The Research Coordinator's Corner

A quick update on electronic submission – I spoke briefly with OSP's Director, Toni D'Agastino, who reported that the first large-scale electronic submission went about as well as one could ask. UTMB submitted over 30 grants electronically, and only three had to be resubmitted a second time because of errors. This stands in stark contrast to the overall experience reported by NIH -- the average electronically submitted grant took over a dozen tries before all the errors were corrected. OSPA's training, and particularly Kathy Lee (OSPA's point person on the electronic submission process), thus deserve major kudos, as do the various Departments' staff who received the training and applied it correctly. Importantly, while the grants.gov system's overall processing speed slowed somewhat as traffic got heavier later in the day on June 1st (particularly in terms of the wait for confirmatory e-mails), there were no browser time-outs to indicate a totally overloaded system. This suggests to me that the planned conversion of R01 applications to electronic submission will probably proceed as scheduled, with the February 2007 deadline. Finally, Toni indicated that work to implement the InfoEd grant submission/administration process no later than December 1 is proceeding apace, with training probably to begin late this summer or in the fall.

All current or prospective PIs/co-Is should now be registered with the NIH Commons – As of June 1st, NIH will no longer send notices of your application's receipt and assignment to a particular Institute/program and Study Section; instead, you must now look for that information periodically under your NIH Commons PI account, just as you already must for your priority score and "pink sheet." I recommend that you develop the habit of logging into the Commons to check for the various notices (assignment, priority score, request for "just-in-time" material, etc.) on a regular schedule – perhaps first thing every Monday, Wednesday and Friday or Tuesday and Thursday morning.

Hurricane season started last week – which makes this a good time to ask yourself: "if Hurricane Rita had come here, would my lab be operational yet?" Part of the answer is obviously beyond your control, but much isn't. Are your critical cell lines and transgenic animals backed up in a secure site outside the expected damage zone for a major storm that devastates Galveston Island? How about your data – are there copies maintained on the UTMB server, so they're routinely backed up (this obviously necessitates your lab having migrated to an electronic lab notebook system – has it?) Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine were set back years by Tropical Storm Allison, and some researchers at Tulane and LSU still aren't fully operational after Katrina. Plan ahead, to minimize the chances of it happening to your lab! And don't forget that many researchers at Tulane and LSU Medical Center had to operate in temporary quarters for quite some time – some of them here at UTMB (for instance, Tada Izumi, a recent BMB alumnus who only recently returned to his lab at LSU). Make sure that possibility is included in your lab's hurricane planning! If you want some additional ideas on this topic, be sure to attend UTMB's annual research-oriented hurricane preparedness meeting this Friday June 9, from 8:30-11:30am in the Clinical Sciences Auditorium.

Be careful what you call "in vivo!" – Several grants I recently edited shared the error of improperly using the term "in vivo," usually when stating that a given reaction/pathway/phenomenon would be examined "in vitro and in vivo." Closer examination of the research plan usually showed that no animal studies were being proposed – the project
included studies done in the test tube and in cultured cells. While certainly a step up in
complexity from experiments using isolated reaction systems or even crude extracts, work in
cultured cells is nonetheless done "in vitro;" in fact, that was the title of the journal of the now-
defunct Tissue Culture Association. To avoid confusion, reserve the term "in vivo" for work
actually done in live animals. As for the original sentence, it's best simply to state that the
experiments will be done in the test tube (or using crude extracts) and in cultured cells.

**When to use "that," and when to use "which."** (This item's a repeat, but judging from
recently reviewed grants, not everyone has taken the message to heart). Both pronouns are
frequently used to begin adjectival clauses that provide more information about the preceding noun.
But when should you use "that," when should you use "which," and when is a comma required
before the pronoun? Yes, this is a fairly esoteric grammatical point, much like the split infinitive.
But as with the split infinitive, those who know the "proper" style often look down on those who
don't, so it's best to use the preferred form unless there's a good reason not to do so. However, a
more important point is that you should use neither "which" nor "that" when the pronoun refers to
one or more people – use "who" instead! "The patients that died during therapy" sounds much more
cold-hearted than "the patients who died during treatment!"

Still, in the majority of cases (when an inanimate object is being described), the choice comes
down to the **restrictive** "that," which does not require a preceding comma, vs. the **nonrestrictive**
"which," which must be preceded by a comma. But what does "restrictive" really mean? A
restrictive clause is **required** to identify or complete the meaning of the preceding noun: "This is
the house that Jack built;" or "These are the hands that built America." On the other hand, a non-
restrictive clause provides ancillary information that is **not** required to complete the identity of the
preceding noun: "UTMB, which was founded more than a century ago, is the oldest medical school
in Texas, and arguably west of the Mississippi," or "The World War II-era M-1 rifle, which held
only 8 rounds per clip and could be fired only in semi-automatic mode, was replaced in 1957 by the
M-14, which used 20-round clips and could be fired in fully automatic or semi-automatic modes."
The one exception to this rule is to use "which" as the nonrestrictive pronoun if there was a "that"
earlier in the sentence, simply because two "that's" in close proximity grate on the ear.

That's it for this month. Let's pray that Dr. Gray is right and that while this may still be an
"overly active" hurricane season, it won't be nearly as destructive as last years – and that there
aren't **any** storms here!

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