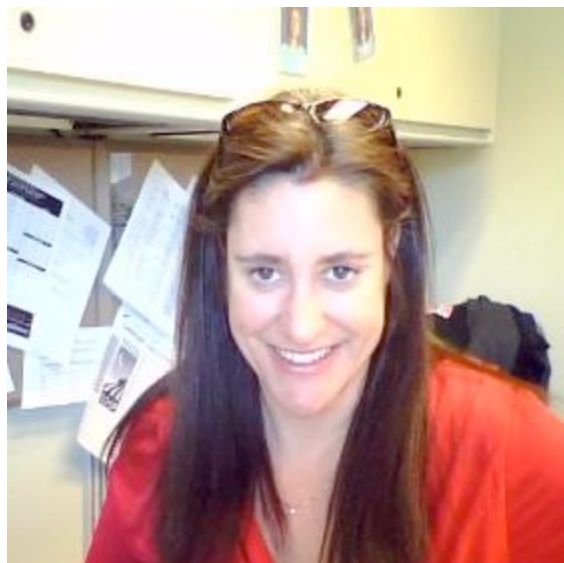


On-campus Interview, December 2015 – Tricia Callahan



Tricia Callahan

What are your current responsibilities and what are the most challenging and/or most rewarding aspects of your current position?

My current responsibilities include assisting faculty with all pre-award activities (finding appropriate funding sources, developing viable proposals, detailing a budget that fits with sponsor and university guidelines, and proposal submission). I also oversee all grant-related training and educational activities for faculty, staff, and students at my institution.

Post-award, I am responsible for award negotiation, subcontract development and oversight, as well as assisting faculty with non-financial technical reports.

Working with faculty on proposal development is rewarding in-and-of itself. I enjoy living vicariously through the good research being conducted by our faculty. I particularly enjoy when I get to hear a faculty member talk about their research and scholarship, for it is then that their passion shows. And for those who engage students, it makes it all the more enjoyable and worthwhile.

How and why did you become a research administrator?

Like so many of us, I stumbled into research administration about 17 years ago. I had just completed my Master's in Psychology at the University of Louisville (UofL) and was teaching part-time. I knew that I would need to finish my PhD in order to get a tenure-track position, but I was also at a place in my life where I wanted to start a career and have a full-time job. Because I had attended grant-writing workshops as a graduate student and was familiar with searching for funding opportunities, I took a chance on applying for a position I saw posted on the UofL website in Sponsored Research. I was fortunate enough to land the position, and I fell in love with being in a support role where I could assist with research across so many varied disciplines. It was a wonderful match for me, and it's been a wonderful career that I never even knew existed.

You recently participated in the NCURA international fellowship program. Please share one or two highlights of your experience as a fellow.

Getting to travel, getting to meet new people, getting to share and learn about how things work at another institution, in another country... all of it was incredible. The University of Luxembourg, where I did my fellowship, is so very different from my own institution. The University of Luxembourg is relatively new, is heavily subsidized by the country, and is focused on research and technology, whereas my institution, Miami University, was founded in 1809, receives dwindling state-support, and focuses on undergraduate

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education. Despite our differences, it was interesting to learn that we still face many of the same challenges, including how we support our researchers in their grant-applications.

Being in a small country like Luxembourg was a particular boon because I got to travel within the country and meet with constituents and business partners of the University of Luxembourg in addition to meeting with researchers and research administrators throughout the institution.

It was an experience that I highly value and one that I will always cherish and appreciate—thank you again NCURA.

Why do you think participating in an international experience is important?

Participating in an international experience is eye-opening in that you learn about cultural differences and differences in expectations. This is particularly important if you plan to collaborate with international constituents. For example, I never imagined how difficult a process it can be for a non-U.S. institution to get registered in SAM and get an EIN. That is why I collaborated with a colleague Mary Louise Healy of Johns Hopkins to offer some insights to non-U.S. institutions on how to go about registering with SAM and what is needed if a non-U.S. institution wants to partner on a U.S. Federal grant. It also led me to apply for the NCURA global traveling faculty program.

The cultural differences can lead to differences in timing, in communication, and even in writing styles. The more we can understand our differences, the better we can work together and learn to collaborate on important projects that have the potential to impact the world.

What are some similarities and differences between your own research administration program and practices and the program you learned about in the fellowship experience?

“Different, yet the same,” is the sentiment came up time and time again during my NCURA Global Fellowship experience. Both the University of Luxembourg and Miami University have been given a directive to become research-intensive institutions, and both currently lack the administrative infrastructure and support systems need to fully support our targeted growth.

Our practices are actually quite similar: we assist researchers in finding appropriate funding programs, we aid in proposal and budget development, and we assist in the submission process. Our challenges are also similar: we both lack regulation of internal processes, we could both benefit from clearer policies and procedures to support research administration, we both face fluctuation in administrative staff and we both need to keep abreast of ways to provide training for new, incoming administrators. The list of “different, yet the same,” goes on and on.

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What does NCURA currently provide that is the most helpful to you in your current position?

A better question might be, “What doesn’t NCURA provide?” and I really cannot think of an answer to that question.

If I had to select *one* thing it would be the networking opportunities that NCURA provides both domestically and now internationally. There is no need for anyone in research administration to work alone or in a silo, not when you have thousands of colleagues available for consultation (and commiseration) at your fingertips through NCURA Collaborate, Annual Meeting, regional meetings, PRA (Pre-award Research Administration), FRA (Financial Research Administration), specialized workshops, webinars, YouTube Tuesdays... again, the list goes on and on.

What do you see are the upcoming challenges in international research administration over the next five years?

While possibly counter-intuitive, I wonder how technology might impact international research administration in the upcoming years. Technology is moving fast, so fast it can be difficult to keep up with on a small local scale, let alone on a global scale. The challenges we face domestically with technology, putting data into local context, sharing of data while keeping confidential what needs to be protected all seem to become increasingly challenging given the rapid pace at which technology is evolving.

Recently I read a blog on issues in global research by Reineke Reitsma where she wrote, “...knowing doesn’t equal understanding.” It seems that we need to take time to get to know one another, to understand each other’s context, so that we understand how to better communicate and move forward the research administration enterprise in a way that is mutually beneficial and understandable.

The NCURA Global Fellows program can assist us in doing just that.