NEW TRAINING ROLE AT THE OFFICE FOR SPONSORED RESEARCH-CHICAGO

We are delighted to announce that Lori Palfalvi was recently named Manager of Education and Training in the Office for Sponsored Research-Chicago. In her new role, Lori will support the goal of developing and implementing effective training curricula for pre- and post-award administration on the Chicago campus.

Under the direction of a multi-disciplinary advisory committee, she will work to identify the appropriate training necessary regarding the regulatory, administrative and technical practices of research administration, focusing mainly on pre-award processes during the first year of this project. Lori will assess current training offerings at NU, will interview staff in central and well as department settings and will also look at what our peer institutions are doing to train and educate their research administration staff. There will also be initiatives aimed at faculty training and education in the administrative aspects of grant proposals and administration. The goal is to forge a more effective partnership between investigators and research administrators as well as departmental and central staff in all aspects of sponsored research administration.

Lori, a Certified Research Administrator (CRA), brings with over 15 years of experience in sponsored research administration at Northwestern University, most recently with the Department of Medicine’s Central Administration. Many individuals already know Lori as the founding President of NURAP and through the DOM Monthly Research Administrators Meeting she has hosted for the last several years on the Chicago campus. She will continue to foster education and training in this new position.

Please join me in welcoming Lori to her exciting new role!

David Lynch contributed this piece to the RAP Up.
FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings NURAP members.

I’m pleased to present the Winter Edition of the RAP Up.

Within these pages, you’ll find helpful information from the Office for Sponsored Research, Corporate Relations, and Foundation Relations.

I would also like to announce that this is the final edition of this newsletter that I will be editing. I am confident that I am leaving this publication in solid hands, particularly those of my subcommittee co-chairs: Sara Sylvan and Nathan Younglood. It will continue to grow from strength to strength and will succeed with the hard work of the information subcommittee, especially from its ad hoc members Taylor Carl and Ingrid Fowler.

I’ve been with the RAP Up since the first edition and know that a host of members have helped the RAP Up become successful: Krista Galvin, Rebecca Weaver-Gill, Elizabeth Adams, Frank Cutting, and Susan Held, amongst others.

I thank everyone named in this article for their diligence and effort and wish the RAP Up continued success and the best of luck for the future.

Alden Chang is a co-Editor of the RAP Up and a Senior Research Administrator in the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Congratulations to RAP Up contributor, Susan Held. Susan was just designated as a Silver Level contributor to the RAP Up by the NURAP Information Subcommittee. The new status acknowledges her prolific contributions to the newsletter.

Congratulations Susan!

The Chemistry of Life Processes Institute would like to recognize Michelle Suran, Business Manager, who recently received a Service Excellence Award for working tirelessly and far beyond the call of duty to provide the highest level of financial services to the fast growing Chemistry of Life Processes Institute.

Over the course of the four years since she joined the Institute as a research administrator, Michelle has overseen an 3-fold increase in the number of Centers and 7-fold increase in the number of core facilities served by her office. She has implemented a broad array of business practises and policies that endeavor to ensure appropriate compliance with University, state and federal regulations while minimizing the administrative burden on faculty and students. She has played a critical role in enabling the development and growth of 5 new shared resource facilities; helping faculty directors and facility managers develop their business plans, cost studies, and annual budgets.

Michelle constantly strives to meet the highest standards of best management practises. She goes out of her way to help her colleagues in other units; frequently giving up valuable hours to share her extensive knowledge and expertise. Moreover, she consistently provides an empathetic ear to faculty, students and staff and is unfailingly warm and courteous no matter how great the workload or pressure. She models professional behavior and discretion at every turn and has earned the trust and regard of her peers and clients alike.

Congratulations to NURAP member, Kelly Morrison for her appointment to the role of Associate Director of OSR-Evanston.

Congratulations to NURAP Travel Award Winners: Aaron DeLee and Geoffrey White.
Corporate Engagement
The Corporate Relations team works to build relationships with industry to increase their engagement with schools and units across Northwestern. Corporate engagement opportunities include sponsored research, recruiting, executive education, technology licensing, and philanthropy.

What we do
We collaborate with an extensive network of university staff and faculty on outreach to companies, as well as assist with resolving corporate agreement and accounting issues. Our collaborators represent almost every school and unit across the university. As a result, our office can streamline a company’s engagement with Northwestern.

Corporations we work with
We work with a wide range of companies from start-ups to Fortune 100 corporations representing manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, software, computer hardware, consulting, and marketing.

Helping with Pre-award
We identify funding opportunities and help with proposals from faculty and program directors. We are available for counsel on university data, indirect costs, and standard procedures.

Helping with Post-award
We assist with stewarding companies post award including help with reporting requirements and follow-up visits.

The Office of Sponsored Research (OSR)
Our team has a strong working relationship with OSR both in Evanston and Chicago. We work together to maintain positive and coordinated relationships between corporations and the University.

Common questions we answer
I just received a check from a company with no additional information, where does it go?
We have an extensive database tracking both proposals and relationship management data. If you are not sure where money belongs, we can help you find the appropriate account.

A company contacted me with interest in funding my program! What do I do?
Congratulations! Give us a call or email any of us. We are available to help with the process in securing university funding from a company.

What corporations might fund my professor’s research?
Our office understands which industries support which disciplines. We can provide prospects and assistance in getting your faculty or programs in front of corporations.

Any questions?
Please do not hesitate to contact any of us at the addresses below. We are happy to help!

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Jim Bray, Senior Associate Director
j-bray@northwestern.edu, 1-3371
Tim Angell, Senior Associate Director
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Aaron Wooden, Assistant Director/Researcher
aaron.wooden@northwestern.edu, 1-7483
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Allison Savage, Program Assistant II
allison.savage@northwestern.edu, 1-8802
Recently, a colleague recounted a frustrating encounter with a faculty member. This well-meaning PI told my colleague, “NO faculty member would EVER want you to [do that thing you just did].” My colleague wisely kept his calm and did not tell the PI that, actually, most faculty members ALWAYS ask him to do that. He was simply trying to let previous experience guide him.

One of the significant differences between departmental and central administrators is that we interact with faculty all the time. We’re on the front lines, giving them advice, nagging them about rules and missing items, helping them wrestle with complicated systems, and following them around to get signatures. This is actually one of my favorite parts of being an RA, and why I’ll probably never go back to central administration (sorry, OSR). We get to literally peek into the PIs’ labs and touch their research, to learn their kids’ names and their dogs’ names, to hear their hopes and dreams for their portfolios and their students. When things go well, we get the praise, along with the occasional chocolates, flowers, and wine (sorry, departments with less awesome faculty).

When things don’t go well, though, we’re also on the front lines. We’re right there down the hall when they’re upset about the reimbursement they haven’t gotten yet, we’re at the top of their inbox when they want to tell someone how unfair the federal regulations are, and we’re trying to use the urinal next to them when they suddenly remember a proposal they forgot to tell us about (not me, but TRUE STORY).

When these unfortunate encounters happen, it’s tempting to generalize. “Faculty are so crazy!” “Faculty are so absent-minded!” The correlation between tenure and personality traits is best left to the experts, but I feel pretty confident saying: faculty are people. They are not all the same. Treating them all the same is a bad idea. However, trying to divine what works for any one of them could be a large-scale research project in and of itself. Here are my suggestions for getting to know a PI and what works best for them.

**Ask.** Be straightforward. Ask what is most important to them or what they like best about their favorite administrator. Ask if they have processes they’ve tried in the past that have worked really well for them. Ask what their least favorite part of the process is and see if you can help make that easier.

**Let them know what’s popular, carefully.** We don’t want your PI jumping off a cliff just because all the other PIs jumped off a cliff, right? But you also don’t want your PI to think you’re just making all this up. You could say, “Many faculty tell me that the closeout process is easier to understand if we have a face-to-face meeting the first time we go through it. If there isn’t a convenient time for us to meet, just let me know and I’ll make sure you get the information you need another way.” This gives the PI an easy out of they just don’t like meetings.

**Offer concrete options.** This is especially important for new faculty, who may not have any idea what they want yet. Instead of asking, “What do you want me to do next?”, say “I can prepare a draft for you to edit, or you could put something together for me to review. Which would you prefer?”

**Explain when suggestions are based on preference.** It’s okay to tell a PI what would be easiest for you, especially if they ask. Just make sure it’s clear what you’re doing and why. For example, I might say, “I’ve found that it’s simplest if you send me a Word version, in case I find a typo or a stray page number that I can correct without bothering you. However, I can use a pdf if you prefer.”

**Let them know when they don’t have a choice.** If something is a requirement rather than a personal preference, make sure the PI understands. “You need to use different headings on your research plan” invites the response, “No I don’t!” or “Says who?”. Explaining that a solicitation has special, non-standard guidance about the required section headings redirects the PI toward writing a great proposal rather than arguing with you.

**Invite faculty to let you know what you’re doing wrong.** Trust me, I hate hearing that I’ve done something wrong or unhelpful, but it’s better to know right away than find out later on. Tell your PIs, “If I’m ever doing something in a way that’s confusing to you, or you think we could make this process better, please let me know so we can try something different.” It’s easiest to set a precedent when you or the PI are new, but you can also drop this into a conversation with a PI in an established relationship, whether it’s “Things seem to be going well, but I hope you’ll still tell me if there’s something I could be doing better” or “I know the last few expense reports I’ve processed for you haven’t gone done as quickly as you wanted. How could I have done things differently to make that easier for you?”

**Learn from your mistakes.** Calmly take the blame when something didn’t go well, and don’t do it again. My first month on the job, I almost quit because a faculty member told me I had neglected to do something “all RAs do for all faculty.” I thought I would never be able to make it up to him. My very wise supervisor told me that he would probably forget much more quickly than I would. I don’t know whether he has forgotten, but last year he told me he didn’t know how he would manage his research without my help.

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**Susan Held, CRA** is the author of the Department Dossier column and a Senior Research Administrator in the Department of Biomedical Engineering.

Susan is a silver level contributor to the RAP Up.
Can you tell us about your background and how you arrived in research administration?

I was raised in Oak Park, IL, a suburb of Chicago. I received my Bachelor of Science in Communications at Bradley University in Peoria, IL this past May. Being from the area, you hear of Northwestern and how involved it is and that really resonated with me while I was searching for a career. I did a lot of charity work in high school and at Bradley so being part of a process that does so much great research was very enticing. I graduated May 18th and started at OSR May 28th and have not looked back!

Can you describe a typical day at work?

My day starts with creating a daily to-do list. I believe that organization is a key element in any aspect of your life, especially your career. I then read over my emails, responding when applicable. Based off my experience communication is one of the most important parts of the research administration process. From there my day is filled with reviewing research proposals and processing grant awards.

What are the more challenging aspects of your job?

I wouldn’t necessarily call it challenging but at the Office for Sponsored Research we have organized chaos, especially around deadlines. But with such an all-around well trained staff from the department research administrators, principle investigators, OSR and everyone in-between everything seems to run fairly smoothly.

Do you have any recommendations for new hires?

I would recommend new hires to be proactive about networking. In my brief time at Northwestern one thing that has stuck out is all the opportunities to meet people and extend your network. Whether it’s a department’s brown bag, a NURAP at Noon, or even bagels in a break room, there’s always opportunity to meet new Northwestern employees and expand your network.

What do you like most about being a Grants Assistant?

My excitement to come into the office in the morning. Quite simply I enjoy the interactions that take place between everyone involved in research administration, whether face-to-face or over email. From the first day at the office I could tell how lucky I am to have such friendly and intelligent coworkers.
FOCUS ON:
Working with Foundation Relations

Working with a faculty member who is mulling over MacArthur? Are you guessing about Gates? Or, maybe there’s another foundation on your mind – after all, Northwestern interacts with well over 100 private professional foundations every year. Each foundation has its own particular programs, guidelines, and relationships, which means that foundation grantseeking can be a distinct challenge for even the most seasoned research professional or principal investigator.

Thankfully, administrators and faculty at Northwestern have an institutional resource dedicated to foundation partnerships: the Office of Foundation Relations (OFR). OFR works across all areas of the University to monitor and enhance Northwestern’s relationships with private professional foundations. Please contact our office if you or a faculty member you are working with is interested in reaching out to a private foundation:

foundationrelations@northwestern.edu or (847) 491-4590.

Read on to learn more about our work and how we can best assist you:

What exactly are “private professional foundations” and what do they fund?
Private professional foundations are charitable, non-governmental organizations that fund programs and projects that serve the public good. They are distinct from public charities in that they do not solicit donations from the public to support their programs but instead spend down from an endowment (hence the term “private”). They differ from more informal family foundations due to the existence of dedicated program staff and a detailed proposal process (hence the term “professional”).

Beyond those basics, foundations vary widely in funding interests and preferences – which is why a dedicated foundation relations office is so useful! Generally speaking, foundations tend to support discrete projects that address a specific problem and benefit the larger community beyond the University. Foundations typically do not provide funding for core University needs such as course development or endowed chairs or centers. At Northwestern, single-year foundation grants average $100,000 and multi-year foundation grants average $300,000.

Where is the Office of Foundation Relations located?
Organizationally, OFR is part of Alumni Relations and Development. In addition to working with development colleagues, we regularly collaborate with all areas of the research infrastructure at Northwestern, including the Office for Sponsored Research, Office for Research Development, Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs, the Provost’s Office, and the President’s Office. Physically, our offices are located on the second floor of the John Evans Alumni Center at 1800 Sheridan Road, Evanston campus. We frequently travel to both campuses to meet with colleagues across the University.

What assistance does OFR provide and how can I work with you?
Though Sponsored Research is the official required signatory on all sponsored project foundation proposals, OFR can assist you in all aspects of the grantseeking process up to and beyond proposal submission, including:

* Offering initial guidance to faculty interested in seeking foundation support
* Providing research and advice about specific foundations
* Identifying foundations that might be interested in funding particular projects
* Reviewing and editing proposals and letters of inquiry
* Coordinating and tracking submission, reporting, and stewardship efforts

Why work with OFR?
We are a team of foundation specialists and experienced editors with extensive knowledge about individual foundations and funding opportunities. We bring a carefully calibrated “foundation-centric” perspective, allowing us to share guidance and feedback that is likely to mirror a foundation’s priorities. Our efforts in FY2013 involved every school at Northwestern and contributed to a total of $38.5M in foundation commitments.

We are open to any of your inquiries about foundations and look forward to working with you:

foundationrelations@northwestern.edu or (847) 491-4590

http:www.northwestern.edu/foundationrelations

Michael Kelley contributed this piece to the RAP Up. He is Senior Associate Director, Foundation Relations, Office of Alumni Relations and Development.
The majority of Northwestern University’s research portfolio is composed of funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which is largely composed of grants by their subsidiary the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The HHS will be making a significant change to how the actual funds are received by the grantee organization, moving from “pooled” to “subaccounts.”

Current Practice
Although each project is issued under a separate award notice, the total funding for all awards is currently aggregated into a single “pooled” account, which is accessed by the grantee through the HHS Division of Payment Management (DPM). The grantee draws down cash as a lump sum for the collective expenses that occur in a given period over all the individual projects. Northwestern draws down weekly for expenses applied to the applicable accounts in the previous week.

New Practice
HHS is moving to a system that uses “subaccounts.” In this new model, grantees will draw down funds from award-specific accounts in the DPM on an account-by-account basis. This alternative model is already being used for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) awards and ultimately allows both the grantee and NIH to better monitor how much funding is available for a given project.

NIH’s transition plan
Between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014, NIH will transition payment for all domestic awards with new document numbers (i.e., Type 1, Type 2, Type 4, Type 6, Type 7, and Type 9) from NIH Payment Management System (PMS) pooled accounts (G accounts) to PMS subaccounts (P subaccounts). Since these new awards will already come to Northwestern as pooled subaccounts, departments will see no change in how these awards are set up in NU systems. ASRSP will manage the changes.

Between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015, however, NIH will transition payment for all continuing domestic awards (i.e., Type 5 and Type 8) awards that have not yet transitioned to subaccounts from PMS pooled accounts (G accounts) to PMS subaccounts (P subaccounts). For these types of continuation awards, the following will happen:

NIH will issue all FY 2015 non-competing continuation awards that have not yet transitioned to subaccounts as Type 4 awards (funded extension awards) to recognize the changeover from pooled to the subaccount model.

This transition will effectively “break” the single non-competitive segment into two shorter “competitive” segments. NIH will curtail the first segment by changing the project period end date in Commons to equal the budget period end date. The aforementioned change will take place when the award for the second segment, the FY 2015 noncompeting award, is issued.

Consequently, the current year award then becomes the final year of the first “competitive” segment and a final Federal Financial Report (FFR) from the original start date through the new/revised project period end date must be submitted.

NIH will allow for carryover in accordance with the terms and conditions on the individual awards. Per existing policy, the Grants Management Officer (GMO) at NIH will review unobligated balances in excess of 25 percent of the total authorized amount for the budget period and may request additional information from the grantee. If the GMO determines that some or all of the unobligated funds are not necessary to complete the project, the GMO may restrict the grantee’s authority to automatically carry over unobligated balances in the future and use the balance to reduce or offset NIH funding for a subsequent budget period. A combination of these actions is also possible.

NIH will be enforcing the 90 day policy that governs the expiration of a federal grant in which recipients can only use remaining grant funds to liquidate expenses incurred during the performance period within 90 days of the project period end date. After that time, we will not be able to make draws for expenses.

How to prepare?
Plan ahead and carefully monitor expenses and unobligated balances. For transitioning projects where NIH will break the current segment into two shorter “competitive” segments, a federal financial report on the first segment will be required and a new chart string established for the second segment.

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NIH Subaccounts—continued from previous page

Timeliness is paramount. With the enforcement of the 90 day policy, NU will now have only 90 days to draw down funds after a project has ended. You will need to ensure all trailing costs are applied in a timely manner. If there are outgoing subawards, remind the subrecipient that we must have their final invoice by the due date prescribed in their subaward document.

Know which awards will be affected. This significant change will apply to all non-competitive awards where the current competitive segment was issued prior to October 1, 2013 and you anticipate a non-competitive award issued between October 1, 2014 and September 30, 2015.

Joint information sessions by OSR and ASRSP will be forthcoming in the summer months.

Department Dossier—Continued from page 4

In any of these situations, it’s possible that the PI will come back with a preference that really won’t work. “I want you to certify all of my effort reports for me” is not something we can accommodate, nor is “I want you to decide which supplies to order on which grants instead of asking me.” But the more you can get to know your PI and how they like to work, the more likely they’ll listen when you explain that, actually, a German Language & Literature major should not be writing their Project Summary.