

Meena Rao

Meena Rao, Vice President for Academic Affairs, is the chief academic officer of the University of Illinois. The vice president reports to the president and works closely with the chancellors and provosts of the Urbana-Champaign, Chicago, and Springfield campuses in defining and shaping strategic academic priorities and directions for the University, providing advice on important academic policy and budgetary issues, and supporting key academic initiatives. The VPAA works to foster communication and collaboration on academic matters among the campuses of the University of Illinois system. Units reporting to the Vice President for Academic Affairs include the Institute of Government and Public Affairs (IGPA), the University of Illinois Press, University-wide Student Programs (USP), and University Academic Programs and Services (UAPS), including online education.

The VPAA also has responsibility for the University's relations with the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), and University Academic Human Resources (UAHR). The VPAA works closely with the Vice President/Chief Financial Officer, the Vice President for Technology and Economic Development, and the University Senates Conference.

CURRENT ACADEMIC INTERESTS:

Related to Academic Administration:

In the 21st century, educational excellence in a global society can only be achieved if institutions of higher education, and especially public institutions, dedicate themselves to "providing educational opportunity and promoting educational success for all of our children." Compelling evidence in the literature supports the notion that institutional commitment to diversity benefits all students. Diversity can be broadly defined to include all aspects of human differences, including gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, status as a veteran, geographical diversity and religion. My interests rest in how to create an academic climate that will foster diversity and will weave diversity into the core values and curriculum of an institution.

Related to Research:

Meena continues to maintain a small research program, with help from a Research Assistant Professor and a research specialist. This has been critical in helping my administrative work. Her overall research interests are in understanding the molecular and cellular mechanism(s) underlying hormonal and neurotransmitter regulation of physiological processes. She is particularly interested in elucidating, at a molecular level, the processes that modulate ion transport across epithelia. Epithelia such as those lining the gastrointestinal tract are multi-faceted and complex. In these tissues, ion transport processes are involved both in the vectorial movement of salt and water and in general "housekeeping" functions such as regulation of volume, pH and growth. As a consequence, epithelial cells exhibit multiple layers of complexity, ranging from compartmentalization of transporters to different forms of transporters and multiple signaling cascades with extensive cross-talk. Their recent work focuses on discerning the biochemical basis of developmental differences in how the gut regulates chloride transport. This has implications in their understanding of infectious diarrheal diseases such as cholera and inherited diseases such as cystic fibrosis.