



Background

Armand currently works as a Research Administration Projects Manager in the Office of Sponsored Programs Administration, but he did not always plan on working in grants administration. He is originally from Los Angeles, California, and has always had an interest in writing. In 1997, he moved from California to Boston to complete his Masters in Fine Arts Degree in Writing, and he worked odd jobs to support himself. Realizing that the Harvard

Longwood Campus was a short walk from where he lived in Mission Hill, he decided to give the School a call and see if they had any temp positions open. He says that if he had lived in another part of Boston, he may have never started working at Harvard!

Armand began his career at Harvard as a temp in the department of Maternal and Child Health (which no longer exists) as an Office Coordinator and Staff Assistant. Over time, he saw the position somewhat disappear due to a shift from in person meetings, telephone correspondence, and filed paperwork to digital work. After the Department of Maternal and Child Health merged with a larger department, he was moved over to supporting grants administration. He then spent 6 years as a Grant Coordinator in the department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, where he provided administrative support for grant proposals and reports. When he was first moved into his role in grants administration, he didn't know much about the field – but he is thankful he ended up there, as the field has grown over the last few decades and he feels he has been able to grow with it.

In 2014, he was promoted to Grant Manager within the department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. After two years in that role, he was promoted again to Senior Grant Manager within the same department. In this role, he managed a large portfolio of research awards, endowments, and gifts, and was able to work on the full life cycle of research projects. As a result, his interest in the field really took off. In 2017, Armand had the opportunity to move to a more centralized role, and he joined the Office of Sponsored Programs Administration where he gained supervisory responsibilities. He now leads a team of consulting Grants Managers that provide back-up and solutions for departments and centers with grant funded research projects and needs.

When asked what he has learned about himself from working at Harvard, Armand said he has learned that he often can enjoy the negotiation, and the detail-oriented, complex work that comes with sponsored research administration. He says, “It is a bit like detective work sometimes, and also involves working and negotiating with all kinds of people on thorny issues. Because it's challenging and non-repetitive, it stays interesting. In our culture, growing up, we often equate office work with “boring,” so many of us set our sights on careers in arts, athletics, or careers that involve direct engagement with people (doctors, social workers, teachers, etc.). Those are all great careers, but I was surprised to learn (over time) that office careers can also carry elements that can make them challenging and interesting and can involve helping people (in an indirect way).”

Recommendations for Staff

Armand's advice to staff is to “look sideways more.” Although Harvard is huge, it is not like a typical company where all staff are promoted by central administration. Instead, Armand says

because there are so many Harvard schools and departments within them, “The effect is more like there are tons and tons of small businesses under one big roof. It’s hard to get promoted or progress in a small shop, but there could be dozens of adjacent small shops that might have a similar job or at least a job that requires a similar skill set.” He also says it can be hard to move from a support role to a management role, but that, “One possible strategy might be to move from your job in a small project or in a department and try to get a job at a school directly. Because the schools and central offices have more employees, they might be more likely to have openings for junior management and may be a bit more likely to promote someone from the house team.” When he worked for a specific department rather than a central one, he sometimes found that supervisory roles required experience that was hard to get – but opportunities are out there, you just have to be open to looking and learning.

What do you like most about working at SPH?

Armand says that for the field he is in, SPH is one of the best places to work. The thing that makes the biggest difference for him is the people – as he believes that an amazing job with terrible people is a terrible job, but amazing coworkers can make an already amazing job even better. And the Harvard benefits aren’t bad either!

Resource to You

Interested in learning more about Armand and his work, or getting one-on-one advice from Armand himself? Contact him directly via email at ainezian@hsph.harvard.edu!

How about You?

Interested in telling us your success story? Let us know by sending an email to employment@hsph.harvard.edu.