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This double issue of the Journal contains articles from both the summer 1998 and fall 1998 issues. The summer 1998 issue of the Journal was previously published in electronic form on the SRA web site. A quick perusal of the contents page of each issue illustrates the diversity that characterizes the field of research administration. However, the reader will notice two consistent themes: (a) the need to adapt to change, and (b) the importance of establishing partnerships to advance the research enterprise.

These themes are particularly timely, for this will be a year of change for the SRA Journal, and it will take all of us to make sure that any changes in the Journal result in better service to the membership. Toward this end, only two single issues of the SRA Journal will be published in 1999. This change in publication schedule will give the society an opportunity to examine the Journal’s publication costs and alternative ways of meeting these costs. Individuals representing key groups within SRA will participate in an evaluation of the Journal’s current format, content, and visual appearance.

I invite all SRA members to participate in the redesign process by sending me your comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the present Journal. I can be reached at <pmiller@siu.edu>.

Thank you!
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A NEW PARADIGM FOR DEPARTMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE REORGANIZATION

Robin A. Hexter

ABSTRACT

The basic science department administrators at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine have experienced internal and external factors pressuring their departments to provide more service with fewer resources. Given these emerging factors, it was inevitable that departments would need to consider administrative restructuring in order to meet the needs of the departmental research faculty and a growing research portfolio. The administrators concluded that individual department efforts to reorganize duplicative areas of administration were inefficient and wasteful. A collective approach to departmental restructuring was developed involving interdepartmental cooperation and collegiality. This method of working together has fostered a new paradigm in administrative reorganization for the basic science departments.

INTRODUCTION

Few things are more sacrosanct than departmental autonomy. Despite this, many factors within and outside academic institutions make it compelling for departments with common administrative functions to cooperate and, in appropriate cases, to consolidate these functions. The eight preclinical departments at Johns Hopkins have entered into an effort to systematically centralize and enhance selected, shared services. This is a case report on the first jointly established administrative service.

BACKGROUND

There are eight preclinical departments at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine Department of Physiology, 217 Hunterian Building, 725 North Wolfe St., Baltimore, Md. 21205. Phone: (410) 614-1508. Fax: (410) 614-8331. E-mail: rhexter@bs.jhmi.edu

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Special acknowledgement to the basic science department administrators for the outstanding cooperation, commitment and devotion that made this article possible: Jude Brown-Bellamy, Sue Chapman, Gerry Hunsicker, Al McCauley, Sue Scheper, Arleen Skaist and Pam Smith. A special thanks goes to William S. Agnew, PhD, for his encouragement and editorial assistance.
Medicine, including Biological Chemistry, Biomedical Engineering, Biophysics and Biophysical Chemistry, Cell Biology and Anatomy, Molecular Biology and Genetics, Neuroscience, Pharmacology and Molecular Sciences, and Physiology. Basic research and education are the primary focus of these departments. In fiscal year 1997, the annual sponsored research programs of the basic sciences totaled $46 million. Of this, 79 percent was in the form of individual R01 awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In the face of a more competitive environment for federal research funding since 1990 (Katz, 1995; Horton, 1995), NIH awards to the basic science departments have grown an average of 8 percent per year over the last five years.

The traditional revenues that support research, patient care and teaching at academic medical institutions, such as Johns Hopkins, include direct awards for the cost of research, indirect cost recovery from federal research grants and clinical practice earnings (Pardes, 1994). Health care reform has made it more difficult for academic health centers to provide clinical care competitively. Such centers are inherently expensive because of costs associated with specialty health care, biomedical research and teaching (Igelhart, 1995). Consequently these academic institutions are facing increasing pressure to reduce costs of medical care, shorten hospital visits and increase outpatient treatment (Igelhart, 1995). This reduction in clinical revenues may significantly diminish the funds available to invest in research and teaching (Rich, 1994). This co-investment (e.g., for pilot studies, lab renovations, bridging funds, etc.) is essential for maintaining vigorous growth. Within the last several years, Johns Hopkins has experienced the impact of managed care. In response, the medical center has undertaken organizational restructuring, cost-cutting mandates and expansion of health care provider networks.

An additional complication is that in 1993 the NIH eliminated all administrative support from the direct cost category on individual research grants (OMB Circular A-21, Section F.6.b, July 26, 1993). As a result of this 1993 federal policy mandate, expenses associated with administering these grants were to be absorbed by unchanged indirect cost rates. Furthermore, no compensatory increases were made to basic science department budgets from the administration to cover those costs.

With a steady growth in research programs in the basic science departments and shrinking resources to administer the research, the basic science administrators concluded that it was necessary to work together to address the administrative needs of the research faculty. In 1995, the eight preclinical administrators met to examine their administrative operations. They reviewed each department’s organizational structure, administrative staff and the coordination of departmental administrative responsibilities. From this and subsequent discussions, it became apparent that there were redundancies in some

1The Johns Hopkins University was not affected by this policy revision until July 1, 1996, because the university’s indirect cost rates were negotiated through June 30, 1996.
areas of department administration. Closer examination of these redundancies became the primary focus of the administrators.

**METHODS**

**Survey of Needs**

From the eight department administrators, a working group of four was formed. At its first meeting, the group ascertained which redundant administrative functions might be centralized. Credentialing of faculty and non-faculty appointments was one of five areas initially identified. Although most departments coordinated credentialing differently, the credentialing paperwork for these appointments was the same for every department. The standardization of paperwork made the centralization of credentialing easier than the four other administrative functions reviewed. The working group thought that establishing a central credentialing office would initially decompress administrative staff, liberate faculty from an administrative burden, and create a high standard of quality and expertise in credentialing for participating departments.

**Credentialing Process**

"Credentialing" is the certification of academic credentials for faculty and non-faculty appointments. Non-faculty appointments primarily include postdoctoral fellows and trainees. For appointments to be reviewed and approved by university officials, standard documentation is required from the department. Usually this involves the verification of academic qualifications, completion of transmittal forms, and attachment of letters of recommendation and all information from the prospective appointee. Non-U.S. appointees commonly need a visa. Nearly 50 percent of all appointees in the basic science departments are from another country. Foreign appointments require about six to 12 hours to process, depending on the visa type (i.e., J-1, H-1B). By contrast, domestic appointments take one hour. Non-faculty appointees constitute 70 percent of all appointments for these departments.

**Data Gathered**

Data were gathered on the volume of credentialing activity and the staff assigned in each department by means of a database questionnaire followed by staff interviews. This information revealed wide variations in practice. Interviews disclosed that most personnel performing credentialing also handled many other administrative tasks. Most departments had two or more individuals handling credentialing. In some departments, faculty were doing most of the credentialing functions with minimal staff support. Highest efficiency and central coordination was found in the departments that had one staff member accountable for credentialing. These departments could carry out credentialing with little or no assistance from faculty. However, it was often true that the staff person responsible was over committed.

Results from the credentialing questionnaires revealed that in fiscal years 1994 and 1995 about 2.2 full-time equivalents (FTEs) were devoted to processing appointments and visas in all eight departments (this figure did not include estimates of faculty effort). The questionnaires also indicated that departmental staff of
various pay levels were performing credentialing. The total appointments and visa totals for fiscal years '94 and '95 are shown in Table 1 (see page 9).²

Planning
The working group met with the remaining administrators to review the data gathered in the questionnaires and interviews and to make recommendations about the establishment of a central credentialing office. All eight departments agreed that a central credentialing office should be established. The administrators decided that the department with the highest expectation and service for credentialing should be accepted as the minimum standard for the credentialing office. They appointed the basic science administrator with the greatest credentialing experience to oversee the office. A majority of the eight department administrators would determine policies for this office. The credentialing office would handle faculty and non-faculty appointments and visas; the departments or the office could process routine re-appointments. In mid-April 1996, the administrators presented a proposal about the office to the department directors, who then gave their approval.

Implementation of the Basic Science Credentialing Office
Following the directors' authorization, the working group re-convened to discuss the logistics of opening the Basic Science Credentialing Office (BSCO) by July 1, 1996. The Human Resources Department assisted with the classification of staff positions for the office. Two qualified persons from two separate basic science departments were hired. One of these individuals was chosen with some supervisory skills so that the office would not require day-to-day supervision. The two departments that contributed staff sought no replacements. The administrators decided that the initial support for salaries and operating expenses of the credentialing office would be funded equally from existing departmental budgets. Under this arrangement, some departments incurred an additional expense while other departments reduced their expenses. Computers, office equipment, furniture and space for the credentialing office were provided by several of the department administrators.

Standardized credentialing documents and procedures developed by each department were collected for the credentialing office. The working group and the credentialing staff completed the coordination of phones, network connections, office equipment, computers, furniture and other necessary items for the office. The BSCO opened on July 1, 1996. The credentialing staff spent July establishing the office, ordering supplies, installing computers, and discussing policies and office procedures. Also, the staff finished appointments that they had started prior to their new positions in the BSCO. A color-coded file management system was developed to visually distinguish materials for each department. Acquiring the

²Credentialing data for FY 1996 were not obtained because surveys were conducted during the second quarter of FY 1996. Complete data for 1996 would not have been available until after the planning and implementation of the Basic Science Credentialing Office.
### TABLE 1
APPOINTMENTS AND VISAS
FY 1994 AND 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>*Faculty (tenure track)</th>
<th>*Faculty (non-tenure track)</th>
<th>*Facultyl Promotions</th>
<th>*Non-Faculty</th>
<th>*Visas (All)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 94</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 95</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Primary appointments within basic science departments only*
existing appointee files from the departments took two and one-half months to complete. During this time, the BSCO staff met with central divisional office personnel and basic science department staff to establish liaisons. The BSCO began processing new appointments in August 1996.

Within nine months of operation, a BSCO mission statement and information about the BSCO's services were developed and distributed to the basic science community and the central divisional offices. The BSCO staff instituted new office procedures and a variety of standardized forms. These included the credentialing checklist, the summary letter on university health insurance requirements and costs, the sample degree certification, a letter of introduction, and consent and release forms for degree information. Departments no longer maintain credentialing records because they are kept by BSCO and are available upon the individual department's request. This office was given signature authority from the School of Medicine Registrar's Office for non-faculty appointment and stipend/health insurance changes. This eliminated the need to ask for the department director's signature on such changes. Most of the credentialing paperwork was computerized. New appointments and visas processed by the BSCO from July 1, 1996, to June 30, 1997, are shown in Table 2 (see page 11).

**EVALUATION OF BSCO**

Faculty Evaluations

To evaluate BSCO, phone surveys were conducted with basic science faculty, central administrative staff and appointees. Of 42 possible faculty, 26 were randomly selected to respond to the phone survey; 19 of them had reason to directly interact with the BSCO and were thus able to answer the survey. The phone survey consisted of five questions; because question 3 could be interpreted as critical of the faculty member's department, it was considered optional. Table 3 (see page 12) summarizes the faculty's responses from the phone survey. Information that was revealed from the survey included:

- 100 percent of faculty respondents had experience dealing with both the department and BSCO.
- 59 percent of the responding faculty said that the service was improved: the remaining 18 percent thought the quality of service was unchanged.
- 100 percent of the respondents approved of a central office.

The overall rating (question 5, not limited to the four categories in the survey) reflects faculty satisfaction with all aspects of the office. General comments about BSCO included "very smooth process," "knowledgeable staff," "liberates department staff to handle other administrative responsibilities" and "positive experience." Several faculty also commented that the existence of BSCO could have been better communicated. Others suggested there could have been more personal contact with the faculty.

Central Staff Evaluations

All of the central administrative staff in the School of Medicine (e.g. the Registrar, Postdoctoral Programs, Student and Postdoctoral Benefits, and International Student and Faculty Services Offices) that interacted with BSCO were contacted. Their responses are presented in Table 4 (see page 13). Important outcomes disclosed from the survey were:
### TABLE 2
APPOINTMENTS AND VISAS
FY 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Faculty (tenure track)</th>
<th>Faculty (non-tenure track)</th>
<th>Faculty Promotions</th>
<th>Non-Faculty</th>
<th>Visas (All)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 97</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Primary appointments within basic science departments only
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>Customer Service</th>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**

How would you rate the BSICO on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = worst, 5 = best)?

| 001   | X           |

Do you think we should continue to have a BSICO? Yes or No?

| 18    | Same        |
| 69    | Better      |

In comparison to the Cecemalin service provided by your department, was the

| 001   | X           |

Has the BSICO process improved for your department?

| 001   | X           |

Have you had improved processed by your department prior to the inception of

| %     | Response    |

**Summary of Facility Responses**

**Table 2**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Summary of Central Staff Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your interaction with the Basic Science departments been frequent, occasional, seldom or never?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has your interaction with the BSCO been frequent, occasional, seldom or never?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In dealing with the one central office (BSCO) for credentialing issues as opposed to many Basic Science Departments, has the process been better, worse or same?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think we should continue to have a BSCO? Y or N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you rate the BSCO on a scale of 1 to 5 (1= best, 5= worst) for each of the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Overall Rating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Not an average of the four categories above
• The central administrative offices expressed that they were no longer training or re-training inexperienced basic science faculty and staff on credentialing issues because the BSCO was handling credentialing.
• The quality of work by the BSCO was exceptional insofar as appointments were almost never returned for errors or incompleteness.
• Central staff no longer lost time determining which departmental staff member to contact for credentialing questions or problems.
• The overall rating (question 5, not limited to the four categories in the survey) indicated high satisfaction with all aspects of the credentialing office.

Common observations about BSCO included “very responsive,” “easy to deal with one central credentialing office rather than many different departments,” “made our jobs easier” and “knowledgeable, experienced and competent staff.”

Appointee Evaluations
Many non-faculty appointees were contacted; however, several factors reduced the evaluation to brief comments only. Most appointees were not familiar with the appointment process. Also, most of them had no previous knowledge about how well appointments were processed prior to BSCO. And in many cases, language barriers for the appointees created communication problems. Remarks made about BSCO included “helpful staff,” “no problems,” “appointment process seemed simple,” “excellent or very good experience” and “responsive staff.”

Interview with BSCO Staff
The BSCO staff initially thought that most of its difficulties stemmed from communication gaps with central administrative staff, and department faculty and staff. Also, the BSCO staff had problems communicating to the basic science faculty that the office existed and the services it provided. Overall, the staff believed the BSCO provided a needed service. Communication with the central offices now has been well established. The BSCO staff has improved communication with basic science staff and faculty. The staff hopes to further improve communication and plans to visit annually with faculty and staff to keep them updated about BSCO. In the future, BSCO intends to enhance its services by implementing an electronic database to provide information to basic science departments and central offices, and to manage proactively appointments and visas. Also, there are plans to create standardized procedures to streamline the entrance and exiting process for appointees.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS
Most basic science administrators felt that working closely together can lead to more efficient administrative services for faculty engaged in research and education. The first area for such cooperation was in credentialing. This unavoidable administrative function was a redundant area in the departments that was eliminated by establishing the central BSCO without diminishing departmental autonomy. The surveys revealed that the university, departments and faculty realized better service and efficiency. The office was funded in the most equitable fashion, resulting in
cost shifting. Overall, additional costs were not incurred. At this juncture, no clear cost savings have been demonstrated. However, higher performance standards have reduced burdens on faculty and central administration by liberating time from credentialing activities that BSCO presently performs. As research programs grow, this office can efficiently expand services with more flexibility, more efficient training and fewer incremental staff than a system where personnel are distributed in each departmental office.

Survey comments confirmed that the BSCO staff were knowledgeable, experienced and competent, and that the staff had developed expertise in training and service. All parties agree, however, that to maintain high quality the credentialing office should be periodically monitored.

The collegiality of the basic science administrators was a significant factor that contributed to the success of centralizing credentialing, which will be tested in the creation of additional centralized services. New career opportunities for basic science personnel were created as a result of this project. This form of restructuring has been the catalyst for consolidating other administrative areas. It is hypothesized that as more consolidated services are established, cost savings across departments will be generated as department staff numbers are reduced. Fewer highly skilled staff with specific administrative training will deliver a higher degree of quality service to the faculty. A new administrative structure within the basic sciences can be seen on the horizon, and thus, will be a subject of future studies.

(See references on page 16)
REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit institutes are widely regarded as being perhaps the best location for an experimental social innovation unit. As described by Fairweather and Tornatzky (1977), the ideal location for an experimental social policy research unit is one that “lies between and overlaps various aspects of government and the university. The best organizational form seems to be one that involves funding and legitimacy by the executive, legislative, and operational units of government and of the university” (p. 389).

Such an organization offers a number of advantages, including the ability to bring researchers, policymakers,
and community members together to work on neutral ground with a focus on cooperation and problem solving. Research is divided into contracted research, performed at the request of participating governmental agencies, and innovative research. (Fairweather & Tornatzky, 1977).

By the late 1980s, several state health departments across the country—among them New York, California and Massachusetts—had “in-between” organizational arrangements that enabled them to conduct selected research, education, and service activities through closely aligned nonprofit entities. These “first wave institutes” encompassed a variety of functions as nonprofit research, development and educational institutes or foundations, and they gave their host states a number of inherent advantages. As news of their success spread, other states and entities—including Michigan, Louisiana and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—established similar nonprofit institutes.

Although perhaps different in organizational details and range of projects, these institutes share inherent advantages. Unlike their government colleagues, they can:

• Compete for applied health science and community research awards from the National Institutes of Health and private foundations that virtually never award such funds to political entities, such as governmental agencies.

• Patent, license and market advances in vaccines, molecular biology, blood products, and other biologicals.

• Generate fee-for-service income by providing specialized health service capabilities to non-governmental client groups (e.g., the sale of health data, the provision of health training, or the sale of surplus biological products).

• Accept and undertake new projects in a timely manner, including recruiting professional, scientific and support staff and securing the necessary equipment and supplies.

• Terminate projects in an equally timely manner.

• Take advantage of unique cost savings measures, such as hiring personnel for the duration of the project, purchasing equipment through the use of preferential
procurement contracts held by collaborating institutions, and controlling indirect cost rates.

These advantages have not gone unnoticed. Today, an entirely new wave of players is contemplating the establishment of such institutes.

In a guest commentary published earlier this year (McDade & Hausler, 1998), Joseph McDade of the National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and William Hausler Jr. of the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory stated that the changing roles and responsibilities of the public and private health sectors have necessitated new arrangements able to "identify the specific functions of public- and private-sector laboratories, facilitate collaboration in areas of shared responsibility, and prevent unnecessary duplication of services." They recommended that "local public health institutes be formed, with public health laboratories as founding members, to improve strategic planning for public health," and cited the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) as an example of an institute that can provide such a forum. Many groups, like the public health officials of Victoria, Australia (VicHealth, 1997), are considering the establishment of institutes quite similar to the one put into practice in Michigan.

This paper discusses the nonprofit Michigan Public Health Institute, one of only a handful of collaborative institutes across the nation specializing in public health research, development and education. Because of its status as a neutral, nonprofit institute with access to the best and the brightest in health care researchers and policymakers, MPHI stands as a model for the establishment of other, similar organizations to meet the challenges of our ever-changing public health environment.

THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE EVOLVES

Throughout the latter half of the 1980s, key members of the Michigan Dept. of Public Health (MDPH) staff, representatives of state universities, legislators, and other interested parties joined forces to establish a closely aligned nonprofit public health entity in Michigan.

By the fall of 1990, organizers had passed enabling legislation and filed articles of incorporation that established the new Michigan Public Health Institute as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, adopted bylaws, and held their first meeting of the new board of directors (now comprised of representatives from the three partner universities, state government, foundations, and community agencies).

In the beginning, MPHI's directors envisioned the new institute as a major force in achieving the goals expressed in The Future of Public Health (U.S. Institute of Medicine, 1988) and Healthy People 2000 (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1991). They reasoned that the new institute had close ties with the academic, government, and health care provider communities within the state and therefore would be able to take full advantage of the entire depth and diversity of Michigan's health research community. Today, just as its founders envisioned, the institute offers its partners a number of advantages, similar to the perceived benefits enjoyed by the Research Triangle...
Institute and its partners (Larrabee, 1991).

The three partner universities (Michigan State University, the University of Michigan, and Wayne State University) gain: (a) internship and training opportunities; (b) graduate employment opportunities; (c) access to specialized facilities; and (d) access to a broader talent pool for adjunct research and teaching appointments. In addition, they are able to take advantage of cooperative research, demonstration and training opportunities with other partner universities and state and local government, foundation, federal, and corporate sponsors. They have access to a reservoir of supplementary scientific resources that can be used to recruit graduate students and distinguished faculty. When they develop fundamental health policy innovations, MPHI provides them with an avenue for disseminating those innovations and putting them into action as public policy.

MPHI has subcontracted nearly $3 million in projects to its partner universities. Inter-Institutional Personnel Agreements (IPAs) have been signed by MPHI and its university partners to permit the movement of personnel and other programmatic resources between and among the partners and the sharing of administrative costs on project grants. MPHI has sought and received a federally approved indirect cost rate of 12.4 percent on all direct costs, excluding equipment. MPHI and its university partners have worked together to establish the following three-part policy on indirect cost rates for university subcontracts with MPHI:

- For projects funded by the state of Michigan, the universities cap their indirect cost rate at 20 percent of the total direct costs.
- For projects funded by federal government entities or foundations, the universities reflect their current applicable university indirect rate for on-campus or off-campus projects, subject to the rules of the funder.
- For projects in which universities become funding partners, the involved parties may negotiate a mutually acceptable rate on indirect costs on a case-by-case basis in recognition of the fact that they are investing for a mutually beneficial outcome.

The state health department also benefits by being an MPHI partner. As a result of its partnership, it: (a) receives access to diverse sources of funding; (b) gains the ability to tap into the scientific and technical resources of the state universities and MPHI; (c) broadens its research, development, demonstration, and training capabilities; and (d) is able to rapidly start and terminate projects.

MPHI gains access to expert faculty and government consultants, as well as to shared equipment and facilities. The cooperative university/public health/nonprofit venture gives MPHI a competitive advantage in winning major research contracts and grant awards. This spirit of cooperation also enables MPHI to divide the work from contracts and grant awards among university, MPHI, and government experts. Joint or adjunct appointments in research or teaching give MPHI scientists the opportunity to teach, supervise graduate study, and
co-author books and papers with their university and government colleagues.

**MPHI Comes Into Its Own**

In 1994, MPHI was awarded a two-year master contract for research from the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA). It was one of only 10 consortia in the United States selected for the award. The following year, HCFA awarded MPHI a prestigious five-year Master Contract for Research Centers to conduct long-term care research and policy development, making it one of a select few research consortia pre-qualified to bid on high-priority projects related to improving elder health care in the United States.

As the prime contractor under this Master Contract for Research Centers, MPHI works in conjunction with its three member universities and other Michigan- and U.S.-based health research collaborators to pursue research and demonstration projects. These projects are concerned with health system financing, access and quality of care, service delivery systems, managed care, provider payment, sub-acute care and long-term care.

MPHI has experienced exponential growth. At the end of 1992, the institute had three funding sources, no employees, four new projects, and an annual income of $371,056. By the end of fiscal 1997, MPHI had 120 full-time employees and an income of $16.1 million for the year.

A sizable portion of the institute’s growth in the last two years has been due to a re-focusing of its mission, vision, values and strategic objectives. These changes were made necessary in part by a 1996 executive reorganization of state government in which the Michigan Dept. of Public Health became the Community Public Health Agency within the Michigan Dept. of Community Health. (Today’s Michigan Dept. of Community Health encompasses the operations of the former state governmental units of public health, mental health, Medicaid, services to the aging, and drug control policy.

MPHI and its partners are focusing on building community capacity through leadership development, technical assistance, program evaluation and training.

As part of that executive reorganization, a number of the functions of the previous state health department are being “devolved” to communities. In response to this change, MPHI and its partners are focusing on building community capacity through leadership development, technical assistance, program evaluation and training. The institute’s current projects involve community-based
human services collaboration, child and family health, health care systems and financing, risk factor reduction/ chronic disease prevention, violence and injury prevention, and laboratory and infectious diseases.

MPHI encourages the formation of multi-institutional collaborative grant-writing and research teams. These project groups may be located at any of the partner institutions or at MPHI. Personnel, purchasing and business systems are under the leadership of researchers. Teams are established as “semi-autonomous” research groups, with their own offices or suites. Program directors, pulled from the ranks of researchers, are encouraged to provide leadership and service to the research groups in their area, but all share in the decision-making.

This leadership style has been described as primus inter pares or “first among equals” (Greenleaf, 1977). Although one person is chosen to be the group leader, that person is not the “chief.” Instead, governance and guidance are spread among the group of peers, all of whom are able and willing to share in the running of the organization. This servant leadership style is compelling. It empowers the individual, and it can be seen throughout all levels of activity at MPHI.

As research is completed, MPHI disseminates the findings to as wide an audience as possible, often publishing the research in peer-reviewed journals, health care trade publications, and university or foundation publications. For instance, at the completion of the institute’s community health profiles project — designed to improve the health assessment, planning and evaluation capacities of local public health departments and their hospital partners in Michigan — project leaders published a discussion of their findings in a statewide journal for hospital and health care administrators (Monaghan, Schillo, & Beane, 1995). Similarly, research regarding activities being undertaken throughout Michigan to revitalize the process of community health assessments was published last year in a peer-reviewed journal for public health managers (Paul-Shaheen, Schillo, Beane, & Kleinau, 1997). Furthermore, research regarding a pilot program to educate the public about the safe use of firearms was published this year by a peer-reviewed journal for social marketers (Roberto, Johnson, Meyer, Robbins, & Smith, 1998).

**Building for the Future**

As the decade comes to a close, MPHI is placing a greater priority on science that has the potential to focus community health trends in positive directions, as well as projects that advance community capacity to improve health status and to reduce disparities in health status among population subgroups. It also is developing its role as an advocate for community health improvement, especially as a conduit for effective communication between communities and government, funders and academia. MPHI’s new direction can be found in a recent MPHI report on the efforts of 26 communities (Patterson, 1996) and a subsequent statewide conference involving state, community and foundation players.

The institute currently invests about 55 percent of its gross income in communities in the form of grants and support to universities, community-based organizations, and others working to promote health and pre-
vent disease. It is working toward the day when it invests as much as 60 percent of its financial resources in endeavors that increase local leadership capacity in communities, promotes research and education in advancing public health practices, and builds on effective public health collaborations with universities, communities and institutions.

One of the most promising long-range projects undertaken by MPHI during the last few years is the Michigan Community Health Leadership Institute (MCHLI). Established by MPHI in 1995, the MCHLI offers public and private health care professionals, community leaders, and members of the academic community the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to lead Michigan's efforts in solving state and local health problems. Programs are one year long and include on-site and distance learning opportunities. Modules are interactive and consist of team projects, presentations, discussions, and case studies. Faculty members are drawn from Michigan's colleges and universities, as well as from the national public and private sectors.

MPHI's recently completed conference center and interactive learning center will offer an endless array of learning opportunities for MCHLI scholars and other key constituents. Its offerings will enable MPHI, its partners, and its clients to remain in the vanguard of health research, development and training. The facility includes a three-room, 145-participant videoconferencing facility that offers satellite downlink capability and the opportunity to host fully interactive video conferences on a simultaneous basis with participants in as many as 45 sites around the world. The adjoining community health sciences virtual library, currently under construction, will provide workstation-based electronic library service, on-site reference and literature search services, access to information regarding funding resources and opportunities, multimedia resources, inter-library document delivery, and a "best practices" information exchange between health groups.

CONCLUSIONS

The executive reorganization of Michigan state government that was begun in January 1996 continues today. Many see it as a defining movement in "devolving" some state government responsibilities to communities. In response to these changes, local communities are striving to reform their systems to integrate services and support the choices of families and individuals. As local governments and non-profits struggle to develop additional expertise in their communities, they are expressing an increased need for training and support services. Likewise, as the size of their own staff significantly decreases, state agencies are expressing an eagerness to contract these services to qualified experts.

MPHI is well-positioned to accept many of these additional responsibilities, and it is doing so. The institute is playing a key role in supporting communities working to respond to devolution, something that many states may soon be experiencing.

In today's changing health care environment, MPHI serves as an effective, collaborative voice of communities. It also stands as a model for the
establishment of other nonprofit health institutes that can take advantages of their organizational neutrality and university-government-community connections to meet the nation’s changing public health needs through public health research, development and education.

REFERENCES


INTRODUCTION

Large collaborative grant applications can be stressful for researchers and research administrators. Such applications typically involve researchers from a variety of disciplines and propose a scope of work that spans several project years. Research administrators in the Office for Research of the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) play an important role in the planning and development of these complex applications. At UTMB, resources and services are organized under two phases of assistance.

FIRST PHASE:
PROPOSAL PLANNING

Identifying Project Participants

When a request for proposal (RFP) for a large collaborative grant is received, sponsored programs staff at UTMB use the faculty profile database on STARline (Services to Academic Researchers Online) to identify researchers who have research interests related to the scope of work described in the RFP. STARline is a research resource web page developed by the Office of the Assistant Vice President for Research at UTMB. STARline provides information on external and internal funding opportunities and guidance on how to (a) update faculty profiles, (b) interact with other faculty via electronic bulletin boards and faculty research committees, and (c) search federal home pages and other information databases (see Figure 1, page 26).

STARline's faculty profile database provides information on the researcher’s educational background, professional affiliations, honors and awards, publications, teaching experience, and research interests. The interface between the faculty member's
Figure 1

STARLine
(Services to Academic Researchers)

Provided by the Office for Research

The University of Texas at Galveston

To access STARLine (Services to Academic Researchers), on line, go to the UTMB Home Page and select "Research*" or from the UTMB Home Page, type: http://www.utmb.edu/ovid

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research interests and clinical research and disease/organ systems is also described. A sample faculty profile is presented in Figure 2 (see page 28). In addition to finding faculty to work on proposals at UTMB, staff have found this database useful in responding to requests for collaborators from nearby campuses.

Facilitating Communication
Communication among the principal project participants is critical to the success of any large collaborative grant application. A considerable amount of interaction is usually required to develop a research agenda. At UTMB, sponsored programs staff convene frequent meetings of project participants to discuss the broad implications and applications of the project and the project's probable results. These meetings allow project participants to inform each other about their progress in developing the proposal and any changes in research design that might affect the work of other investigators. Sponsored programs staff at UTMB are responsible for scheduling meeting rooms, sending E-mail notices of meetings, and arranging conference calls.

Sponsored programs staff also attend project meetings and facilitate interaction between and among project participants by (a) listing participant comments and outlining the research procedures being discussed on a chalkboard, (b) providing information on collaborators and background material related to the project, (c) recording tasks to be performed by different members of the project team, and (d) developing a feasible time line for contacting outside resources and completing the application.

Planning Budgets
As non-stakeholders, sponsored project staff at UTMB serve as a catalyst in the development of the project budget. Budgetary constraints should always be identified and addressed early in the process of developing a large collaborative project, particularly when there are several investigators with laboratories and personnel dependent upon external funding. At UTMB, sponsored programs staff keep track of the funds that need to be encumbered for indirect costs and other costs, such as the administrative core, scientific service cores, and evaluation. After these costs have been deducted, each investigator is told how much money is set aside for their scope of work. The investigator then designs a research protocol that conforms to these limits. This approach eliminates misperceptions of available monies, prevents faculty from becoming too deeply involved in projects that are broader than available funds, and provides a framework for making decisions about project personnel and equipment needs.

SECOND PHASE:
PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

Drafting the Proposal
At UTMB, sponsored programs staff take an active role in creating portions of the proposal. Typically, staff members draft the portion of the proposal that pertains to the administrative processes, functions, and responsibilities of the project and develop a diagram of the project's organizational structure. This information is then circulated and discussed among project participants.

Staff members also furnish boilerplate information on institutional
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Communication
Phone: 409-772-xxxx; Fax: 409-772-0287; EM: acee@xxxxx.edu

Education
M.D., The Johns Hopkins Univ, Baltimore, Maryland, 1962
Ph.D., The Johns Hopkins Univ School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland, 1965

Professional Organizations
American Federation for Clinical Research
American College of Physicians, Life Member, Fellow
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases

Honors/Awards/Honorary Lectures
Goldberger Summer Fellowship in Nutrition, The American Medical Association, 1964
Research Career Development Award, 1 K04 GM00xxxx, National Institutes of Health, 1977

UTMB/Local/State Committee Participation
Executive and Seminar Committees, Dept of Preventive Medicine and Community Health
Scientific Review Committee, General Clinical Research Center

Selected Publications

Books/Chapters, Technical Papers

Teaching Experience
Clinical Pharmacology course for medical students
Lectures in Human Nutrition course for graduate students

Career Identification
Clinical investigator
Laboratory investigator

Figure 2

Research Interest
Major research interests are in two areas that relate to the regulation by chemicals and diet of liver hemoproteins and the synthesis of heme in the liver. A major research interest is in the regulation by chemicals and diet of liver hemoproteins and the synthesis of heme in the liver. The effect of diet and drugs on hepatic cytochrome P450 enzymes, and the hepatic metabolism of chemicals in the diet by specific cytochrome P450 enzymes is studied in healthy subjects and patients with liver disease. The metabolism of coumarin by a specific subfamily of hepatic P450 enzymes (CYP2A) in humans and baboons is a particular interest. Diagnosis and management of hepatic porphyrias. Studies of new treatments for specific types of patients with porphyrias are in progress.

Photodynamic therapy of cancer.

Diseases/Organ Systems Impacted by the Research
Cancer
Liver
Kidney
Nervous system

Keywords
Porphyria

Current Collaborations
D. E. Felgroom, Preventive Medicine and Community Health/Nutrition, UTMB. Porphyria treatment studies, FDA, Leiras, Inc. and American Porphyria Foundation.
S. Weber, Internal Medicine and Physiology and Biophysics, UTMB. Photodynamic therapy, UTMB Small Grant.
D. Wollman, Metabolic Solutions, Inc. Breath tests for assessing liver function and effects of diet, NIH-SBIR for Wellman.

Current Funding Sources

Clinical Trials
Leiras
Pfizer

Pfizer: An open study

Industrials Expertise

Industrial Assistance

We are studying how diet affects the body by which drugs and other foreign chemicals, including chemicals that may cause cancer. Many of these processes occur in the liver and may be impaired in patients with liver disease. Therefore, we are comparing results in normal subjects and patients with cirrhosis and other liver disorders. We are investigating the use of breath tests and other noninvasive methods with no anticipated side effects for assessing the capacity of the liver to clear chemicals from the blood stream. We are particularly interested in dietary substances derived from plants, such as coenzyme Q10, which may be protective against cancer. We are also studying methods of diagnosis and new treatments for porphyrias. Another recent interest is in photodynamic therapy of cancer.
resources and programs relevant to the project. Much of this information can easily be obtained from the STARline web page and included in the grant application. In addition, staff assist researchers by developing master letters of support, cooperation, and/or intent. When there is enough lead time, staff may provide four or five different drafts of a letter of support. However, only one model letter of intent may be provided for all cooperating entities when time lines are short.

As the budget becomes more refined, sponsored programs staff at UTMB provide a sample budget justification for the time and effort of personnel involved in the project, fringe benefits, unrecovered indirect costs, equipment to be purchased or donated, and travel provided from other sources. By this stage, cost sharing and in-kind contributions have been identified and documented in writing.

At UTMB, sponsored programs staff draft elements of the proposal to help investigators develop a sense of personal pride and commitment to the project. When researchers see the less desirable but necessary parts of the proposal completed, they are motivated to finish writing their own sections of the proposal. Staff members can then assist researchers with writing style and other aspects of English composition.

Monitoring Proposal Development

One of the most important contributions sponsored programs staff can make to the development of a large collaborative project is to help investigators respond to the priorities of the funding agency and adhere to the application requirements in the RFP.

This is particularly important when the first draft of a proposal is prepared several weeks prior to submission of the final proposal. In such cases, the sponsored programs staff often have a clearer picture of the overall project and the funding agency's priorities than do the authors.

By helping the investigators focus the requirements of the RFP, sponsored programs staff can improve the chances of the proposal's success. Reviewers typically give lower scores to proposals that are poorly organized and fail to address the objectives of the funding program. At UTMB, sponsored programs staff encourage researchers to eliminate all non-essential information from a proposal. However, staff are always aware that the author(s) of the proposal can accept or reject their suggestions.

Evaluating Proposal Appearance and Format

Sponsored programs staff should help investigators select a font style and size that conforms to the sponsor's requirements and that can be read by a reviewer without causing eye strain. Staff at UTMB recommend that Century Schoolbook or Times New Roman be used for the text of the proposal while fonts such as Omega and Avant Garde, which resemble print (sans serif), be used for headings.

Line style also can negatively affect the reviewer's reaction to the proposal. Left and right-hand justification (full justification) provides a neat edge on the right side of the paper, but, over time, the uniform appearance of the line tends to become boring to the eye. This style also can create very unusual word spacing and
this, in turn, can lead to eye fatigue. After reading several pages in this format, the reviewer may cease to process the information. At UTMB, sponsored programs staff encourage researchers to use left-hand justification. This style results in an uneven line length, which is more interesting to the eye.

Finally, sponsored programs staff put the finishing touches on a proposal by making sure the proposal is thoroughly proofread for typographical, spelling and grammatical errors. Even in the era of computerized grammar and spelling checks, mistakes can be made. Such errors may be interpreted as arrogance or sloppiness and undermine the reviewer's response to the proposal.

**CONCLUSION**

Large collaborative grant applications pose a variety of problems for researchers and research administrators. Information must be collected from a variety of sources, and some data may take several days or more to compile. Communication, organizational and budgetary issues may arise when a large number of researchers representing a variety of academic disciplines are involved in developing the same application. Research administrators can assist with the development of these complex documents by facilitating communication among project participants and providing administrative information, budgetary details, and model letters of support for the grant application. Researchers who are freed from these tasks will have more time to spend on the development of the project's research design. Team effort ultimately will produce a more competitive application and enhance the reputation of the sponsored programs office.
COMMENTSARY

THE STRUGGLE FOR SHAPE AND SUBSTANCE:
A METAPHOR FOR THE EMERGING IDENTITY
OF THE RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR

Edward Francis Gabriele, D. Min.

ABSTRACT

As assignments for research administration offices develop and multiply, research administrators often wrestle with their fundamental identity. Research administrators have a need to engage in the ongoing task of understanding who they are and what they do. From the perspective of philosophical inquiry, this article entertains a potential metaphor for the identity of the research administrator and the service mission that research administrators offer their respective offices and institutions.

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION:
A PRACTICE IN SEARCH OF
A THEORY

In 1991, through a series of fortuitous events, I was catapulted into the world of research administration. My initiation was confusing. From the quiet and sometimes comfortable world of classroom teaching, I entered the confusing morass of ledgers, computers, compliances, laws, regulations, pre-award preparations, post-award requirements, prior approvals and the entire gamut of activities that go into the life of the research administrator. Through a series of successive supervisors, I learned that my identity and mission were largely imprecise, often learned only through doing. There were moments when I felt much like some of Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures: struggling to emerge from raw stone into precise form and substance. I found that my work as a research administrator was shaped more by the exigencies of the given moment as opposed to any understanding of the basic nature of research administration. As my time in service progressed, two questions emerged within my pro-

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professional life: “Who am I? Where am I going?”

The demands of professional research often do not permit the executive research administrator to emerge from mature reflection with precision. This is simply an occupational hazard given our fast-paced professional schedules and duties. This hazard is not restricted to the research administrator either. Sometimes it is easy for researchers to lose sight of the goals and ends of research itself. However, the frenetic pace of daily work demonstrates all the more the need for research administrators to realize that we are often a group of practitioners in search of a theory to our profession. Who are we really? What is our relationship to the research community and to those who authorize research? What fundamental critical and ethical responsibilities do we have that rest underneath the scope of our daily tasks? What is the mission of the research administration body? What resources are needed for us to accomplish our mission while maintaining personal and institutional integrity and efficacy? How do we measure our success? How do we assist researchers to measure their own effectiveness? How do we convey to our research colleagues that our function as research administrators is a critical and integral part of the research process and not just a bureaucratic non-essential?

One of the great tragedies of post-industrial America is a widespread sense of the utilitarian nature of individuals that places an unbalanced emphasis upon “doing” rather than “being.” Necessary though it may have been in an age of revisionism, American education in the 1970s deconstructed the central theme of critical inquiry and the pursuit of learning over and against the simple acquisition of “useful” skills. Gradually, we have come to see the problems that have developed from such a philosophical perspective. We have become consumerist and utilitarian in our professional and personal lives. Small wonder that today we are witnessing a resurgence of interest in humanistic studies and philosophical inquiry. We are again becoming a people in search of our souls. In this light, perhaps it is a worthy exercise for us as research administrators to step back and reflect upon what may be a philosophical basis for our service. Like humans in the process of maturation, perhaps we can entertain emergent metaphors for our identity complete with enthusiastic challenges for our profession. But where can we find such potential metaphors? What follows is one possible seedbed for discovery.

A CROSS-CULTURAL DYNAMIC

One of the key elements of civilization has been the emergence in every culture of a person or persons that have been termed as “prophet,” those who inevitably appear in institutions to nurture and rise up to consciousness the quality or charisma of institutional or community life. Sociologists have commented upon the unique and essential nature of such “charismatic” figures or movements for the life of institutions. In the Semitic tradition, these were the nabi; in Greek culture, the charismatoi; in primal societies, the shaman or berdache.

In common language, we usually use the word “prophet” or “prophecy” when speaking about future predictors or predictions. However, cultural
experts point out that this is not necessarily the case. From my own field of academic inquiry, I am reminded that "prophets" in the sociological sense are not those who foretell the future, but those who forth tell the truth. Whether it be in the experience of primal tribes or in the accounts of various bodies of cross-cultural literature, the prophet or "charismatic" figure seems to be the one who reminds the members of a community of its past, its present and its future. The charismatic figure is one who appears grounded in a sense of the community's mission and its fundamental identity, is able to assess the community's present life in terms of its fundamental being, and sees on the horizon the issues toward which the community's identity and mission are being stretched, reshaped and growing, however painfully. The charismatic figure can offer to a culture a voice of reason, authenticity and integrity clarifying the fundamental identity of the group, calling the group to an equally authentic living out of identity and mission, and pointing the way to new and unprecedented opportunities for growth and development.

The research locus is a community of professionals like all other human gatherings. Beyond funding sources, compliances and business requirements, the research community has its fundamental identity and "being" in the broad pursuit of expanding the body of generalizable knowledge for human advancement. The research locus is more than a business amalgam. It is an intricate and detailed interweaving of professional relationships dedicated to the accomplishment of scholarship for human benefit.

As a community of sorts, it is subject to the same laws of interaction and development that are true for society as a whole. Just as societies need charismatic figures to assist the community to realize its fundamental identity and its emerging future, the research community will always be in great need of those figures who can raise up to consciousness the group's roots and mission, its ideals and horizons. As communities of learning and scholarship in a fast-paced culture, research bodies are in great need of professionals who consistently and through a variety of means can help mold the community's identity, improve its quality of life, and help identify and characterize the horizons that are emerging for its growth and development. It is my firm belief that, in addition to our business and administrative leadership, the image of the research administrator as charismatic leader is an emergent and challenging role for the research administrator in the research community.

A SUGGESTED METAPHOR FOR RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS

If we can ascertain that the institutional research locus is a professional community and that research administrators, have a sociological function, then it may be interesting to entertain a metaphor for understanding the critical social function or charisma of the research administration enterprise itself. It may be possible to capture a single image for all the variant duties and responsibilities given to offices of research administration. One metaphor that may be entertained is "custodians of the corporate conscience and culture." How might we understand this metaphor practically?
In the first instance, research administrators are responsible for the preparation and review of various research project proposals, ensuring that they are in compliance with a variety of requirements. Research administrators do not set research policy per se, nor actually direct the course of research itself. However, research administrators do have a responsibility to promote and facilitate the accomplishment of the executive administration dimension of research endeavors. In this sense, research administrators appeal to the research community’s conscience by assisting researchers themselves to meet the standards and requirements of the research endeavor. Some of these standards and requirements would include fidelity or consistency to institutional mission, legal compliance to federal and local statutes, compliance to agency regulations, ethical consistency, fiscal responsibility, academic responsibility etc. These are not exhaustive but illustrative. This random listing of duties reveals that research administrators have a responsibility to assist research professionals and leadership to meet the task of ethical compliance. However, there is something far deeper here.

Underneath the compliance to business practices, ethical prescriptions and legal requirements, research administrators have an overarching responsibility to assist the research community and its leadership in meeting the ever-evolving “ethos” of the research task and the institution’s mission. Ethos is deeper and more pervasive than ethics. Ethos is the groundwork from which ethics springs. Indeed, the authenticity and integrity of ethical prescriptions is dependent upon their being congruent with the community’s established and evolving ethos. Research administrators are custodians of the corporate conscience and culture by developing a critical and in-depth appreciation of the research community’s ethos, analyzing and reviewing research processes in light of that ethos and its resulting ethical/legal requirements, and assisting individual researchers, research leadership and the general research community to come to a greater understanding and development of the ethos mission, which is at the root of the institution itself.

In the second instance, research administrators are custodians of the
corporate conscience and culture by being agents of insight and development. Underneath being executors of procedures, which make for efficient daily management, research administrators contribute to the overall life of the research community by helping to create a corporate climate in which new and important developments can become more visible to researchers themselves. Research administrators richly serve the research community by providing fresh insights into the application of the research community’s mission in the light of new social, educational, scientific or cultural needs and developments. Research administrators, given the daily grind of duties and responsibilities, make a positive and critical contribution as custodians of the corporate conscience and culture when they open the way from broader currents in society to new interpretations of the fundamental identity and mission of the research community as a whole.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

At various gatherings of our profession, beneath the subject matter of symposium and seminar, our conversations find us searching for new and authentic ways to understand our critical identity and role — the very substance of our service. In an age when professional research has become central to the progress of human inquiry regardless of academic discipline, the identity and service of the research administrator are critical for the life of the research community. The service of the research administrator and the role of offices of research administration cannot be reduced simply to cost accounting, receipt control, the tracking of project applications or the installation of new software. We are more than just the sum of our procedural parts. The human is always on an urgent quest to understand the self, to ascertain what one's life means, and to glimpse what sense of integrity one’s life can make to the broader scheme of things. In the research community, research administrators are the same. Our service to our constituents is not just the sum of the accomplishment of duties. Our service is part of the entire process of learning for the development of generalizable knowledge and human advancement.

While the metaphor presented above may not be precisely accurate in all circumstances, the quest for the identity of the research administrator is. As professionals, we have a need to see ourselves in relation to the broad mission of our institutions and their ideals, to promote new graduate level and continuing educational programs for our careers, to discover new ways to assist the executive leadership that is ultimately responsible for the institution’s conscience and culture, to search out new areas of service that would assist our research colleagues, and to call into high relief the challenges that are being posed by culture for those in research. This demands a commitment to hermeneutics, which scholars define as the science of interpretation. Research administrators must always seek to re-understand, to offer “reinterpretation,” and to help re-envision our fundamental identity and the identity of our research communities. In this way, we discover afresh in each moment of our professional lives what it is we do and who it is we are.
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The accounting system for sponsored research activities must provide financial data to internal management for use in planning and controlling operations and to external parties for use in determining the effectiveness of operations. Furthermore, the system should include mechanisms to ensure that award provisions and restrictions are observed and provide reports that such provisions and restrictions have been satisfied. Unfortunately, the accounting system used by many grantees is not specifically designed for post-award accounting. The pitfalls of these "customized accounting systems" have caused a growing number of institutions to turn to commercial software. The present review examines Grant Administrator®, a software package offered by Dyna-Quest Technologies, Inc of Sudbury, Mass.

The first version of Grant Administrator® was written by Dyna-Quest Technologies in 1993 to manage its own SBIR grants. Used internally for the first two years, the system was ultimately enhanced and offered for sale in a wide range of packages, including those for single users and networks. The software’s origin in practical application has enabled its evolution into an efficient, practical system for grant management.

A demo that can be downloaded from the Dyna-Quest web site (http://www.Dyna-Quest.com) presents a sample grant award and walks you through the steps of: (a) adding principal investigator information; (b) categorizing expenditures by multiple levels of sub-account information, including cost status; (c) setting up a grant account with multiple budget

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periods; (d) adding expenditures to the account, with multiple expenditures under the same ID number (e.g., PO #), and splitting of expenditures between multiple grant accounts; (e) reconciling and partially reconciling the account; and (f) generating a number of report options, including account summary, account detail and monthly expense. The demo is a self-extracting, executable file of approximately 1.5MB.

In Grant Administrator®, an order for equipment, supplies, etc., becomes an encumbered amount, which is automatically deducted from the appropriate grant budget line. An encumbrance becomes a paid expenditure only after it has been reconciled.

Grant Administrator® requires an IBM/PC or compatible with a minimum of a 386 microprocessor and 8 megabytes RAM. The hard disk must have at least 6 megabytes free for installation, and additional space dependent on the amount of data entered. The software is network compatible, and allows you to maintain decentralized and centralized grant tracking systems when used with the Site Manager Package.

The Dyna-Quest web site provides an impressive list of institutions presently using Grant Administrator®. These include large and small academic institutions as well as various not-for-profits. The program provides an efficient system for managing research awards. The ability to purchase a site manager package, which allows a central office to control multiple departmental or divisional databases, is a particularly useful asset.
NOW AND THEN

THE PREMISE AND THE PROMISE:
THE FOUNDING YEARS OF SRA

By Kenneth L. Beasley, PhD

This article appeared in the Summer 1988 issue of the SRA Journal. Kenneth Beasley is a charter member of SRA, past President (1971-72) and recipient of both the Excellence Award (1978) and Hartford-Nicholsen Award (1974).

The twentieth anniversary of both the Society of Research Administrators and its scholarly communication, the Journal of the Society of Research Administrators, is an appropriate time for all of us to look back at our beginnings to understand the present. An analysis of the purposes and hopes in the founding years will go a long way in expressing what SRA is today and also provide clues to where we should go in the future.

THE FOUNDATION

The spark that ignited the concept of the organization came from a group of business managers in the science departments at Yale University who got together to discuss mutual problems and how to solve them. A member of the group, Ken Hartford, business manager in the Biology Department, was featured in an issue of Laboratory Management and the article mentioned the interchange of ideas through the meetings of business managers at Yale. In response to letters of inquiry about expanding the group, Hartford asked his correspondents to meet with him at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The nucleus of SRA was established at the 1966 AAAS meeting in Washington when Jack Stacey, Manager of Plans, Programs and Resources at the Midwest Research Institute in Kansas City; David Meyer, Business Manager of the Botany Department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and Richard Nicholsen, Research Center Business Manager at the Archer Daniels Midland Company (now Ashland Chemical Co.) in Minneapolis met with Hartford to discuss the need for an organization for research administrators.

It is significant to note that the four founders were: (a) all business managers for scientific research; (b) represented higher education, industry and a non-profit research laboratory; and (c) felt the need for an organization to provide the exchange of mutual concerns between these sectors. There were existing organizations for research administrators in 1966, but there was no organization that included membership from all
the various research sectors, and the members of the existing organizations tended to come from top management positions. Knowingly, or unknowingly, the four founders of SRA were fulfilling a need for a broad based organization that provided for the cross-fertilization of ideas among all research administrators — horizontally among all sectors of research regardless of the employer, and vertically among all ranks of employment within business, hospital, university or laboratory.

These four men decided to hold an organizational meeting at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Massachusetts on June 23 and 24, 1967. Under the leadership of Ken Hartford, who directed the meeting, and Dick Nicholsen, who wrote a draft of the bylaws, the Society of Research Administrators was born. The 100 people who attended the Amherst meeting debated the purposes, the name, the membership requirements, the activities and the amount of dues. (For those people involved in the leadership of the Society over the past 20 years, those are familiar themes because some are still being debated.) The Amherst meeting closed with a unanimous vote that, “We, the research administrators present, hereby constitute ourselves into an organization.” The decisions made at Amherst were formally ratified at the second annual meeting of SRA in Houston in March, 1968.

**THE PREMISE**

The basic premise of SRA as evident from the reasons for its founding and the stated purposes in the bylaws is there are common functions performed by research administrators, and the skills required to achieve these functions can be learned and improved through an interchange of ideas among all research administrators. Under the broad premise to improve the art of research administration, some of the founding members had additional motives such as: (a) to gain professional prestige so as to increase recognition and salary, (b) to build a network of friends to make job hunting easier, (c) to establish a research program to provide a scholarly platform for research administration, and (d) to hold meetings where kindred souls could socialize and commiserate about their problems.

The premise and the additional motives were embodied in the original bylaws under:
ARTICLE II  PURPOSE

Section 1. The exchange of information among research administrators through personal relationships, presentations, discussions, formal and informal meetings and publications.

Section 2. Research in the area of administration of research.

Section 3. The development and promotion of professional standards.

Section 4. The improvement of the interface between research and its administration.

Section 5. Such other activities as the membership shall adopt.

In short, the founders wanted to exchange information, improve performance, research their activities, gain professional recognition and improve communication with their bosses.

THE EARLY YEARS

The first two years of SRA can, at best, be described as lacking direction and, at worst, be described as chaotic. There were no procedures to follow, no records, no coordination and there was virtually no money. Each officer and committee chair ran their own program with a lot of enthusiasm and little support. The amount of money in the treasury was often a mystery because the income was not known and expenses not coordinated. The Society survived in those early years on the volunteer efforts of its leader and the telephone and mail budgets of their employers. In SRA’s first year, the head of the placement program embarked on a program to find jobs for research administrators that, if carried out, required a printing budget that was twice the size of the national income. The membership chair received all applications for membership and circulated them in turn to each of the officers for approval. This was at a time when there were serious differences between the board members on how open or restricted the membership criteria should be. These few examples illustrate the situation that prevailed in a new organization of uncoordinated volunteers.

The central management and coordination needed by SRA came from the early organization of the West Coast Section. The popularity of the Society gained momentum in the West in 1968 and an early surge of members came from California and Washington. The Western Section was organized in January, 1968 and along with an active regional program became interested in the national administration. At the third annual meeting in San Francisco in July, 1969, Treasurer Paul Davis from the University of California-Berkeley and Rod Rose from the University of California-Irvine made a proposal to set up a national office at Irvine under the direction of Rose. The proposal was accepted by the Board and the National “Secretariat” was established on August 1, 1969 to: (a) be a distribution point for SRA communications, (b) be the official mailing office for SRA and the Sections, (c) publish the Journal, newsletter and directory, and (d) maintain the archives.

By 1970 the Society had a central office, a regular schedule of board meetings to establish policies, active programs to achieve priorities, the beginning of an effective communications program and a budget that was a
little more under control. From the point of view of the observer, the 1968-1970 period was crucial in the life of the fledgling organization. In spite of turmoil and travail, the Society had cleared the first hurdle and was on its way.

**THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS**

It is evident from the premise on which the Society was founded that communications to exchange ideas was critical to achieving its purposes. From the beginning SRA initiated programs to allow members to communicate their practices, their ideas, and their dreams to other research administrators. The communication activities fell into two general categories.

**Meetings** — National meetings with presentations, papers and panels have been the mainstay of face-to-face communications for the organization. Within a year of the Amherst meeting, two Sections were formed—Western and Northeastern—and they held regional meetings. Within a few years the other Sections were organized and held meetings where research administrators could discuss their concerns and prescribe solutions. Later on the Society established an education program and conducted special meetings on specific topics.

The topics at the early meetings fell into two categories—how-to-do-it lectures and, how do we increase the status of research administrators. In the former category were sessions on personnel management, facilities planning, purchasing practices, organizing the office and project management and accounting. Under the increased status category the topics were either philosophical or reports of a survey describing the “typical” research administrator. Some of the topics in this area were: the role of the research administrators, the relationship of research administration to top management, and research administration as a profession. One topic at an early meeting of the Northeast Section was “Research Administration — What Is It: Fact or Fiction?”

In reviewing recent programs at SRA meetings, it is evident that the how-to-do-it topics are still popular. However, the search-for-identity type of program is no longer as prevalent as in the early years. New program emphases in recent years involve experts outside of research administration making how-to-do-it presentations on topics such as time management, stress reduction and automating your office.

An SRA opportunity in the early years would have changed the course of the organization. In 1972 the Department of Health, Education and Welfare introduced a new program called the Quality of Grantee Management. The purpose of the program was to evaluate grantees and reduce the reporting and management requirements for those institutions that had an excellent program of grants management. Richard Hill from the Medical Research Institute in San Francisco first talked to HEW and then to SRA President Ken Beasley about the Society conducting the grantee management program for HEW. Beasley wrote a proposal for this purpose and HEW awarded a grant for $99,221 to SRA to perform the accreditation of the quality of management for its grantees. The proposal called for the training of teams of SRA members who would then visit grantee institutions to evaluate their research administration. At the last
minute, the funds for the grant were rescinded by officials in the Nixon administration.

Publications — The other means of exchanging ideas among research administrators was an active publications program. The SRA Newsletter was started during the early critical days of SRA. It was published in August, 1968, with an editor at M.I.T. and the publisher at Irvine, California. The first Newsletter contained information about the formation of sections, plans for the next national meeting and a request to members to pay their $15 dues. Between 1968 and 1972, the editorship of the Newsletter went from M.I.T., to Systems Development Corporation in California, to Northern Illinois University and finally to the National Secretariat at Irvine. In spite of the period of peripatetic editors, the Newsletter was established as the basic Society communication for members.

The Journal of the Society of Research Administrators was discussed at the organization meeting as the means to encourage research on research administration, to communicate research findings and to bring prestige to the Society. Launching this scholarly journal turned out the be more difficult than wishing for it. The first issue of the Journal of the Society of Research Administrators was published in July, 1969. The lead article was a report of a survey by the SRA Research Committee — “Profile of a Research Administrator.” The SRA Journal was the first broad-based scholarly periodical for research administrators. It was a pioneering effort that was actually published a month before SRA had a national office.

The early years of the Journal were rocky years because there was a paucity of manuscripts and money. The Journal had not attracted wide notice in those early years and the number of articles submitted barely made an issue. The cost of the Journal was significant in a budget that was always constrained to fund the Society’s activities. There were issues of the Journal that were late and numbers that were missed in those struggling days.

The SRA Journal was the first broad-based scholarly periodical for research administrators. It was a pioneering effort that was actually published a month before SRA had a national office.

The action that provided a sound footing and guaranteed the Journal’s success was a grant for $18,400 from the National Science Foundation to support the publication from 1972 to 1976. Ken Beasley and Dave Canham found a program at NSF to support new scientific journals. The proposal they submitted characterized the Journal as important to scientific research and indicated the funds

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would be used for improving quality, increasing circulation and making the Journal self-supporting. This infusion of funds laid the foundation for the stability and quality of today’s publication. As it enters its twentieth year, the Journal of the Society of Research Administrators enjoys a well-earned reputation as the scholarly outlet for all research administrators.

THE PROMISE

The basic premise of SRA at its founding was that research administrators performed common functions and could improve their skills by exchanging ideas with other research administrators. Since SRA was founded by research administrators from several research sectors, it was implied that the required skills were similar no matter which sector and the interaction between research administrators in industries, universities, hospitals, non-profit organizations and government was beneficial. The advantage of hindsight allows us to look at those early assumptions in the light of history and determine if they are true. The advantage of hindsight allows us to look at the promise of the future for SRA.

There appears to be little doubt that SRA members have benefited from the interchange of ideas by members who work in the same sector of research administration. That is, university people learn from other university people and research administrators in industry learn from their colleagues in industry. What is not clear is the benefit of interchange between people in different sectors of employment.

This situation is the paradox of SRA. The strength of the Society is that it brings all research administrators together. It provides the forum to test the premise of interaction across the board. It is an example of “strength through diversity.” At the same time, it is hard to focus on diversity and please the separate interests of the members. If you program to satisfy the needs of specific sectors, how can you design an umbrella program to enhance interaction across the board? If SRA cannot bridge this dilemma of the horizontal and vertical interests of its comprehensive membership, then the basic premise of an interchange between research administrators is wrong.

I believe the basic premise was sound in the beginning and is still sound in 1988. It is obvious that the solution to the paradox of diversity and unity is matrix programming that emphasizes our common comprehensive interests and builds on unique interests within that framework. The progress of SRA toward the 1967 purposes has been upward, although it has not always been smooth or unanimously supported. The Society of Research Administrators is still a young organization. It will continue to develop into a cohesive, comprehensive organization on the strength of its members. As the diversity of its members increases and the management of its programs matures, SRA will reach the goals envisioned by the founders on those two early days in 1967.

The promise of the Society of Research Administrators is the validation of the premise upon which it was founded—the achievement of a truly comprehensive organization for the exchange of ideas among research administrators.
A group of SRA leaders discusses important issues faced by SRA, many of them similar to those faced by the Society’s founders as outlined in a 1988 SRA Journal article by Kenneth L. Beasley. Panel members include J. Timothy Hanson; Victoria (Tori) Molfese, PhD; and Lawrie Robertson. Marcia Landen Zuzolo, SRA Journal associate editor, moderated the discussion.

Marcia:

SRA’s founders, according to Ken Beasley’s 1988 article, were fulfilling a need for a broad-based organization that could provide for a cross-fertilization of ideas among all research administrators. That’s a pretty big task. Has SRA been successful?

Tori:

The paradox that Ken talks about in his 1988 article is interesting. The challenge reflected here requires that SRA serve research administrators who function in different areas of expertise and at different levels within different types of organizations, while at the same time enriching the opportunities of research administrators within specialized areas, levels, and organizations. The challenge of this paradox has existed since the founding of SRA, although it may have been less evident then since the original membership was largely made up of business managers. Today, this same paradox is the subject of many SRA committee meetings, including those of the annual meeting committees, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Board of Directors. Indeed, a look at the SRA Needs Assessment and the SRA Strategic Plan, both of which were completed in 1997, provides good examples to the current awareness of the paradox and the current efforts to address the challenges raised by Ken in his article.

The 1997 SRA needs assessment asked members to provide information about their work setting and responsibilities, involvement in SRA, use of current SRA services, opinions on possible changes in SRA service delivery, opinions concerning goals and challenges facing research administration and preferences for topics and formats for SRA meetings and workshops. Respondents to the SRA needs assessment survey placed a high priority on SRA programming as important for enabling networking to occur, professional skills and effectiveness to improve, currency on professional issues to be maintained and the learning of new regulations, laws, policies, and procedures. These responses reflect a strong confirmation that the issues important when
SRA was founded remain important issues for SRA today. Further, when asked what programming/topics are desired, 70% or more of the respondents to the SRA needs assessment endorsed issues of general interest to the membership (e.g., proposal and budgeting skills, career development, agency and legislative updates) rather than more focused topics (e.g., issues specific to institutional structure and size, project and facility design, distance education).

Based on the SRA needs assessment survey, the SRA Strategic Plan was developed and presented to the SRA membership in October 1997. First among the strategic objectives is “programming and networking opportunities for research administrators,” with specific attention given to both beginning and more experienced research administrators, issues of importance to the SRA division members, and opportunities to learn new skills through training and caucusing with other organizations. Other strategic objectives focus on how to better bring SRA programming and services to members through print and electronic communication, annual section and chapter meetings, as well as interest groups and distance learning to encourage larger geographical, including international, participation of members in SRA activities.

While working on the development of the SRA Strategic Plan and in discussions with various SRA committee members, it has become clear that active participation by members from diverse research administration settings is occurring at all levels.

— Tori Molfese

Tim:

I think SRA has lived up to most of the founders’ original ideas, particu-
larly the goal of cross-fertilization. Their objective was to get a broad range of research administrators interacting, and they succeeded. It is not unusual now to sit down to lunch at an SRA meeting and be with the spectrum of research administrators: pre-award, post-award, departmental, institution-wide, hospital, independent research organization, university, and even a few from the for-profit sector. When you put these people together there is bound to be some exchange of ideas.

This cross-fertilization is also reflected in the employment mobility of our members. People move between universities, hospitals, independent research organizations, and even into private consulting. SRA exposes members to the range of opportunities and shows that the skills acquired in any one of these organizations can be readily applied in a different environment. I don't know that this mobility was part of the founders' original plan or whether it is an unintended consequence, but it has certainly been beneficial to the field.

Lawrie:

SRA has taken on the difficult challenge of addressing the diversity of the profession — daunting in the sense that our diversity is geographic, institutional and role related.

Diversity starts with defining the profession and how a society best serves its members. Yet no single definition fits each member. Rather, SRA recognizes and must define its supporting role in response to an array of perspectives — each related to one's role and perspective in the continuum of activities related to a project's life cycle. For example, contrasting roles exist within the same institution. The focus of an administrator located in a sponsored research office may be more specialized and vertical. Professional development may concentrate on understanding and applying financial and regulatory principles to support research administration. For those located at the department/school level, the profession is apt to be more diverse and horizontal. Border-spanning skills are sought (e.g., facilities planning, general management, external and community relations, networked computing, human subjects and animals, and an array of other requirements).

Given the complexity of this challenge, SRA has had mixed results. Over the past ten years SRA leaders have debated the wisdom of its division structure within the governance context. Without a clear division role in governance, perhaps various stakeholders would question SRA's commitment to a diverse membership. At the same time, divisions have not been as effective as they need to be in developing programs and interest groups. Ultimately, SRA's leadership has consistently concluded that diversity is the organization's unique niche and divisions were central to supporting the organization's ability to support a diverse membership. As a cornerstone of diversity, SRA must give attention to more fully developing the potential of its divisions.

If diversity is SRA's distinguishing niche, then how are we leveraging this to best serve the members? Our tendency is to mimic other professional organizations rather than design a unique approach reflecting our diverse character.
Marcia:

There's a natural temptation, I think, to compare SRA with NCURA. One of the most frequent questions I get from newcomers is “What's the difference?” How do you answer that?

I think SRA has lived up to most of the founders’ original ideas, particularly the goal of cross-fertilization. Their objective was to get a broad range of research administrators interacting, and they succeeded.

— J. Timothy Hanson

Tori:

It should be apparent from the name of NCURA alone (National Council of University Research Administrators), but the exclusive university focus is somehow not readily apparent. SRA’s name appears to be more inclusive, but the issue of providing programming, networking, and resources for research administrators in all types of settings, and not just for university-based research administrators, is not coming through with enough clarity. I am impressed by the efforts of SRA’s meeting planners to be responsive to the diverse needs of the members, even when that effort involves major efforts to solicit and specially select presenters and sessions. This allows a more diverse array of sessions, rather than just sessions strictly determined by who volunteers to present. There have also been efforts to specifically target the meeting sessions that are directed toward specific groups and at specific experience levels so that meeting attendees can choose sessions tailored to their interests and expertise.

Lawrie:

I see three essential organizational differences: (1) SRA’s mission is to address the professional development needs of research administrators in the four key sectors of education, commercial, not-for-profit, and government. As such, it is expected to serve each of these groups. NCURA’s mission is focused on the university-based research entities. (2) SRA is charged to think and act internationally. NCURA serves the United States primarily. (3) SRA operates chapters, NCURA does not.

I think we need to be careful with comparisons to other organizations, just in general. There are many fine groups our members might affiliate with and from which we can learn; NCURA is just one of them.

Marcia:

How can SRA do a better job of addressing the needs of its diverse membership?
Tim:

Our challenge for the future is to make professional diversity and cross-fertilization a more active component of an entry-level person's experience. The Certified Research Administrators program has been one way to address this. To pass that exam, people must interact with others in the different areas of the field. SRA might also consider meeting sessions that focus on the range of career opportunities in research administration, or a session on how to use SRA connections.

Lawrie:

There are no easy answers, but we might consider some of these ideas:

- Each division might annually target a key issue as a focal point for a national workshop linked to either a section meeting or the international meeting.
- Assess opportunities for specialized seminars and workshops that communicate best practices targeted to emerging issues.
- Ensure that program content at meetings speak not only to those who want "safe" and predictable content, but also those looking for new kinds of information from untraditional sources.
- Provide more attention to the content and personal development requirements of our senior administrators.
- Look at new ways of addressing our needs through the development of products that can be readily applied locally rather than merely attending a meeting.
- Work with other organizations (particularly those we wish to attract to and educate about SRA) for our mutual benefit as a way of finding new approaches to ongoing work-related challenges.
- Find alternative means of financing (aggressive sponsorship approaches perhaps) so that we are using professional development as a vehicle for building the profession rather than as the primary means of financing the society.
- Assess other professional societies seeking to reach diverse audiences to determine which seem most effective and why.

As a cornerstone of diversity, SRA must give attention to more fully developing the potential of its divisions.

— Lawrie Robertson

- Bring together our best thinkers to discuss innovative approaches to addressing how SRA should chart its future so that change can be positive, forward-thinking, and non-threatening – the retreat for senior administrators, which took place in July, is a step in the right direction.
- Get comfortable with challenging every assumption and being open to reinventing the organization so that SRA remains relevant to research administrators across the spectrum.
Tori:
I would like to see if there are ways to encourage the division members to play a more active role in crafting professional development opportunities for the society. Division members have eloquently spoken about annual meeting programs that had too little of interest to their members and have asked for more attention to be given to their needs. Because there are differences across divisions in time availability and differences in job demands, sometimes it has not been possible for follow through in translating needs into programming. There must be some way to make this change. Maybe we should hold sessions at the annual meeting so that division representatives might plan programming complete with presenters, with this information fed into the Annual Meeting Program Committee for their use. I believe we need to help make the professional development opportunities for division members more than just a priority (which it currently is); we must actualize it into becoming a reality.

Lawrie:
I hope SRA emerges as the premier professional society serving research administrators worldwide. It will accomplish this by reinventing itself to offer cutting-edge thinking, high-quality programs at all levels (chapter, section, international) using best training practices and attracting leaders in the public and private sector to share their insights with the Society’s members. New member services might be added and enhanced to match member information, skill development and educational requirements. SRA can evolve as an organization through the creative use of web-based interactive learning modules and other developing technologies. We should sustain the public’s support for sponsored research worldwide by mounting well organized public education campaigns. SRA will lead the way in sharing new partnering relationships that span divisional and international boundaries. We can also share emerging breakthroughs in management techniques that match those of the researchers we serve and tap the collective resources of our diverse membership. This can be achieved by an adaptive open approach to governance, programming and leadership by Society members and staff who collaboratively scan the horizon to ensure the Society’s continued relevance and value to its members.

Tim:
I agree with Lawrie’s comments on vision, with a few additional thoughts.
In the next ten years I would not expect notable growth in membership. I think SRA is in for some tough times, due largely to the issue of relevance. Professional inclusion and diversity have been our greatest strengths, but not everyone wants to be a generalist. Consider these examples:

Would Richard Nicholsen, one of the founders of SRA and its second president, be a member today? I don’t know, but given the increased complexity of the work environment and the greater demands on time and resources, he might not find it sufficiently relevant to his professional responsibilities. He was a business manager in a major chemical company, overseeing research activity along with a host of other duties. At the time, we were headed to the moon and the U.S. research engine was at full throttle. Times have changed, and corporate research activity no longer relies as heavily on the non-profit sector for basic research. Apparently, Richard Nicholsen’s successors have found SRA less important: We have fewer than five members who represent commercial research activities in Fortune 1000 companies.

We are also affected by specialization. Our meeting sessions often address clinical trials, but that’s the specific realm of the Society for Clinical Trials. Members interested in tech transfer are usually members of the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM). Although we cover licensing agreements, few members of bio tech companies come to SRA for information. More often they are involved with the Licensing Executive Society (LES).

Those of us who follow a flexible and less focused career path model — pejoratively referred to as “jack of all trades, master of none” — are quite comfortable with SRA. It addresses the need to be exposed to a broad range of issues related to research and higher education. But not everyone wants a broad range of exposure. SRA may operate with more limited resources because of the lack of growth in membership, but it should not compromise the diverse programming that make it a home for generalists in a world of specialization.

Marcia:

In discussing research administration in general, Ken Beasley tells us that a broad premise for the founding of SRA was to improve the art of research administration. Is research administration an art?

Tim:

I don’t think that contemporary research administration is an art, although it clearly started out that way. If I had to choose a discipline, I would say it most closely resembles mechanical engineering. The vast majority of the work is formulaic. It’s controlled by OMB circulars, established IRB policies, FASB regulations, and a myriad of federal administrative rules. The work is done by a staff that is more likely to have moved into the profession from clerical positions than to have come from an academic or clinical background. I think that the past two demographic surveys of SRA members support this point. Our members have fewer terminal degrees, less professional work experience and, I believe, lower inflation-adjusted salaries.

This doesn’t mean the profession is “dumbing down,” it just means we
have worked out a lot of the details of the job. For example, ten years ago most of the schools I work with did not have a Human Subjects Policy. With a flurry of activity we created them, taking bits and pieces from APA guidelines and other policies. Now they all have them and, other than an occasional adjustment, they are pretty much in place.

A small portion of the work, perhaps 5%, is groundbreaking and really interesting. I suspect that this is what keeps people like us in the field. In this tiny area, we get to express the art of research administration by exploring new ideas and developing systems or mechanisms where there are no past examples.

One illustration of this might be our attempt to define the relationship between the capital-rich, mercenary biotech firms and the nonprofit sector. We have two groups interested in the same results for completely different reasons. In the current scenario, universities, independent research organizations, and research hospitals have notably less leverage when it comes to negotiating agreements, and we have yet to work this out in a way that, I think, is mutually beneficial to all parties. This is exciting work and an art, but only a few research administrators are involved in it.

Electronic research administration is another example. If you asked Bob Killoren what has fired him up for the past few years, ERA would be it. He has done a great job helping to define how the art of research administration and the Web come together, but once the details are worked out, it will become a mechanical task for his staff.

Lawrie:

Like so much in life, the profession of research administration is both an art and a science. The “science” is the knowledge base built through years of experience, study and remaining current with the field. The “art” is what transforms this knowledge base into effective practice within the real world of the workplace. Here, issues are ambiguous and systemic. These challenges require insight, judgement, vision and an awareness of the interrelated impacts of applying knowledge to the situation. A person can bring to a position knowledge devoid of passion. However, without vision, judgement and imagination the knowledge is sterile and bureaucratic rather than uplifting and forwarding. In the modern workplace, our colleagues expect more than facts and detail from the professional administrator. They desire recognition of each participant’s capacity for a unique contribution to the whole and an appreciation of what is required to achieve productive results, which enable those we serve (scientists, co-workers, our institution) to truly benefit from our profession.