

RIDDLE ME THIS

By Laura Plant Fuentes

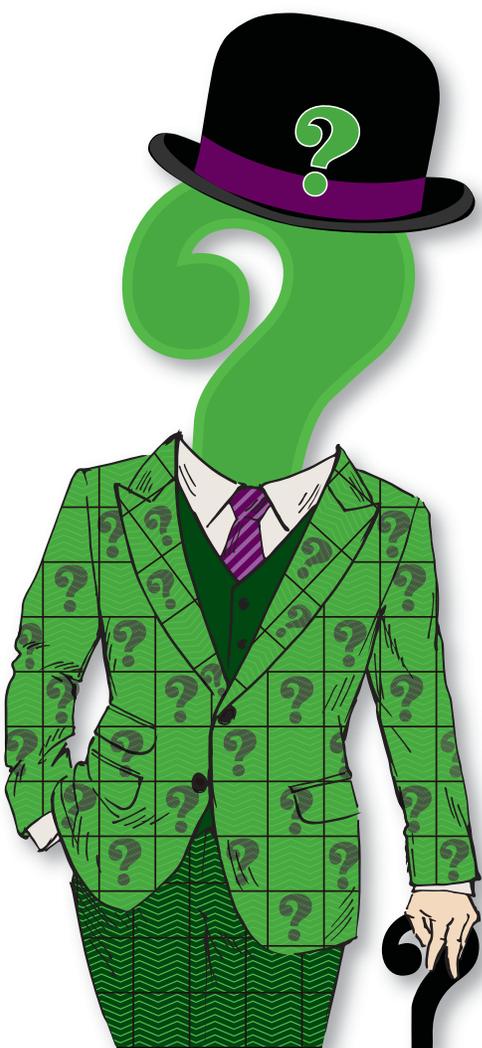
The Riddler is a criminal mastermind who has a compulsion to challenge Batman by leaving clues to his crimes in the form of riddles, puzzles and word-games. Most days I feel like Batman being taunted by the Riddler – with riddles in the form of new applications, policies and funding opportunity announcements, or changing guidelines. The adaptation to the constant challenge is sometimes arduous and challenging but makes the job of a research administrator both rewarding and fun. Tackling these challenges requires us to get out of the Batcave, hit the road in the Batmobile and face the challenges head on.

When I attend NCURA conferences, or visit colleagues at large research institutions in the US, it always surprises me that many research administrators have one role (and sometimes two) within their administrative process. In these institutions it seems that the diversity within research administration comes from multiple people working together to fulfil a goal to submit and manage (mostly) US grants, which works perfectly if the resources are available. Research administration offices outside of the USA are generally much smaller so each individual is required to take on diverse roles to complete the tasks within the grant administration chain.

The Karolinska Institutet Grants Office is the largest research support office at a university in Sweden. However many people in our office work across funding agency borders, in both pre- and post- contract, as well as have roles with strategic grants management, communication and education. The broadness of the research administration role at smaller universities and organizations is even more pronounced and in some cases one to two people are responsible for all of the grant-related research administration at their institute. It is often difficult to maintain the breadth of knowledge required to stay up to date with the changes regarding US federal and EU funding – not to mention the support required for application to all smaller, and national, funding agencies. A number of strategies can be used to allow for growth and development within a research administration role. In my opinion, the most efficient strategies are adaptation, networking and communication.

Adaptation to the changing needs involves openness and willingness to diversify. The knowledge required can be obtained by creating a network of peers who are seeking to achieve the same goals. Informal and formal societies, both national and international, have been created by individuals wanting, and needing, to grow and diversify. Membership in these societies and active participation is an invaluable tool supporting the research administrator. These societies are often, although not always, one of the primary avenues supporting communication in any given area. In Sweden we do not have a formal society to link individuals working with US grant applications and management. However, through Swedish and European networks, as well as NCURA, we have made connections and have the support structure we need to maintain up-to-date knowledge regarding funding and grants management.

Diversification to work within several areas is a positive aspect of our work. Without the riddles to solve a research administrator is more like Dilbert than Batman. Via our adaptation to the need and support via our networks we can continue to grow as individuals and as research administrators. In the words of the boy wonder “Holy Uniform Guidance Batman.” ■



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