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Moving Toward the Research Dream

Thoughts from Appalachian State University's Katie Howard

An InfoReady Case Study

infoReady

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Moving Toward the Research Dream

An InfoReady Case Study

Katie Howard, Associate Director of Grants Resources and Services at Appalachian State University discusses how she and her colleagues are moving toward the dream of a single locus for all campus competitions and research endeavors by using InfoReady:

As the research "super administrator" at our campus, InfoReady has really revolutionized how I go about my daily work, so I'm always happy to take the opportunity to share how we use the platform in creatively developing and disseminating uses across campus.

As one of 17 schools within the UNC system, Appalachian State is a mid-sized primarily undergraduate institution (PUI) with a heavy emphasis on teaching. That said, research is growing in importance to the faculty we're recruiting to campus. And it's really important for the student experience, as it is for many other institutions.

Our Office of Research is centralized, which means we serve everyone on campus. That includes about 1400 faculty of whom 1000 are on tenure track, and half of those we consider having high research and grant activity. Our research grants and contracts total about $14 million annually, which makes us middle of the road as far as research activity.

In the Office of Research, we began using InfoReady to automate processes in support of our limited submissions and internal grants competitions. We have about 20 competitions a year falling under those categories, and with the recent Pandemic we've actually added a couple of competitions as internal grant programs.

Relatively recently we also started using InfoReady for nominations and awards in the Office of Research as well as calls for proposals for symposia and research events, with probably about three iterations a year within our office for that purpose. A number of other units on campus utilize it for this reason, as well.

With the Pandemic obviously unanticipated, we also found InfoReady to be enormously helpful in managing the resumption of research activity post-quarantine. This usage also falls under my job description and, while we're hopefully not going to be doing this forever, it's been really great to have InfoReady as a resource for managing the process. To name just one example, we've been tracking and routing requests to resume research activity on campus and also utilizing it for record keeping -- so that

when people update documents such as risk mitigation plans or contingency plans, we have a comprehensive and updatable archive of those, which is absolutely critical.

Once our Office was up to speed on utilizing InfoReady, one of the main items on my to-do list was disseminating the platform across campus. There are obvious advantages in doing so – cost-sharing being just one of them – but also significant challenges on the administrative side, including managing the various relationships.

Our centralized Office of Research is comprised of four units. In addition to my area of responsibility, Grants and Services – which manages research development, training, resources, funding opportunities, and strategic planning for research – we also have sponsored programs, research compliance, and research design & analysis units. Each of those units has their own administrator role to access InfoReady and utilize it as they prefer.

For example, Sponsored Programs has a professional development program for research administrators across campus and they handle applications for that program through the InfoReady system. Another unit, the University's Research Institute for Environment, Energy, and Economics, reports directly up to the Vice Provost for Research, so they need administrative access because they too manage an internal grant program.

Currently, our Office of Research accounts for 40 percent of InfoReady use, with other colleges, independent programs, and other units each accounting for 20 percent.

Examples include our graduate college, which uses InfoReady to manage their graduate teaching awards, graduate student research assistantship programs, graduate faculty awards, and graduate student awards. For them, InfoReady automates nominations, reviews, and award selection – as well as the grants and fellowship programs they administer through the college.

Our College of Health Science has used InfoReady for internal awards, summer grants programs, and teaching awards. And, our College of Arts and Sciences currently uses InfoReady for student and teaching internal grants and awards.

Our dream would be for every college to have access, and in three years we've made considerable progress toward that goal. Right now, in fact, we're in negotiations with the PR and the Academic Affairs units to discuss how we might best reach everyone, including the independent programs and random uses of InfoReady already on campus. For example, we have an academic leadership development program funded by the Office of the Chancellor, administered by a small cohort of faculty and administrators who already utilize InfoReady for applications.

We have a public school partnership mini grants program, and they utilize the system. Our Office of International Education and Development offers travel awards, scholarships, and other grant mechanisms through their unit and they use InfoReady for those purposes, as well as for managing teaching exchanges and visiting professorship programs with partner institutions abroad.

So, while InfoReady has spread broadly across the campus, we really would love to expand its use further. Three years into the adoption curve, it's clear that InfoReady's reputation is growing, users have become very comfortable with the platform, and they expect certain kinds of content to be accessible there.

A game changer for many of us is that we can use a single sign-on integration, meaning that each user can access the system with his or her Appalachian State login – with no outside passwords, email addresses, or additional login information to remember. And when they do login, users see the same familiar page.

Capitalizing on InfoReady's functionality, efficiency, and user comfort is important as far as dissemination, and our Vice Provost for Research, Dr. Ece Karatan, has been instrumental in spreading the word via Dean's Council and Chairs' Council. She encourages those individuals to reach out to us for demos or more information and explore how they might utilize InfoReady to automate and simplify their processes. My role involves disseminating information to our communications liaison group, from where it quickly spreads through word of mouth.

It's been really positive the way dissemination has worked out. When groups express interest, we connect them to the InfoReady team to get in-depth demos. And I do brief demos in my office to colleagues who are interested in what the system can do and how we use it. We also provide sandbox access to any administrator, or a flex admin role so they can actually play with the system before they decide to opt in. The key selling point to other units is invariably the increased efficiency they'll gain from automating their processes through InfoReady. Whether they're managing an award nomination, a limited submission competition, or whatever, administrators are almost always using an amalgamation of three or four different systems – from a learning management site to Google Drive, Google Forms for collecting applications, or a rubric sent out via email. With InfoReady all of the elements are in one place, even award notification, so the process is much easier and much more efficient.

Communicating all of these advantages is critical in moving toward our dream, our magical unicorn, in which every internal competition – whether scholarships, fellowships, awards, internal grants, or limited submissions – would live in one place for

the entire campus, one single landing page, where any student or faculty member could go to identify all the opportunities they could potentially apply for.

As we move toward this objective, my role as a super administrator is to provide support for other InfoReady administrators on campus. That involves sharing information via email, sharing access to relevant webinars and resources, and doing basic troubleshooting to see if I can help them before they put in a support ticket with InfoReady if the issue is beyond my expertise.

As the University's use of InfoReady matures and expands beyond the Office of Research, it's likely that as super administrator my role would continue to be our primary liaison and InfoReady contact, as that model has so proven effective.

But even at this juncture, we can safely say the dream is within sight, thanks to InfoReady."

To learn more about *InfoReady*, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current *InfoReady* users, contact Amanda or Max at the contact info below.

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