

Research Council 2002-2003 Annual Report

DATE: July 11, 2003
TO: Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate
FROM: Machteld C. Mok, Chair of the Research Council
SUBJECT: Annual Report of the Research Council for Academic Year 2002-2003

The purpose of the Research Council is to promote, stimulate, and facilitate research activity at Oregon State University. The Council advises the Vice Provost for Research on dissemination of information, provides advice on research policies, reviews and ranks requests for funds from various OSU funds, and evaluates pre-proposals as required for external research funding opportunities to which the university can submit only a limited number of proposals.

During academic year 2002-2003, the Research Council considered 60 proposals for the General Research Fund (GRF), of which 17 were funded for a total of \$142,225. The Council reviewed 51 proposals for the Research Equipment Reserve Fund (RERF), of which 28 were funded for a total of \$627,441. The Council evaluated five requests for support from the Kelley Family Fund Equipment Grants for Materials Science. One of these requests was granted (\$90,000). One application for support of a Major Research Initiative (MRI) was received and declined by the Council.

The Research Council adopted some changes in the guidelines for the GRF and RERF. The maximum GRF award was increased from \$8,000 to \$10,000. Requests for funds for animal care, which were specifically excluded as an allowable activity in the past, will be allowed in the future. In order to increase the number of proposals to the RERF, the requirement for matching funds was decreased from 40% to 20%.

A proposal was received to rename the Transportation Research Institute (TRI) to Kiewit Center for Infrastructure and Transportation. The name change reflects an increasing focus on civil infrastructure and the commitment of a \$1.6 million endowment by current and former Kiewit employees to the development of a Center dedicated to infrastructure and transportation research. The Council supported the name change.

The Research Council discussed the recommendations put forward by the OSU 2007 Planning Team on Scholarship, Research and Creativity, with particular attention to those concerning the Indirect Cost Rate (ICR), central research facilities, and Centers, Institutes, and Programs (CIPs). The Council supports the suggestions regarding raising OSU's ICR, funding central research facilities, and creating uniform guidelines for establishing and reviewing CIPs. The Chair sent a memo to Provost Randhawa in support of forming task forces on ICR and CIPs, with the recommendation of having a member of the Research Council on each of these task forces.

A list of formal suggestions on how to promote research at OSU had been submitted to the Research Office in June 2001 and updated in January 2002. In January 2003, written comments to the suggestions were provided by Vice Provost Holdren and further explanations were given in a Council meeting by the Research Office liaison, Jack Higginbotham. The written comments to the suggestions are as follows:

1. Continue its service of expediting budgets and proposals being prepared for submission. Maintain the 1-day signature/approval turnaround.
Status: Sponsored Programs works very hard to be responsive to faculty requests, including short time-line requests for proposal review but, at this point, we are asking investigators to give our office a minimum of 72 hours to turn proposals around. The primary issue we are facing is a shortage of trained staff to review proposals. Due to unanticipated turnover of staff, we currently have only one full time grant specialist and another 0.5 FTE position in training. A search is ongoing to fill a second vacant 1.0 FTE grant specialist position. We continue to work diligently to balance the convenience of investigators (i.e., short turnaround) against the requirements placed on the institution by regulators.

2. Establish a system that will address the problem of balloon payment of vacation pay and sick leave for soft money employees at the end of their term. Vacation should accumulate, as for other OSU employees, in an account that the individual can move from position to position within OSU and from which an individual can draw upon leaving OSU.

Status: A proposal has been put forward to establish "cash accounts" - ones that carry over from year to year, and ones that accrue interest - into which vacation and sick leave balances are accumulated. Basically, the university would charge vacation and sick leave accruals as OPE expenses and place the funds so charged into special index accounts each month (this would be a net zero cost over the course of an individual's employment, but it would increase charges in those months in which neither vacation nor sick leave were taken by an individual.) Then, vacation and sick leave would be charged against the appropriate accounts. The advantages are that the cash for these two types of leave would have been charged against those indices for which the individual actually worked, and that financial burdens for these types of leave would not fall to whatever unit currently employs the staff/faculty.

If implemented, the system would probably be started at the time we start a new federally negotiated indirect cost rate (currently slated for July 1, 2004). The reason is that, by moving vacation and sick leave to a cash account, this changes our overhead structure and hence, how ICR rates are calculated.

The Vice Provost for Finance and Administration and Director of Human Resources have been involved in this discussion. Projections are that we may be able to do something like this for vacation balances but that it is unlikely that we will be able to do this for sick leave. There are two apparent obstacles. First, the university is not currently allowed to maintain cash accounts that accrue interest. There are proposals before the 2003 state legislature to address this. Second, and far more serious, is how to transition from our current system to the new system. The Research Office will continue working with the VPFA and Director of HR to bring a resolution to this issue.

3. Establish a university-level fund to help P.I.s bridge personnel and critical operating expenses for relatively short periods between grants.

Status: A "fund" has not been established, but the Research Office, working in coordination and cooperation with Deans and Heads/Chairs, has provided this type of service in at least three cases over the past year. The way this has generally worked is that the Dean provides the bridging funds, and then recaptures the funds from the indirect costs that are normally returned to the department on grants generated in the future (typically a 2-3 year time frame). The Research Office has agreed to cover a portion of the college costs if the faculty member is unable to generate the amount of indirect costs required in the agreed upon time frame. This approach has worked reasonably well, but it has required that the faculty member and his/her chair to forego future ROH. This always is a cause for some stress.

4. Establish a university-level fund for purchasing and repairing research equipment that costs less than the \$5,000 minimum required of capital expenditures and through this fund allow for purchases of computers, workstations, and software disallowed by federal rules for capital equipment.

Status: This is a request over which the VPR struggles - for a number of reasons. First, the VPR's priority is to help faculty with the "heavy lifting," i.e., supporting major equipment acquisition, and let the acquisition of the smaller pieces of equipment remain the responsibility of the individual investigator. Second, if the time-line to get a piece of equipment repaired is too short to be able to rely on a grant application, then the overhead returned to deans is intended for just these types of expenditures. Deans (or their surrogates, usually department heads or chairs) should be willing to support this type of request, especially if the faculty member has a track record of getting extramural support. Third, the Research Office is concerned about using the Research Council time to review and decide individual requests on how to apportion what would be a relatively small amount of funds.

5. Existing rules limit the money that a research facility can retain through the collection of fees for performing expert tests and analyses. As this money is sought to help maintain equipment routinely used in research, the rules should be altered so that the money retained by facilities in service center accounts is not limited.

Status: This statement is true, but it will require a change in the Oregon Administrative Rules

(OARs) to be able to do something about this. The VPR and VPFA have had discussions about this issue with no resolution to date. The proposal is to have two types of accounts, an expense account (that would operate according to the current rules), and a capital account that would allow the university to accrue (with interest) replacement funds for the instrumentation. One of the challenges with this process is that, if the equipment is even partially paid for with federal dollars, then the rules governing who can be charged become convoluted. In order to move forward, staff resources would need to be allocated for development of the needed accounting procedures which could stand up to a federal audit.

6. Routinely support some of the costs of producing large proposals prepared by investigators in several departments/colleges. Production costs on some large proposals: copying, photography, etc., depending on the subject, can become sizable, ~\$1,000, and multi-department/college involvement leads to headaches as far as who pays for what. Clearly, mechanisms for making these funds available need to be streamlined. Requests must be met in short order. Proposal preparation invariably involves 200% efforts and down-to-the-wire timing.
Status: The Research Office views its responsibilities in a slightly different light than the authors of this request. At one level, if a proposal is a continuation of an existing project, or even if the topic of the proposal is closely related to the subject of an existing grant, then paying for all of the items listed above are considered an "allowable expense" on the existing grant. At the next level, if the work is being conducted primarily within a single college, then such requests are best handled within the college. This is an expense that one might reasonably expect to be paid out of the returned overhead. To the extent that a Dean (or Head/Chair) elects to support these sorts of activities (or not) is a matter for the college to decide. Finally, for those proposals that are multi-college or multi-institutional, we currently have a program, Major Research Initiative (MRI), to handle such requests.

7. Increase opportunities for faculty release time. Faculty, particularly in the College of Liberal Arts, want more opportunities for release time to do research and prepare proposals. Currently, the release time program is viewed as being largely restricted to young faculty. GRF does not currently support release time.
Status: The GRF gives preference to release time requests from junior faculty because these are the faculty that have the least amount of experience in creating proposals and thus would presumably benefit most by having the extra time and support to pursue their professional scholarly goals. The program has funded Associate and Full Professors.

One related issue that we would appreciate feedback on is the level of support for release time. At present, we award an average of about \$4,500 per award, which limits us to 10 or 11 awards per year. In a number of the colleges, the cost to hire replacement faculty is now on the order of \$7,500 to \$8,500 per quarter and, as a result, we have not seen applications from these colleges in the past several competitions. One option is to retain the current award structure, which will increasingly limit awards to a progressively fewer number of colleges. At the other extreme, we could increase maximum awards up to \$10,000 per quarter, but then we might be limited to making only 5 awards in any given year. The Research Council's view and recommendations would be very helpful on this topic.

8. Develop a system which provides faculty with up-to-date management information that enables accountability and future spending projections on grants. The lack of an accurate and timely financial management system continues to be a major inefficiency, especially with faculty time. The disconnection between FIS and HRIS seriously challenges timely management of grants, contracts, and other research funds that are salary-intensive. Helpful and informative reports are often not available, or the information is several months out of date. A critical need is for management (not accounting) information that enables accountability and future spending projections.
Status: The Research Office agrees. This issue has been brought to the attention of the VPFA and several of his staff. No progress has been made because the attention of this group has been diverted by other issues over the last 15-18 months.
9. Since Graduate Students are crucial to the research endeavor at OSU, the Research Office should work to secure graduate fellowships.
Status: This activity is the responsibility of the Graduate School and is one of Dean Francis's current initiatives.

10. Support common-use research facilities. University-level infrastructure for research at OSU is in dismal shape. Specific examples noted by faculty are the marginal collection and resources available through the Valley Library, the lack of campus computing, the primitive state of campus networking and IT support, the lack of common-use facilities supported by OSU, rather than by P.I.s on their grants, and the lack of OSU support for staffing these facilities.
 Status: The OSU 2007 process has highlighted the lack of central university support for major research facilities as a major concern, and a group has offered a proposal to address the issue. The specific proposal is their item number 3, located at the web site:
<http://oregonstate.edu/osu2007/ResearchScholar/satellites/support/SupportTeam2Final.rtf>.
11. The Research Office and VP for Research should be the "spokesman" for research within the administration. We do not see that the University has put research as a priority for the future, even though research is crucial to the success of the institution, especially with achieving top-tier status. So, as thrusts are being mounted to improve athletics, increase undergraduate enrollment and retention, open the Bend Campus, etc., comparable thrusts should be mounted to increase graduate enrollment, and improve facilities, services, and infrastructure for research. Some faculty have become frustrated. With the increase in undergraduate enrollment and no tangible additional support for faculty, they see research as being killed.
 Status: The VPR for Research Office is the spokesman for research within administration. In order to respond in a productive manner, we seek the Research Council's advice on what the proper and important roles and responsibilities for the VPR and Research Office are at OSU. Certain functions, such as Technology Transfer, Sponsored Programs, and Regulatory Compliance are not going to go away, but there are many other functions we serve or that we might serve that should be reviewed and discussed.
12. The Research Office is encouraged to engage in fund raising, possibly through the OSU Foundation, aimed at building the research infrastructure on campus.

We agree and have taken this on as an action item. Our energies are currently focused in two areas at the moment; one is in the development of an OSU Research Park and two, to advance the proposal to construct Pauling Hall. Strong support of the needs for research service centers such as CGRB, are crucial to the improvement of research infrastructure. The turnover in leadership at the OSU Foundation should open other opportunities for funding the research enterprise at OSU.

The following is a list of the 2002-2003 Research Council members, their year of termination, and their affiliations:

Machteld Mok '03, Chair	Horticulture
Thomas McLain '03	Wood Science & Engineering
Olga Krankina '03	Forest Science
John Bolte '04	Bioresource Engineering
Mary Jo Nye '04	History
Dan Rockey '04	Microbiology
Deanna Kingston '05	Anthropology
Roger Nielsen '05	Oceanic & Atmospheric Sciences
Janet Tate '05	Physics

Alternates:

Laura Rice '04	English
Osbert Sun '04	Forest Science
William Vorachek '04	Environmental and Molecular Toxicology
Virginia Weis '04	
Ex-Officio: Jack Higginbotham	

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