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Social Scientists and Research Development: What Do Research Development Professionals Do?

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The concept of Research Development (RD) has existed for three decades, and select academic institutions have existed for a long time. Over the last five years, precipitated by the economic downturn (and subsequent decline in overall research funding) and the collaborative nature of research problems, RD programs have spread to more universities, colleges, and research centers, and now span the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education index.

The National Organization of Research Development Professionals (NORDP) is the leader in this burgeoning field. Through our new and rapidly growing peer network, NORDP members develop and implement cutting-edge approaches in pursuing strategic research initiatives. Work within our individual institutions and our RD network is expanding, and institutional approaches to organized research and to capturing research resources.

RD professionals catalyze new research, enable interdisciplinary partnerships, facilitate research excellence, and more. From the 2010 survey of NORDP members indicate that RD is a diverse profession driven by a multitude of needs across a broad spectrum of disciplines, ranging from the biological and biomedical and life sciences, social sciences, engineering, physical sciences, to business and management, design, and law. Additionally, 41 percent of our members have PhDs, and 60 percent of our membership has been working in RD for seven years or less. (For more information, see www.nordp.org/assets/resources-docs/2011-nordp-numbers.pdf.) In the last two years, there have been several NORDP Job Board, a testament to the vibrancy and value of our growing field, and the priority placed on it by :

The Making of Two Research Development Professionals from the Social Sciences

Gila Budescu: I relocated to the United States in 1992, joining my spouse in a Midwest university town. I had a Master's degree in Organizational Behavior (OB) from Technion in Israel, training and work experience in psychology and anthropology.

A university town is an exciting intellectual environment for PhDs, especially those pursuing academic careers. I was pursuing an applied career. Nonetheless, a short while after my arrival, I came across a job listing for a Coordinator at a university research in biophysics and in computational biology. I applied, outlining my academic credentials, organization and operation of service organizations. I promised to bring in a unique set of management skills informed by my consulting accomplishments. Just in case, on the way to the interview, I stopped at the public library to find out more about biophysics. These fields, as I learned, tackle broad and complex research problems that rely on team efforts across

The interview was short. The facility director, a renowned scientist, only asked about my management perspective having an OB PhD supporting the non-science oversight of the facility. His open-minded and thoughtful approach over years at the facility, empowering me to perform independently, grow on the job, and develop and nurture a team climate of collaboration and excellence. Over time, my work included not only team and relationship building, identifying funding opportunities, creating and sharing new knowledge, providing training, offering guidance on grants requiring quantitative evaluations of service quality and stakeholders' satisfaction, and other entrepreneurial efforts; in short, I am today's RD professional. Toward the end of my tenure in this position I also contributed as a co-investigator on projects combining my onsite experience with my previous training in social science research methodology (e.g., the development of software user surveys; the evaluation of software products and support). My next positions allowed me to similarly—and take advantage of—my formal training. I am now the Director of the Sponsored Research and Programs at the University in New York.

Barbara L. E. Walker: Despite a passion for social science research and analysis, I have never been excited about a cultural geography at University of California-Berkeley, I began my job search with uncertainty about pursuing post-doctoral applications later, I accepted an NSF Post-Doctoral Fellowship at UC-Santa Barbara. I have always known of the way that you can lay out a beautiful and elegant research plan that is not complicated by the realities of funding and all the other nuisances that make the best laid plans go awry.

Initially intended as a stopover on the way to the tenure-track, my post-doc turned into a series of increasingly large programs and grants. I continued to apply for teaching positions half-heartedly, but several factors kept me in Santa Barbara: funding that supported long-term fieldwork and a competitive salary, along with strong cultural and family ties. In a decade I received close to \$1 million in research funding, and my proposal writing skills had been honed through working with a variety of interdisciplinary collaborators (a drop in the bucket compared to research funding for "hard" sciences). Abundant funding sources for social scientists, even for someone whose focus is on social theory and qualitative research, sharpened my knack for academic administration as well as my ability to organize and execute complex academic programs for students.

The arrival of three children in short order coincided with a job opening in the UCSB Office of Research for a research manager in the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. Established in 1987, UC-Santa Barbara has one of the oldest Research Development campuses that employ a RD professional exclusively for the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts. Recognizing the need for research funding in these areas, and increasing interdisciplinary opportunities calling for collaborative projects in the social sciences, humanities, and arts, my office provides multiple training opportunities and other programs that catalyze grant submission. Ironically, I do a lot of teaching now. I teach an annual graduate grant-writing course, a faculty grant-writing workshop on various aspects of grantsmanship. Sharing my expertise with my colleagues is fun and rewarding. I hope to contribute in a small way to the range of brilliant research topics being pursued on my campus.

Lessons Learned

The design/adoption of smart, proactive, and relevant organizational solutions to meet strategic and routine challenges in academic administration depends on multi-disciplinary integration and knowledge crossover. Brought together, an engineering PhD and a social science PhD can lead to fertile and mutually beneficial partnerships that foster individual, professional, and institutional growth. They provide a unique and exciting context for testing and applying aspects of social science theory, principles, and research. They bring fresh and innovative views and ideas into research institutions creating worthwhile and lasting intellectual contributions.

Job Requirements

A recent discussion on the NORDP listserv focused on what qualities universities look for when hiring a research manager. The common traits mentioned were: the ability to write and communicate well; an understanding of academia and the

getting grants, especially involving large multi-investigator grants; administrative/process/project management relationships with sponsors and/or key individuals within sponsoring organizations; and most of all, a desire an

When applying for jobs, identify those elements of your training and background that can add significant value confident about your abilities. Work with leaders that respect your education and understand that it could benef peers, and networks who will support you and your efforts and advocate the need for them. In an RD position, s respect their research needs. Have the capacity to translate investigators' needs into simple, intuitive, and cost-e meaningful. Increase investigators' funding success, yet minimize the administrative burden on them. Be able to institutional priorities and changing funding landscape, and change course if/when needed. Supporting today's : sustaining excellence can be accomplished through true partnerships, flexibility, and reason. Social scientists ha

Does Research Development need social scientists? Absolutely. Explore the [NORDP site](#) and [Job Board](#) for pos: www.nordp.org.

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