

Title: Administrative Allocations as Strategic Responses to Resource Dependence in U.S. Research Universities

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Problems Addressed, Research Question, and Significance

U.S. research universities face increasingly constrained and volatile federal funding environments, heightening dependence on external research resources, and pressure on internal administrative capacity. As competition for federal research funding grows and compliance requirements expand, universities must strategically allocate limited administrative resources to sustain research activity. Research administration plays a central role in institutional grantsmanship, including competitive proposal development, compliant award management, and sponsor oversight (Gant et al., 2023). Despite broad recognition of research administration's importance, limited research has assessed how staffing allocations affect institutional capacity for grantsmanship or how institutional context conditions shape effectiveness. Addressing this gap, this research conceptualizes whether grant writing capacity, internal compliance training, and professional development function as mechanisms linking staffing allocations to grantsmanship outcomes, and whether governing conditions shape these relationships.

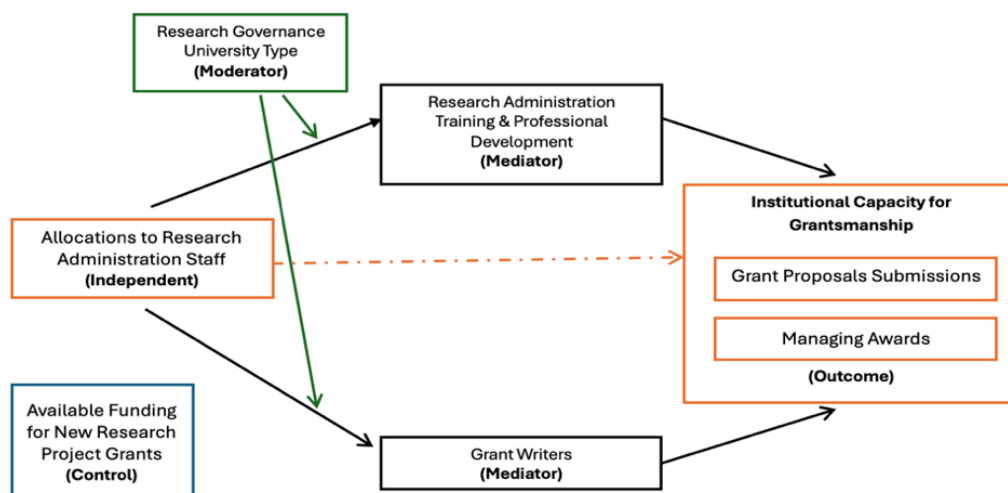
This research is important to university leadership, research administrators, and policy-relevant stakeholders responsible for allocating administrative resources under constrained and uncertain funding conditions. Federally funded university research plays a critical role in advancing health, science, knowledge creation, and economic development. Thus, creating institutional capacity to sustain research activity has consequences that extend beyond individual organizations. By focusing on institution-level administrative allocations rather than faculty productivity or

discipline-specific outcomes, this conceptual model provides a template for evaluating how administrative capacity supports sustainable research activity and funding compliance.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

Grounded in Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), this research conceptualizes internal resource allocation as an organizational response to dependence on external actors controlling critical resources (Reitz et al., 1979). In U.S. research universities, reliance on federal funding incentivizes strengthening administrative capacity for securing and managing research awards. From an RDT perspective, research administration staffing and related allocations are intentional strategic responses to funding dependence rather than routine operations or administrative overhead.

Consistent with this framing, this conceptual model depicted below positions grant writing capacity, internal compliance training, and professional development as organizational capabilities that transform administrative staffing into effective institutional grantsmanship (Goff-Albritton et al., 2022; Gant et al., 2023; Steinberg & Rubin, 2009; Temples et al., 2012; Preuss, 2015). The model further conceptualizes university governance type as a contextual mechanism that affects how administrative allocations create organizational capacity across institutions. (Hackman, 1985; Powell & Rey, 2015).



Research Design and Proposed Methods

This research also proposes using a quantitative design to examine how administration allocations influence institutional grantsmanship capacity. Such an empirical approach would integrate archival data and institution-level survey data to assess our conceptualized relationships among administrative allocations, internal capacity-building mechanisms, and grantsmanship outcomes. Archival data capture indicators of proposal activity and award management performance, while survey data capture research administration staffing allocations, grant writing capacity, and internal compliance training and professional development. Governance type and measures of federal research activity could be drawn from national postsecondary education and federal data sources.

Consistent with our conceptual model, such a research design would evaluate whether internal administrative mechanisms function as pathways linking staffing allocations to institutional grantsmanship capacity, and whether governance context shapes these relationships across universities.

Preliminary Results, Findings, & Practical Relevance

Since data collection has not commenced, there are currently no preliminary results or empirical findings.

Practically, this research is intended to offer a conceptual template to inform leadership decision-making by research administration staffing as well as training under constrained and uncertain funding conditions. By focusing on institution-level administrative allocations, this research is designed to guide future empirical assessments of how administrative capacity supports institutional grantsmanship, regulatory compliance, and the sustainable conduct of federally funded research.

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