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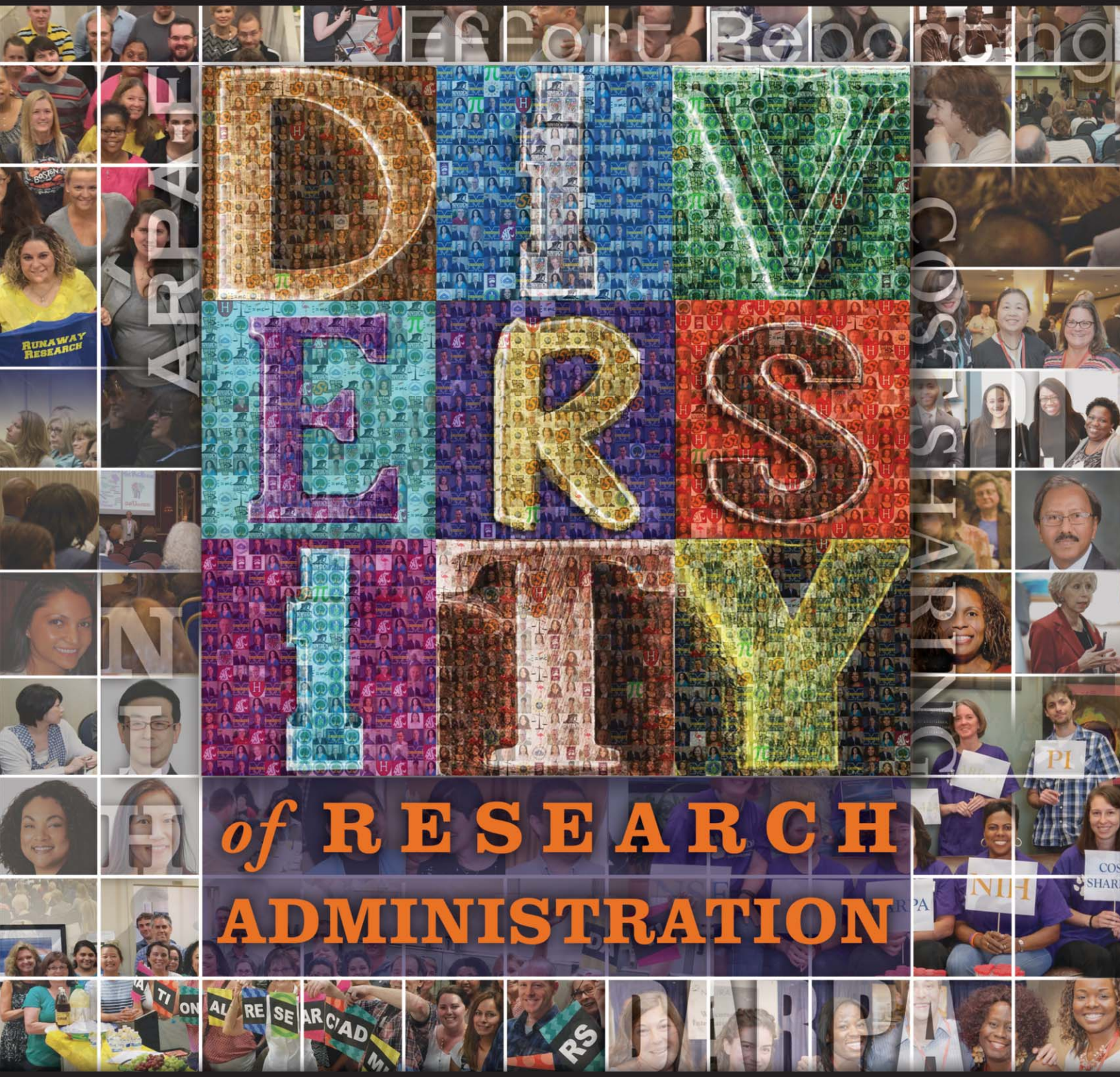


DRIVERS of RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Future Trends:

The Growing Diversity of Research Administration Observed in a Master of Research Program

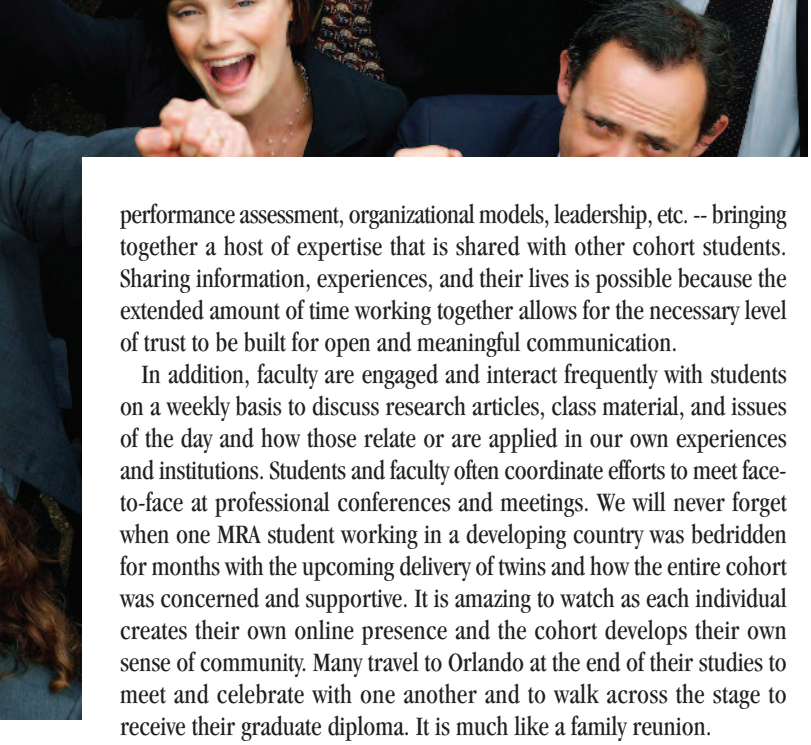
By Jo Ann Smith and Jennifer Shambrook

Diversity is no longer defined primarily by race and gender, but has broadened to include differences in cultural backgrounds, disabilities, age, sexual orientation, race and gender. Both the level of diversity and the rapidly aging workforce are significantly impacting organizations today and in the future.

According to quote by Ohio Congressman Rob Portman in the Washington Post (July 21, 2014),"every day for the next 19 years, 10,000 baby boomers will reach age 65." Retiring boomers comprise the largest segmented group of well-educated workers leaving the workforce that has ever been experienced in U.S. history. Without proper succession planning, the departure of so many well-educated experts will cause a void within our own workforce in almost every organization. The 2015 Research Administrator Stress Perception Survey (RASPerS) provides data that supports this graying trend in research administration. The RASPerS data showed research administrators with over 20 years of experience or over the age of 60 is our fastest growing demographic group. It is predictable that this group will be retiring within the next 5-10 years in very high numbers. In order to best support sponsored programs management responsibilities for the research community, it is crucial that we create a cadre of well-prepared leaders to step in as those with 20+ years of experience exit the profession.

As graduate faculty teaching in the UCF MRA program, we both have witnessed increased diversity among our profession and the MRA students. Since the inception of our program in 2011, half of the graduate students that have enrolled are ethnically diverse (59%), originating from 4 different countries (Uganda, Pakistan, Rwanda and Nigeria), from eight different areas of specialization, and 25 different states. As a cohort of students navigate the series of courses, we also witness deeper interactions and a greater depth of understanding among our students from radically diverse cultural backgrounds, geographical regions, ages, specializations, experiences and types of research organizations, including an Indian Reservation. This same level of diversity and interaction is not always obtained in our own professional environments or in non-cohort graduate school models because interactions are often sporadic and occur while working on a single project, over a short period of time, or within a single role.

The cohort model is designed to foster an environment for close interaction with fellow research administrators having very diverse backgrounds as they proceed together through the graduate program over a two-year period. Interacting with a colleague from a foreign institution, different type institution, or an investigators seeking funding from different funding streams over a length of time creates a more diverse network for peer-to-peer learning. It is clear, based on the past three graduating cohorts, long-lasting relationships are established due to their engagement in the program. These students are able to discuss and study a varied number of professional topics in depth such as: financial management, contract negotiations, strategic planning,



performance assessment, organizational models, leadership, etc. -- bringing together a host of expertise that is shared with other cohort students. Sharing information, experiences, and their lives is possible because the extended amount of time working together allows for the necessary level of trust to be built for open and meaningful communication.

In addition, faculty are engaged and interact frequently with students on a weekly basis to discuss research articles, class material, and issues of the day and how those relate or are applied in our own experiences and institutions. Students and faculty often coordinate efforts to meet face-to-face at professional conferences and meetings. We will never forget when one MRA student working in a developing country was bedridden for months with the upcoming delivery of twins and how the entire cohort was concerned and supportive. It is amazing to watch as each individual creates their own online presence and the cohort develops their own sense of community. Many travel to Orlando at the end of their studies to meet and celebrate with one another and to walk across the stage to receive their graduate diploma. It is much like a family reunion.

As "more seasoned" research administrators, we are honored to have the opportunity to mentor the next generation of leaders in research administrators through the graduate program. We see it as a personal mission to promote our students as they advance professionally and personally and watch them continue as high quality research administrators striving for professional excellence. We purposely embed a strong sense of public service and ethical integrity into the MRA program and the individuals we teach.

A graduate degree in the field matters—it demonstrates commitment to the profession, provides a universally recognized level of academic achievement and it also demonstrates mastery of the unique body of knowledge and experience required for advanced research administration professionals. 2015 RASPerS data now indicates that a degree at the Masters level is the norm for research administrators. In order to compete for the best jobs, a Masters level degree is going to be essential for those who want to rise in leadership within the profession. Executives with an eye to the future recognize that MRA programs are the best avenue for much-needed succession planning for upcoming gaps in research administration leadership and for the professional development of the best and brightest employees to become accomplished and well-versed in all areas of research administration.

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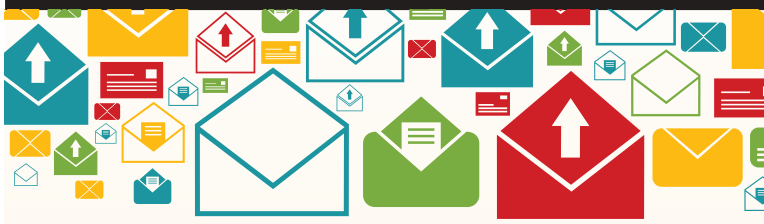
Work SMART



Email. We love to hate it. We get flooded with it and yet we need to respond. Here are some quick tips for keeping your sanity.

Think before you click!

1. **Folders, Tags, Labels and Sorting, Oh My!** All email platforms provide a user with an ability to sort through email automatically, label it and organize it for later reviewing. Sorting through the mountain of emails hitting your inbox and letting the technology do the work for you will save your sanity in the long run. Also remember to set aside time to review the wealth of information from NCURA and other LISTSERVs and stay current.

2. **Respond Within 24 Hours.** Even emails that are information only (directed to you specifically) should be acknowledged. If a more thorough response is required, let the sender know you are working on it and set a time for when you think you will have it complete.

3. **Document and CC Responsibly.** Emails are a way of documenting verbal and face-to-face meetings (which we know are time intensive, but generally more productive). Ensuring your team and constituents are all the same page helps to stem the flow of repetitive emails. If a sender CC's the entire College, you should not do the same. CC's and BCC's are only intended to ensure that individuals that may be impacted by the content of the email are informed (can we drop the passive-aggressive behavior already?).

4. **Clean It Out.** Once you respond or have at least read the information, just like paper, it needs to go someplace – in a folder, archived or deleted. Don't let your inbox look like an episode of Hoarders! Being able to quickly search emails and know what is actionable will be easier if filed away. Most email platforms allow you to make a "To Do" list from emails rather than leaving them in your inbox as a way of staying on top of things.

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