

Kyoto University Hosts International URA Symposium

By David Richardson

In February of this year, I was honored to have the opportunity to serve as a keynote lecturer for the inaugural International University Research Administrators Symposium sponsored by the Kyoto University Research Administration Office (KURA). The daylong event took place at the Kyoto University Yoshida campus in the historic Clock Tower Centennial Hall and attracted university research administrators from all over Japan. My lecture was titled “An Institutional and Individual Perspective on Successfully Administering the Research Enterprise” and focused on sharing best practices to advance institutional competitiveness in the pursuit of external funding. I shared common examples of office structures, training suggestions, and provided pre-award and post-award best practices on everything from managing the proposal submission process to collecting accounts receivables.

While Japanese universities have produced world-class research for decades, the advancements their researchers made in science were achieved sans any formal administrative sponsored research structure that is common to the institutions in the United States. However, increasing dependence on external competitive funding has left many Japanese researchers struggling to find the time to conduct the research while balancing the administrative needs required to obtain the funding, manage the projects, and provide outreach and public relations. Recognizing the need to reduce the administrative burden on the researchers, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) initiated grants to select institutions to establish sponsored research administrative operations. Kyoto University was one of the original MEXT grant recipients having established the Research Administration Office in April of last year. Since its establishment, the Kyoto University Research Administration Office has emerged as a leader among the Japanese sponsored research offices and the symposium was an inaugural effort to bring together university research administrators from the various institutions throughout the country.

For many of us that have been in the profession of research administration for some time it is hard to imagine what it would have been like to work in the profession in 1959, the year NCURA was founded. But this is exactly where our colleagues in Japan find themselves and it was greatly fascinating and exciting to have the opportunity to share with my Japanese colleagues what I've learned over the years. While the profession of research administration may be new to Japan, the problems facing their institutions and their researchers are not. It was my observation that my colleagues in the Kyoto University Research Administration Office are serving as a pioneering model for university research administration and I was honored to have had the opportunity to participate in the inaugural symposium and I encourage the NCURA membership to reach out to our Japanese colleagues when the opportunity avails itself and make the world a smarter place by exchanging best practices. ■

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