.

Joshua Lamb, Program Assistant, NUCATS Institute

Department Dossier: NU Behaviors for RAs

Susan Morris, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science Research Administration

As we all know, it's Performance Excellence season. Approaches towards PEX vary: some are able to embrace the process as a tool for meaningful change, while others focus their energy on wondering "why is this happening to me again?!" Regardless of personal preference, performance reviews are a required part of our professional lives here, and we might as well make the best of them (or so I keep hearing). Below are some thoughts on how department administrators can approach six of the Northwestern Behaviors outlined at [http://www.northwestern.edu/hr/training/behaviors.pdf].

Coachability: Being receptive to feedback; willing to learn; embracing continuous improvement.

Changing and learning are inevitable for research administrators. Proposal guidelines, federal regulations, and university systems are always evolving. The days of CUFS entry and paper R01 applications are gone, and we've all learned the new ways whether we wanted to or not. An example of a simple goal here could be making sure you're subscribed to the right listservs and newsletters, so you can make sure you're the first ones to find out about the next big (or little) thing.

With so much change going on around us, it can seem like it's hard to improve because as soon as you get used to one way, you're asked for something different. But this only makes it more important to adapt and familiarize yourself with new information quickly, without waiting for formal training. Whether it's feedback from OSR on your proposal materials or comments from the dean's office on your 90-day letter, hearing about your mistakes is never fun, but at least you can avoid making the same ones twice.

Collegiality: Being helpful, respectful, approachable, and team oriented; building strong working relationships and a positive work environment.

Since we're spread throughout many units of the University, it's easy for department administrators to develop an "us vs. them" mentality. NURAP makes it harder because the faceless email address is now a real person with whom you had coffee last week, but the temptation is still there. Remember that we're all sharing the same central resources, so helping your colleague in another school helps you.

Another challenge in being collegial is stress. Pre-award administrators face immovable deadlines every day, with millions of dollars at stake. Post-award administrators may find themselves being pulled in a dozen directions at once, facing demands from professors, students, bosses, vendors, and strangers calling to ask about registration for soccer camp (true story). It's hard to be on your best behavior all the time, but poor behavior isn't acceptable even under the busiest circumstances. Better to let that call go to voice mail while you take a short walk to calm yourself down than to damage a relationship and your professional reputation by being rude or disrespectful.

Communication: Balancing listening and talking; speaking and writing clearly and accurately; influencing others; keeping others informed.

For a department administrator, communication is about balance. It's your responsibility to keep your faculty informed of deadlines, new policies, and updated procedures, but also to respect their time and avoid overwhelming them with information. Which news must go out to everyone immediately? What could be consolidated into a monthly/quarterly newsletter or email update? Does the entire department need this, or just a few people? Try to figure out whether your tendency is toward too much or too little communication and take a step in the other direction this year.

Compliance: Honoring University policies and regulatory requirements.

For many Northwestern employees, compliance consists mainly of following Northwestern's rules: filling out their time cards correctly, not stealing the petty cash to buy an xbox, etc. As research administrators, we have many other rules to follow – the government's rules, an individual sponsor's rules, an individual sponsor's rules about a particular type of award – on top of University regulations that are guaranteed to be more complicated or strictly enforced when sponsored dollars are on the line. Just knowing the rules or where to find them can a challenge, and a good goal for newer administrators could be learning more about certain regulations such as OMB circulars, IRB policies, or University travel rules.

The *really* tricky part is enforcing those rules. Research administration leaders are fond of saying that the answer to most "can I do this?" questions is "it depends." Captain Jack Sparrow is fond of saying that the pirate code is "more like guidelines than an actual code." While federal and institutional regulations are more consistently enforced than a pirate code, they can also seem maddeningly complicated, vague, or contradictory, especially when applied to an unusual or complicated situation, and individual institutions or units may have some leeway in making decisions. More experienced research administrators should focus on developing critical thinking skills to evaluate the nuances of a situation, and everyone can benefit by sharing experiences and seeking each other's advice.

Customer Focus: Striving for high customer satisfaction; going out of the way to be helpful and pleasant; making it as easy as possible for the customer (rather than the department or the University).

Sometimes, it feels like customer focus has to be the opposite of compliance. There are definitely times when you have to choose between a "yes" that will make the professor happy but break the rules and a "no" that will do the opposite. In those cases, it helps me to remember that my job is not "Faculty Morale Administrator." I'm here to protect my faculty's research dollars and reputation, and I know that they appreciate that in the long term even if they're not pleased with me every single day.

That being said, although I can't always make my faculty members happy, I can absolutely work to make their lives as easy as possible. There's a wide range between tasks where my assistance would be useless (e.g. writing Specific Aims) and where my assistance is required (e.g. approving payroll in HRIS). In that grey area are many opportunities where I can take on work that a professor could technically do on her own, and doing as many of those as possible makes the difference between "doing my job" and good customer service.

Efficiency: Planning ahead; managing time well; being on time; being cost conscious; thinking of better ways to do things.

Many forces that affect efficiency for research administrators are out of our control: the government, our faculty, the financial climate. We also have so many daily deadlines – effort reporting, proposal submission, payroll approval – that it's tough to step outside and focus on the big picture. If I set a goal like "I will submit all of my proposals on time" and a professor doesn't have his research plan ready until 30 seconds before the deadline, did I fail? Is that fair? Was it a waste of time to have that goal in the first place?

As a control freak and a procrastinator, I find this area more challenging than others, but I also recognize its importance. The very lack of control that defines our jobs requires *more* planning ahead, *more* prudent use of resources, and *more* dedication to constant improvement of our processes. We have to grab ahold of everything we can possibly control in order to make up for the unexpected, and constantly fight to stay ahead of schedule because it's only a matter of time before something throws us off track. It might not be easy or fair, but it's the job we signed up for and it can be done.

COMING SOON!!

project café

INFO-ED PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Project Café and the Office for Sponsored Research are pursuing plans to roll out InfoEd Proposal Development (PD) to both campuses this fall and winter. PD provides investigators and administrators with an online portal for preparing, submitting, and tracking their grant applications. The easy-to-use software streamlines the administrative effort involved in preparing proposals and offers useful new functionality for managing research grants.

Any grant which can be submitted through Grants.gov can be developed, routed, and submitted directly to the sponsor through InfoEd. For non-Grants.gov sponsors, InfoEd PD will replace current paper and eProposal routing, consolidating the way we do business.

Some key features of InfoEd PD include:

Greater Data Accuracy
- Use a single source online hub for collaborative application preparation that allows Principal Investigators and Research Administrators to view and contribute to the same grant application from work or at home on either Macs or PCs.
- Load standard institution-specific details (e.g., DUNS Numbers, Certification Numbers, F&A rates) into new proposals upon creation, reducing effort and improving data quality.
- Automatically check proposals for completeness before submission. Missing items are highlighted, providing the user immediate feedback and the opportunity to instantly address the issue.

Improved Budget Functions
- Auto-calculate F&A based on selected rate and base types or manually adjust to accommodate non-standard sponsor requirements.
- Produce modular budgets quickly and easily from detailed budgets.
- Easily inflate direct costs by budget period.

Enhanced Grant Submission Transparency
- PD's centralized attachment utility for supporting materials (e.g., research plans, study protocols, biosketches, etc.) allows users to remove and update previously submitted documents.
- Electronic routing and approval mechanism for departmental reviews allows for real-time updates of who has approved or is reviewing the submitted grant proposal.

NURAP Star: Haifei Wang

by **Alden Chang**

Haifei Wang is the Research Administrator for the Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care, in the Department of Medicine in the Feinberg School of Medicine. She is an example of someone starting from the bottom and working her way up the research career ladder. She recently sat down with Alden Chang to talk about her career progression and to offer a few tips for someone looking to make the same move.

AC: How did you get to this point in your career?

HW: I really didn't think about a career in Research Administration until I came to Northwestern University after I graduated from the University of South Alabama. I worked as a temporary employee in the beginning, and was promoted to a full-time Financial Coordinator a few months later. My work focused mainly on basic post-award management such as processing and reconciling charges. Later with more involvement in pre-award and post-award activities I became a Research Coordinator in 2008 and a Research Administrator in 2009.

Now I'm taking care of the pre-award and post-award grant administration for our division and I have some people help me in the post-award administration.

AC: Do you have a preference for pre-award or post-award?

HW: Well, they're different, but I like both.

AC: What do you like most about being a research administrator?

HW: What I like the most about being a Research Administrator is that I feel needed and appreciated. Our faculty really need my assistance to get proposals out in time and to manage their grants properly. They appreciate my work. I feel that I'm an important part of the research community. I'm happy to help our faculty and staff apply for grants and I trouble-shooting for them. I feel like my work paid off when they get funded.

AC: You just mentioned helping faculty and staff, that sort of gets to my next question. How do you define good customer service?

HW: I think we have to put ourselves in their shoes when we think about good customer service. We have to find out what their expectations of us are so we can meet and exceed them. For instance, a lot of faculty don't like to spend a lot of time dealing with research administration; they'd rather focus on their research, so I always try to keep this in mind.

For instance, when I pre-review faculty effort, I try to pre-review their effort and their subordinates' effort all at once so our faculty only need to log in once to certify the effort. Also, with junior faculty, I provide them with checklists, instructions and examples so that they can submit grants more easily.

AC: Do you have any tips on providing good customer service to your faculty?

HW: I think it is important to listen and understand what our faculty are asking for. If they come to us for something unallowable, we should try to propose alternatives that work within the constraints of the policies. Also we should try to be on top of everything to make things as easy as possible for our faculty.

AC: What is the most challenging part of your job?

HW: The most challenging part of my job is that sometimes I have to meet deadlines in a very short timeframe. We always have a lot of deadlines and it's very stressful sometimes, especially when submitting a big grant in paper at the very last minute.

AC: Do you have any general advice for new/junior Research Administrators?

HW: My general advice to new Research Administrators is to fully take advantage of all the resources that are available to them. NU has a great environment for Research Administrators with lots of meetings, training classes, useful online resources, as well as NURAP and good central administration offices for research. Try to participate or use them for your benefit.

Also, don't be afraid to ask questions. We have local experts in OSR and ASRSP. I used to contact them very often and had to set up conference calls once to discuss some VA and NU effort issues. Don't be afraid to contact NIH people when needed for clarification or their advice on some grant management issues. They are very helpful from my experience.

CRA Exam: Post Review and Closeout

Farrin Abbott, CRA?, McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science Research Administration

I've had my eye on the CRA Exam since accepting my first official Research Administrator position. It wasn't the appeal of a 4-hour testing session, the 109 page Courier font OMB-A21, or even the possibility of a little acronym after my name. It was particularly alluring to me because I started noticing job positions which "strongly recommend CRA certification" at other research-intensive universities, representing a possible shift in hiring and clearly a sign of a growing interest. At the time, I had little resources available to me in my position to prepare for such an exam and the task seemed far too overwhelming on my own. I had a lot of experience with post-award administration, some pre-award, but the exam covers a broad range of material. It covers material that I would have to simply memorize; material that I wouldn't know from my own experience in Research Administration. That was the part that didn't appeal to me. I'm an applier. I like to see how something relates to me in the big picture of life. The why…the connection…the reason.

When I read about the CRA Study Group forming on campus, I was a bit apprehensive because I had just started my new job and felt unsure about committing to a 12-week study class. I was surprised when my supervisor encouraged me to attend, even though I was the newest member of our team. It was a big undertaking since I was also learning a brand new job in a large department.

Honestly, I didn't have a lot of time to study each week, but at the very least, I forced myself to attend the review sessions. I could at least guarantee that I would sit and listen for an hour and a half each week to gain knowledge, which would help me in the new position. That's more training and guidance than I have ever received in a job--hands down. I made connections, laughed, and chatted with people that I would never have even met, let alone be on a first name basis with now. It was nice to see all levels of Research Administration banning together for one common goal. I feel that we all made up a collective force and I hope that each one of us found our own versions of success. I certainly don't see passing a standardized test necessarily as *success*. I am generally not a good test taker, but the point is that I learned a lot during those sessions.

Each week, different colleagues would present the materials from the weekly reading. They did a terrific job with their presentations, keeping it interesting and opening up discussions among the group. Afterwards, they shared their presentations and we'd discuss topics as needed via email. I would honestly recommend attendance by all levels of staff. After reviewing and learning more about the laws and federal policies, I understand the need for our sometimes difficult-to-deal-with-systems. They may not be perfect, but I clearly see the need for each one.

I equate it with a similar experience from my college days: I did not understand Algebra until I learned Calculus. Algebra seemed completely fabricated and pointless. Calculus was applied and gave me use of Algebra. It always seemed like a backwards way to learn it, but then who could start with Calculus? This CRA training initiative made me realize the *whys* of our everyday existence with Research Administration. It's easy to get lost in the bureaucracy and feel like just another cog in the wheel. It was valuable to examine the actual reasons and the accountability that we all owe to the taxpayers and to Northwestern.

This program is unique, and if continued for future staff, would have a lasting effect on Research Administration at Northwestern. I know that it was quite a lot of work for the presenters and for that I am so grateful to have been able to participate this year. Lastly, to the organizers, hats off to you for pulling this together so nicely. Seriously, thanks. It was a nice way to escape the office for a few minutes and talk shop with other administrators.

Tips for future test takers

- Study *contracts* even if everyone says, *"they aren't grants"* because they **are** on the exam!
- Make a giant PDF from the very beginning of all of the CRA Body of Knowledge sections to be covered. (If you make it with Adobe Pro, it automatically creates snazzy bookmarks.) This also gives you a giant, searchable, PDF of *all things Research Administration* to use in your actual day-to-day job.
- Use DropBox to sync your documents with work, home, and phone automatically making it easy to study, even for a few minutes, wherever you can.
- Wikipedia is a great resource to piece together dense topics. Use the Wikipedia book creator to make it super easy.

Are you curious about NU's Certified Research Administrator sessions? Were you too busy earlier this year to attend? Would you like to see the sessions offered again next year? What did you like about the sessions? How can we improve upon them?
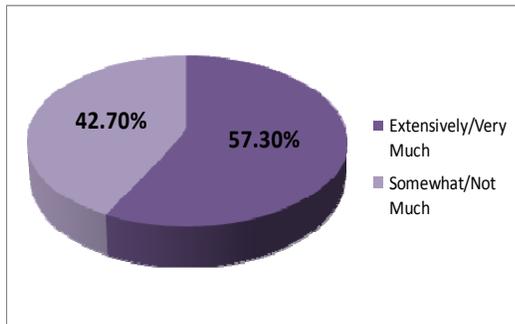
NURAP would like to hear from you!

Please watch for our CRA feedback and planning survey in your email box in the next week or two.

By the Numbers: Results from the Membership Survey

Does membership in NURAP help you professionally?

41.40%   58.60%

■ Extensively/Very Much
■ Somewhat/Not Much
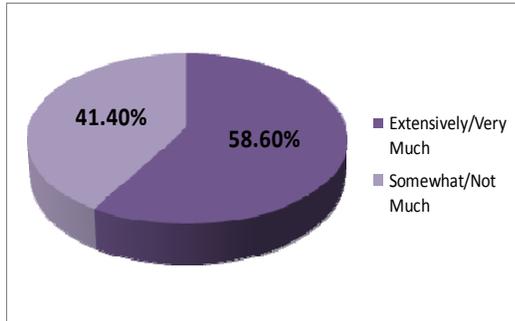
Has membership in NURAP made you feel more interested in the research enterprise at NU?

42.70%   57.30%

■ Extensively/Very Much
■ Somewhat/Not Much

Survey Quotes

NURP has been instrumental to my training as a new employee at NU. The topics covered are really relevant to my job and it is a great way to stay up-to-date with new regulations.

Thank you for creating the CRA prep sessions, preparing the materials and presenting. This was the most wonderful and helpful benefit of NURAP membership to date.

It is a great organization and contributes a lot to the university!

Excellent organization with programming that appeals to new and experienced Research Administrators.

Good job, we're so fortunate to have this organization on campus.

NURAP is a good place to learn and meet some compassionate colleagues. Thanks NURAP for always informing the world of Research Administration here at NU.

Other Regular Newsletter Contributors

Elizabeth Adams, CRA Update
McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science

Jill Bockes, Lead Reporter
Northwestern University Clinical and Translational Sciences (NUCATS) Institute

Frank Cutting, Post Award
Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs

Tyra Darville-Layne, Compliance Corner
Office for Sponsored Research, Evanston

Matthew Duoponce, Sponsor Update
Office for Sponsored Research, Chicago

David Hull, eRA Update
Office for Sponsored Research, Evanston

Daniel Rademacher, "Dear Dan"
Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center

For questions or comments about the RAP Up, please contact us at:

847-467-0043 or alden-chang@northwestern.edu