

## Research Administration Salaries:

# How Do We m

By Jennifer Shambrook

As research administrators, we think about money all the time. How can we get more money for our research? How much money are we cost sharing? How much money have we spent this year? How much money have we received in awards? How much money is left for a no cost extension? Money, money, money! But that is OPM – other people’s money. Let’s take a moment to think about the money you are paid for securing, managing, accounting for, or reporting on OPM. How are we doing individually and as a profession?

### Research Administration Salaries

The 2010 Research Administrators Stress Perception Survey (2010 RASPerS) collected salary information from over 1,138 research administrators across the country. The data from the survey showed that about 80% of research administrators have annual salaries of over \$50,000. As shown in Table 1, 40% of research administrators earn within the range of \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year. Fewer than 3% earn less than \$35,000 and almost 18% earn over \$100,000 as research administrators. How does this compare with similar professions?

### Comparison with other U.S. workers

Salary data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) give us some benchmarks with which to compare ourselves. The BLS reported the median annual earnings of all U.S. fulltime workers at \$38,740. For those of you for whom it’s been a while since your last statistics course, the median means that half of all workers make higher than that amount and half of all workers make lower than that amount.

The 2010 RASPerS data show where we fall within five salary ranges, rather than actual salary amounts for each individual. From the RASPerS data we can see

that at least 2.6% are in a salary range that is lower than the U.S. median of \$38.7K. There were 18.0% reporting their earnings were in the \$35-49.9K range. Of those, we can assume some would be over and some would be under the national median of \$38.7K. Assuming a normal bell-shaped distribution within the \$35-49.9K salary range would support the likelihood that since \$38.7K falls well below the midpoint of the \$35-49.9K range, more than half of the 18.0% in that \$35-49.9K range are above the \$38.7K point. But even putting statistical probability aside, we can clearly see that 79.4% are in salary ranges that earn \$50K or more. So we can say with certainty that as a group, research administrators earn well above the U.S. median income.

### Education

The 2009 U.S. Census (Educational Attainment) reports that only 29% of the U.S. has completed a college degree of bachelor’s or higher. We know from both the Research Administrator Survey (Roberts & House, 2006) and the 2010 RASPerS that research administrators are far above average when it comes to education. The 2010 RASPerS data shows 89% of research administrators have achieved bachelor’s or higher. U.S. Census data over the years consistently shows higher educational achievement is associated with higher average earnings. The BLS reports the median for all workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher is \$60,216. This can be broken down a little further to show the median for those with bachelor’s only as being at \$54,288 and for those with an advanced degree as being at \$71,136. Again, looking at our salary ranges in Figure 1, we find 40% are in the same range of the median salaries for those with higher education degrees, and another 39.4% earning salaries in the two higher ranges. With that, I believe we can feel comfortable with our salaries being in line with our educational levels.

# Measure Up?



**Table 1:** Annual Salaries for Research Administrators as reported in the 2010 RASPerS.

Annual Salary	Number	Percent
<\$35,000	29	2.6%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	205	18.0%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	455	39.9%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	246	21.6%
>\$100,000	203	17.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,138</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2:** Median annual income for workers with bachelor's degree, advanced degree, or working in management, business, and financial operations, divided by gender and gender adjusted for research administration

	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree	Management, business, and financial operations
All workers	\$54,288	\$71,136	\$59,748
Male workers	\$63,284	\$80,236	\$68,016
Female workers	\$47,268	\$62,088	\$51,116
RA gender adjusted	\$50,471	\$65,718	\$54,496

## Responsibility

Another characteristic which we might use to view our salaries, is the area of responsibility. While 29% may have college degrees, all degreed occupations do not have the same earning power. The BSL reports those in management, business, and financial operations occupations generally earn more than those in sales or professional occupations. The median income for management, business and financial operations occupations is \$59,748; for sales is \$33,124; and for professional

occupations is \$52,520. Again, looking back at Table 1, we see that most research administrators are in salary ranges that either meet or exceed the median salaries for those in management, business and financial operations.

## Gender considerations

The salaries discussed above consider the median or mean earnings of all workers. One cannot consider salary without bearing in mind the gender bias that is still alive and well in the workplace today. This is an especially important factor when discussing an occupational group that is comprised of a population that is about 80% female with a reported gender bias present (Shambrook, Roberts & Triscari, 2010.) The U.S. Census Bureau reports the ratio for women's earnings to men's earnings was 78.2%. Stated in monetary terms, for every dollar a man earns, a woman in a similar situation will earn about 78 cents. Table 2 shows the median earnings for men, for women and what we should expect to see for the 80/20 female/male

**Table 3:** Responses salary ranges segregated by research administration role.

Salary Range	Department Administrator	Pre-Award	Post-Award	Research Ethics and Compliance	Other	Response Totals
<\$35,000	0.9% (3)	3.0% (10)	5.8% (12)	0.0% (0)	1.9% (4)	2.6% (29)
\$35,000 - \$49,999	11.3% (39)	26.2% (88)	23.2% (48)	22.9% (8)	10.3% (22)	18.0% (205)
\$50,000 - \$74,999	46.5% (161)	39.6% (133)	41.5% (86)	22.9% (8)	31.0% (66)	39.9% (454)
\$75,000 - \$99,999	24.6% (85)	18.8% (63)	18.4% (38)	14.3% (5)	25.8% (55)	21.6% (246)
>\$100,000	16.8% (58)	12.5% (42)	11.1% (23)	40.0% (14)	31.0% (66)	17.9% (203)
<b>Total N</b>	<b>346</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>1,137</b>

mix found in research administration when adjusted for gender.

When comparing the salaries reported in the 2010 RASPerS with the median salaries reported by the BLS, it can be said that, as a profession, research administrators appear to be earning at or above the median salary range for our educational level and area of responsibility even before adjusting for gender.

## RA Roles

Research administrators perform different primary functions. Table 3 illustrates the responses to the 2010 RASPerS question: “What is your primary role in research administration?” segregated by salary range. Research administrators working in pre-award and post-award have a significantly higher likelihood of being in the lower salary ranges than those serving as departmental administrators, research ethics and compliance or other roles. Those in research ethics and compliance and “other” RA roles are represented with greater percentages in the two highest salary ranges. Department administrators had 41.4% in the highest two salary ranges. Those in pure pre- or post-award each had around 30% in the highest two ranges.

## Benefits

Employee benefits vary from institution to institution, but we do have one measure of employee benefits that was collected in the 2010 RASPerS: health insurance. Just prior to data collection for the 2010 RASPerS, the 2009 American Community Survey reported that 20.6% of the total U.S.

civilian population between the ages of 18 and 64 years old did not have health insurance. For those employed full time, the number dropped to 13.4% uninsured. Only 6.4% of those with a bachelor’s degree or higher were without health insurance. The 2010 RASPerS showed that only less than one percent of research administrators were uninsured. Of the 1,126 research administrators responding to the question about health insurance status, 99.5% indicated they had health insurance.

## So, how are we doing?

Looking at all of this together, whether looking at comparisons with all occupations, or by educational attainment, and even when accounting for gender bias, it looks like we are doing quite well as a profession. Our salaries tend to be above the median when compared against all occupations, or against those with similar educational achievement. Our salaries appear to be higher that would be expected considering our gender composition of 80% female. Additionally, we have benefits that are significantly better than the national norm. All that, and we get to participate in a profession that helps move the body of knowledge forward for the benefit of the quality of life for all mankind. For me, I’ll feel some satisfaction in that, then turn my attention back to OPM. ■

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## Turnover and Retention:

# Why Do Many Leave, But Some of Us Stay?

By Lauren Magruder



Like most of you in research administration, I constantly dread the latest e-mail announcement that one of our teammates is leaving our office and our field. It happens too often. While we are happy for their future plans, our thoughts tend to focus on who will take on their duties, how long will the interview process take, and when will we find time to train the new employee.

The focus of my MPA Professional Paper was on career ladders as a method to reduce turnover in sponsored programs offices. I wanted to share some of the information I found with you and also open a discussion about this issue. Several of the sources I used examined why people stay instead of the more studied issue of why people leave. This made me wonder why those of us who have been doing this for a while continue within research administration. I also wanted to learn more about what we can do as managers to improve employee retention.

Employee turnover or retention in research administration has been an issue for many years. It is becoming more of a problem as the informa-

tion needed to become a successful administrator continues to grow and become more complex. Our jobs often require a greater level of experience and confidence as the learning curve becomes steeper and gray areas increase.

As research administrator positions turn over, providing good support to departments and faculty members becomes more difficult. Remaining administrators are often over-burdened with additional work and training duties. They may become less engaged and start to look for new opportunities. This can lead to multiple administrators leaving at once. I personally refer to this as the snowball effect.

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, and Erez examined job embeddedness (2001, pp. 1102-1121). Job embeddedness is the sum of all internal and external components that influence an individual to remain at his or her current job, or to leave that job. Understanding these components allows managers to influence them in positive ways that will help their employees feel more attached to the organiza-

tion. Mitchell et al., argue that by measuring job embeddedness as a causal indicator, an organization can predict turnover (2001, pp. 1102).

The components of job embeddedness they examined are links, fit, and sacrifice. They see links as the important relationships that workers have with the environment around them, including family, friends, and co-workers. There are pressures from these linkages to continue to work. Leaving a position could diminish these links or reduce them entirely (Mitchell et al., 2001, pp. 1104-1105). Fit is related to how well a person's values fit within the goals and culture of the organization, as well as the community as a whole. A good fit may result in an increased attachment to the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001, pp. 1104-1105).

Finally, sacrifice is made up of the costs and loss of benefits beyond money that are associated with leaving a job. One may have to give up interesting projects and co-workers. If the benefits of leaving are greater than the benefits of staying, turnover is likely. Keeping employees engaged and excited about their work could improve retention (Mitchell, et al., 2001, pp. 1104-1105).

Although it would be difficult to measure every employee's embeddedness level, being aware of these components gives managers the opportunity to address related issues and encourage attachment. Links could be strengthened by social activities at work such as monthly birthday celebrations and recognition of life events like wedding showers or employment anniversaries. Fit could be increased by evaluating administrators' strengths and focusing their efforts in areas that interest them when available. Providing access to training and mentoring may also be beneficial to increasing one's fit. Reducing sacrifice may include educating staff about long term employment benefits or introducing a career ladder with clear steps for advancement.

Oscar Grusky also studied a related concept of employee commitment (1966, pp. 488-503). In

his article, "Career Mobility and Organizational Commitment," Grusky hypothesized that "(1) the greater the rewards received, the greater the degree of the person's commitment, and (2) the greater the obstacles the person has to overcome in order to obtain the organization's rewards, the greater his commitment. (Grusky, 1966, p. 488)"

Grusky studied four areas of commitment. These included seniority, identification with the company, attitude toward management, and general satisfaction. His conclusions revealed that the first hypothesis above was not supported, but the second hypothesis was supported (Grusky, 1966, p. 488).

These studies were applicable to research administration because they address the issue of why people stay and provide opportunities to encourage administrators to stay beyond pay increase or flex time that are often unavailable. It seems that it is not always what a person gets out of a job, but what they have personally invested that creates commitment to the organization.

Long-term research administrators may stay be-

cause we have personally invested in the field of research administration. This investment may be in the form of advanced training, certification, or internal office processes and involvement. As managers, we should provide opportunities for our new employees to become more engaged with research administration. They need to see it as a career and not simply a job at the university.

Research administrators and management must often be reactive to retention issues, and have difficulty creating proactive solutions. Some research administration organizations may have developed specific programs to curb turnover, but there is no one fix for every situation. Ways of analyzing and reducing turnover vary within professions, but good comparisons, such as with teachers and nurses, are available.

Continuing to share experiences with each other through such organizations as NCURA will also help universities to see what each are doing and adapt models to their needs. The future for sponsored research is busy, but bright, if research administration managers can be proactive in their efforts to retain administrators. ■

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