Research Administration at NU:
Finding your path and advancing your career

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NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
The Big Picture

- The missions of universities
  - Research
  - Education
  - Public service
  - Local, state, regional and national economic engines?
- Universities receive sponsored funding for all of their mission-related activities
Sponsored funding represents a significant source of revenue for universities, and it conveys prestige.
The Big Picture

- NU received ~$477M in sponsored funding in 2009, more than double 1999’s figure
- Competition for funding is fierce; sponsors’ expectations are growing
- Bottom line: Faculty productivity must be protected; risks must be managed
The Problem

July 2006 *Chronicle* reports on faculty survey inquiring on their time commitments; 42% 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.”
A Solution

- Robust research administration helps universities be more competitive and more compliant
- Competitive
  - Submit more and larger-scale proposals
  - Attract and retain world-class faculty
- Compliant
  - Reduce risk of audit and disallowance
  - Preserve NU’s reputation, and the public trust
What is a Research Administrator?

The research administration life cycle

Find Funding | Proposal Preparation | Award set-up | Manage Award | Award Close-out

Focus on customer service and compliance throughout the research life cycle
Life-cycle of a Sponsored Project

- Pre-award
  - Proposal
  - Agency Review

- Post-award
  - Active Award
  - Award Close-out
Proposal

- Identify funding
- Read Instructions (RFP, PA, etc)
- Plan a schedule with the PI
  - OSR-5-day review
  - Gather support documents
  - Subcontract?
  - Cost sharing
- Communicate with OSR, Foundation Relations, IRB, and other central admin units as necessary
Agency Review

• After proposal is submitted, the agency may ask for additional information
  • Research narrative revisions
  • Budget changes/clarifications
  • IRB certifications
  • NIH “Just in Time” (JIT)
Active Award

• Contract, award letter, or Notice of Grant Award (NGA) is sent to Northwestern.
  • Contract negotiations between OSR and the funder may be necessary
  • OSR issues project account summary (PAS)
  • PAS outlines all of the budget, demographic, reporting, and restrictions for the award
Active Award (cont’)

• Department spends the funds and works with OSR and ASRSP if changes are needed (ie budget changes, scope of work, PI effort, add/remove personnel, change project dates)

• Annual or interim reports
  • Narrative reports (PI)
  • Financial reports (ASRSP)
Award Close-out

- OSR/ASRSP generate close-out email notices for each project
  - Two basic options: close project or request extension (NCE)

- Record retention
  http://policies.northwestern.edu
Introduction to McCormick

Facilities
The Technological Institute is one of the largest academic buildings in the world. The Ford Motor Company Engineering Design Center, a six-story state-of-the-art engineering education facility, is adjacent to “Tech”.

Departments
There are 8 departments.

Faculty
There are approximately 180 faculty members.

Undergraduates
There are approximately 1400 undergraduate students.

Graduate Students
There are approximately 500 master's students and 800 Ph.D. students.
Research at McCormick

- Nano Engineering
- Network Engineering
- Energy and Sustainability
- Transportation Engineering
- Design
- Engineering and Medicine
- Financial Engineering
- Robotics
- Health Care Operations
- Mechanics
- Computer Science for Economics
- Computer Science for Media
- Neural Engineering
- Data Mining
- Art and Engineering
- Innovative Imaging
The Science of Soccer Stats

Current McC RA Organizational Structure

Elizabeth Adams
Director

Deb Cundiff
Associate Director (McC Centers)

Jarrod Routh
Research Coordinator (ARRA)

Erin Archer
Business Administrator

Research administrators report through the school, but work within the department and interact with faculty.
Advantages of the McCormick Model

- Reporting structure
- RAs manage projects “cradle to grave”
- RAs trained by expert
- RAs work exclusively on research administration
- Flexibility with coverage
- Cohesive operation across school
What’s It Really Like to Be in Research Administration?

- You help faculty and students do the things they are passionate about
- Caters to the intellectually curious and the generalists
- Deadline-driven!
- You don’t yet go to school for this (yet)! You learn by doing
- You gain exposure to and expertise in:
  - The business of higher education
  - Public policy
  - Finance and accounting
  - Law and compliance
  - Organizational psychology and change
  - Management and human resources
  - Information technology
  - International economics and globalization
Research Centers at NU

- NU has a long history of leadership in interdisciplinary research programs and centers. 27 University Research Centers, 90 School-Based Centers, and 3 research centers at Medical Affiliates support interdisciplinary research that spans a wide spectrum of areas.

http://www.research.northwestern.edu/centers/index.html
IPR is one of the 27 interdisciplinary research centers whose mission is:

- To stimulate and support excellent social science research on significant public policy issues
- To disseminate the findings widely—to policymakers, journalists, other researchers, students, and the public

http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/
IPR: A Brief History

- 1968: Founded as the Center for Urban Affairs (CUA) with $1 million Ford Foundation grant

- 1980-81: Changed name to the Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research (CUAPR) to reflect expanded research agenda

- 1996-97: Changed name to the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) to accommodate centers under our umbrella (e.g., Joint Center for Poverty Research) [shorter, catchier, more memorable name, too!]
In addition to helping faculty produce policy-relevant research, IPR works to disseminate faculty research widely through publications, events, and outlets, such as:

- training and workshops
- policy briefings
- conferences and colloquia
- web site, annual reports, newsletters, and e-news
- books
- media

IPR’s Annual Report for 2008
Diversity of IPR’s Funding Sources

- IPR primarily receives funding from federal agencies and private foundations
  - Federal: NIH, NSF, IES (Dept. of Ed.)
  - Foundation: MacArthur, Spencer, Gates, W.T. Grant, Smith Richardson, Russell Sage, Robert Wood Johnson

- Each year, Faculty Fellows submit 40-50 grant applications and receive 20-30 new awards.
Career Advancement at NU

- Job Performance
- Networking
- Training/education
Job Performance

• HR has stated requirements for transfer or promotion
  • 1-year service
  • Strong performance evaluation scores
  • Moving to the next appropriate job grade
Networking

- Attend brown bags on various topics
- Join NU organizations
  - AHEAD@NU
  - NURAP
  - NUSAC
- Talk to your colleagues, friends, and keep your ears open
- Remind people you are interested in ‘moving up’
• Consult with HR and ask for assistance
  • HR staffing consultants are available to discuss career options and training opportunities
  • HR provides feedback on your resume, application cover letter, and may help with a mock interview
Training and Education

• School of Continuing Studies (SCS)
  http://www.scs.northwestern.edu/

• HR Development courses
  http://www.northwestern.edu/hr/training/

• NU administrator training through ORI
  http://www.research.northwestern.edu/ori/training/index.html
Thanks! Questions?