

FEBRUARY 2, 2016



*Left to right: Donald H. Levy, Juan de Pablo, Alida Bouris, Dana Suskind. Photo by Research Computing Center.*

*by Benjamin Recchie*

“The point of my office is to make your research easier,” said [Donald H. Levy](#), Vice President for Research and for National Laboratories, as he addressed an afternoon gathering of recently hired faculty members on January 27. The event—also featuring a wine and cheese reception courtesy of Levy’s office, and therefore dubbed Research Uncorked—was to showcase the different services offered by the units of the [Office of the Vice President for Research and National Laboratories](#) (OVRNL) and share a little advice from faculty in different phases of their academic lives.

First up was [Alida Bouris](#), assistant professor at the School of Social Service Administration. Bouris works with young people who are at risk of contracting HIV or are

living with it; [Arete](#) had helped her with her efforts to put her research into practice with the community.

“In my work, it’s very important to be interdisciplinary,” she said, noting she was frequently invited to speak on different aspects of her scholarship or collaborate with researchers in other fields. But she eventually had to start being selective about which invitations to accept, so as to reserve enough time for her core work. “Learning how to say ‘no’” she says, was critical. But once she starting saying no, people were supportive, including her dean. Her careful balancing act paid off, as she informed the audience; she had just received tenure.



[Dana Suskind](#), professor of surgery and pediatrics, was next. By her own admission, she was “an accidental researcher”—she was a clinician at University of Chicago Medicine, directing the [Pediatric Cochlear Implantation Program](#). But she noticed that some of the hearing-impaired children that she worked with had markedly different outcomes after receiving an implant. Those from wealthier families seemed to thrive much better than those from poorer backgrounds. Curious about this, she said, she consulted with other University experts in fields like economics and psychology, as well as with [UChicagoTech](#)’s Eric Ginsburg, “even though nothing I do is worth any money.”

Her discovery, that poor children hear fewer words than their wealthy counterparts in the first four years of their lives, became the basis of the [Thirty Million Words Initiative](#), which aims to make sure that all young children hear the titular number of words to help improve their cognition.

Suskind also praised the University's interdisciplinary culture for making her research possible. "If I was at any other university, [Thirty Million Words] would not exist."

The final speaker was [Juan de Pablo](#), the Liew Family Professor in molecular engineering, who specializes in supercomputer simulations of molecules to design new materials from the bottom up. De Pablo acknowledged his story was a little different than most senior faculty—he was hired only three years ago, already an established researcher at the University of Wisconsin.

"There are so many people here I have to thank, it would take me five minutes to do so," he quipped. "Whenever they offered me help, I took it." He did take the time to single out H. Birali Runesha, the director of the [Research Computing Center](#) ("Birali promised to take away all my computing nightmares—and then actually did it"), the staff at UChicagoTech, who have assisted him in writing "superior" proposals, and Jasmin Patel, the executive director of Arete, so dedicated to her job she engaged him in a long e-mail conversation even as she was in a hospital in labor.





Having heard advice and testimonials, the formal reception ended, leaving attendees to sample wine and cheese pairings from Pastoral while talking to representatives of each office.

If you missed Research Uncorked, but would like to know more about what the units of the OVPRNL can do for your research, please see the following:

[Arete](#)

[Office of Research Safety](#)

[Research Computing Center](#)

[UChicagoTech](#)

[University Research Administration](#)