Helping Research to Fly

UASP Success Stories: **Akindele Abiodun Tunde**

Akindele Abiodun Tunde has built his career in university administration, with particular expertise in ethical conduct of research and compliance. He is passionate about what he does and understands how his work contributes to progress at his university, the University of Ibadan his country, Nigeria, the continent of Africa and globally.

An important chapter in Akindele's professional and personal journey was his 2017 participation in a Research Management Fellowship, designed and implemented by IREX under the University Administration Support Program (UASP). The fellowship combines workshops on research management and leadership, peer discussion, and a four-week placement with a U.S. host university. Following the experience, fellows like Akindele develop plans to reform research management processes and boost productivity at their home institutions in Africa and Eurasia.

Akindele's specific focus for the fellowship was to learn how U.S. universities foster a strong culture of compliance alongside their research integrity and ethics policies. At the time, the University of Ibadan "had a policy in place, but it was not as robust as some policies in the global north… What we had before was a research ethics policy; the word 'compliance' was part of the policy but did not have a dedicated office for operation and monitoring". Based in the College of Medicine, Akindele was acutely aware of the consequences of missteps, for the university, for faculty, or for subjects of the research. At the same time, as an administrator, it was sometimes difficult to enforce policy when this involved confronting faculty researchers, who are considered higher in authority at many African institutions.

During his host placement, IREX stationed Akindele at the University of California, Davis (UCD) where he met with counterparts and reviewed their compliance and integrity policies and procedures, sparking ideas for how to rejuvenate and strengthen the University of Ibadan's practice back home. Craig Allison, Director of Research Compliance and Integrity at UCD and Akindele's host mentor during the placement, was influential in a way he didn't expect. Akindele said Craig gave him "strategies for managing academics with emotional intelligence." In the United States, as with Africa, there can be power dynamics between faculty and administrative positions. According to Akindele, Craig modeled a leadership style of "carrying everyone along…" He "prevented research misconduct by reaching out to [faculty] on issues of research compliance and integrity before they fell foul of the law, so he didn't act like a policeman waiting for the fall guy…he looks at the processes and he advises them ahead of time, reminding them of what they needed to do…it's preventative." And Craig achieved faculty buy-in by positioning the compliance unit as a partner, seeking the same goals.

> " Whatever research is done that does not follow due process, that does not control or report misconduct, that does not have a whistleblower hotline, those researches cannot stand the test of time—it could cause loss of financial resources or even cause loss of lives. "

The UASP closing workshop reinforced that administrators can indeed be leaders. "The curriculum of the UASP that was talking about leadership…[being] multi-faceted, [not] top to bottom. No matter wherever you are, you can lead."

Upon return home, Akindele made cultivating relationships at all levels a hallmark of his leadership style.

He became active with NCURA (the first African to join the NCURA Select Committee on Global Affairs and NCURA Global Travelling Faculty) and WARIMA, follows higher education administration readings, and began sending relevant articles or funding calls to those with authority at his institution—DVCs of Research and Administration, Deans, etc.

He also trained his staff to work preventatively with faculty as they review proposals and renew ethics committee approvals, employing research integrity checklists and fostering a partnership approach, both of which he'd seen be effective at UC-Davis. All parties seem mutually pleased with the changes. "Before, because we were not academics, we did not have the confidence to stand up to the faculty to help them in research matters …[now] they [the faculty] actually love the new approach."

Overall, he says, "the UASP transformed my way of thinking, my way of relating, especially with the big boys in positions of authority. I had more confidence in approaching them from an informed position. If you have better information, they will want to listen, and the way of presenting the information matters; you have to be friendly with them." But he stressed, you need to reach out to them before you need them, providing information that is helpful to them."

Sharing research management progress since the UASP fellowship with UASP alumni peers at the 2019 ARUA Conference

Step by step, Akindele gained recognition at the institution such that when he applied for a UASP small grant to kickstart a reform project, he was able to mobilize enough support networks in the University to persuade university Deputy Vice Chancellors, Directors, and faculty stakeholders to jointly develop and publish a central and more robust institutional research integrity and compliance policy for the approval of the Vice Chancellor and University Senate. "When I came back, we [compiled] a summary of every policy in the university that is about research— financial grants management, research ethics, [etc.] … and we added the area of compliance so it would be a cohesive policy. We have harmonized everything." The policy was adopted by the University Senate and is now being applied by all six ethics committees that review research for the university.

> " You have to cultivate the relationship when you don't need the benefit of the relationship. The UASP helped me to think better. "

It seems to be a focused vision that drives Akindele to keep pursuing improvement, even when resources are limited, even though change takes time. "The challenges don't compete with the joy of making a contribution." He adds, [from the UASP] "I discovered I have a lot of brothers and sisters in research administration that I could relate with in the work…discovering [other colleagues] doing this around the world, and how it helps research to fly in their institutions, my goal is to develop myself and [our] infrastructure for research to fly, for research to fly at my institution. Research impacts society constantly…it help[s] me to understand my own way to impact humanity."

Akindele presented a study analyzing the state of Research Management at African Universities at the International Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities in Cairo