Sponsored Research Advisory Committee (SRAC)

REVISED REPORT (December 8, 2004)

Initiatives and Incentives for Enhancing Sponsored Research Activities

The SRAC was charged to review the recent trends in sponsored research productivity at UWF and to recommend initiatives for enhancing the generation of external support for research and training programs, including incentives for success in securing such support. Grants and contracts received by the university cover the direct costs of sponsored programs, and enable the institution to recover Facilities and Administrative (F&A) costs. Some of the recovered F&A costs are redistributed to the contributing Principal Investigators and academic units, and also utilized to provide campus-wide intramural support for faculty research and creative activities – through small grants, summer salary supplements, matching support for equipment, and partial sponsorship of core facilities and operations. Thus, enhancement of sponsored research and training programs is important for carrying out basic and applied research in diverse areas, providing opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to participate in cutting edge research, and generating discretionary funding to support campus-wide scholarly and creative activities.

During the past decade, grant/contract funding received by the institution increased substantially – largely due to the successful efforts of centers and institutes. The dissociation of one of the major institutes, IHMC, from UWF will in the near term cause a reduction in total grant/contract revenues, as well as a decline in the F&A costs recovered by UWF. Leaving IHMC’s activities aside, the institution’s grant/contract revenues are for the most part (e.g., 73% in 2003-2004; 66% in 2002-2003) generated by institutes and centers. Among the tenured and tenure-track faculty in the centers/institutes and in the various academic departments of the three colleges, 12 to 15 individuals received grant/contracts exceeding $100,000 per year during 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. It is apparent that in order to enhance grant/contract revenues, strategic actions need be taken to: recognize, reward, and retain productive faculty; identify faculty with potential for securing grants, and provide appropriate opportunities and support for their success; recruit additional research oriented faculty in selected disciplines, and implement well-defined career development programs; and strengthen existing centers/institutes and create additional centers/institutes to facilitate interdisciplinary research and to leverage regional opportunities.

The SRAC discussed pertinent issues at several meetings, reviewed data on grants/contracts, examined the outcomes of the Summer Research Program, and sought input from Principal Investigators regarding their experiences and expectations associated with sponsored research activities. The observations and recommendations noted below are based on information derived from the above sources.

Initiatives to Recognize, Reward, and Retain Faculty with High Productivity in Sponsored Research Programs

When compared to the available awards and means to recognize excellence in teaching, relatively little recognition is being given to achievements in research and creative activities at
Although sponsored research activities are considered as part of faculty research efforts, there is not a clear expectation or recognition for success in securing grants/contracts in appraisals for merit raises, tenure, or promotion. If the university’s goal is to increase grant/contract revenues, there needs to be a systemic change in the “culture” of the university with respect to expectations, support, and rewards for faculty involvement and productivity in sponsored research programs.

Distinguished Research and Creative Activities Award (historically $1,000 cash award; raised to $3000 this year), one award per year open to campus-wide competition, with a limitation that faculty members can win this award only once in their career, is the only current mechanism to recognize distinction in scholarly endeavors. In the competition for this award, there is no clear expectation or weighting for success in securing grants/contracts. For recognition of excellence in other areas, however, there are state-supported TIP awards (base pay increases), multiple Undergraduate Teaching and Advising Awards, and multiple Distinguished Teaching Awards – for all of which, with some temporal limits, individual faculty can win these awards repeatedly based on continuous excellence in their performance. Similar avenues should be opened for rewarding excellence in research, with defined recognition for productivity in sponsored research programs. Suggested actions include:

1. **Expectations for securing extramural support for research and training need to be clearly defined and recognized in relation to merit increases, tenure, and promotion.** It is understood that weighting for this endeavor may vary with the discipline in relation to the support and opportunities provided by the institution, and to the programmatic goals set through strategic planning.

2. **Provide Sponsored Research Administrative Supplements (SRAS) as salary increments for faculty demonstrating high productivity in sponsored research programs.** These salary supplements may be term-limited (up to three years), rotational, and renewable based on sustained productivity.

3. **Replace the single Distinguished Research and Creative Activities Award with at least 4 awards per year – to be awarded through campus-wide competition, with at least two of the awards ear-marked for productivity in sponsored research and training programs.** Faculty with distinguished records of achievements would be eligible to win these awards once every three years. Faculty in state-funded and grant-funded positions would be eligible to compete for these awards.

4. **Initiate an incentive program based on salary savings generated through external grants.** Faculty in state-funded positions would qualify for bonuses from salary savings generated through federally funded research or training grants, or grants from industry or foundations that pay appropriate F&A costs (external funds from state agencies do not qualify). Appropriate supervisor (Chair, Director, Dean, or Provost) may award 50% of the generated salary savings as bonus (extra compensation) for the faculty member, not to exceed 20% of base pay for 12-month employees and 25% of base pay for 9-month employees, or return 50% of the
generated salary savings to the faculty member as “seed fund” in support of research endeavors.

5. **Revise the formula for distributing the recovered F&A costs, with an aim to increase the share of the Principal Investigator in relation to the amount of recovered F&A costs—provided that the F&A costs are recovered at the maximum allowable rate for the pertinent granting agency.** For example: share of 10% (for F&A costs recovered up to $25,000); 12.5% ($25,000 to $50,000); 15% (> $50,000). Non-tenure track research faculty who are not in state-funded positions may utilize the share of the F&A costs for bonuses (not to exceed 20% of 12-month pay or 25% of 9-month pay). Faculty in state-funded positions can use F&A share as well as salary savings towards bonuses, the amount paid from both sources not to exceed the 20%/25% limits.

6. **When making faculty assignments for tenure-track and tenured faculty participating in sponsored research and training programs, chairs consider that state-funded effort be apportioned as 50% for research and 50% for teaching and other activities.** Such assignment is necessary for faculty to be successful in securing and implementing competitive grants from federal sources.

7. **Reduce campus-based administrative burdens for faculty during proposal preparation and post-award monitoring.** Feedback from Principal Investigators indicates that improvements are necessary in processes related to grant applications (timely and accurate assistance in filling prescribed forms), promptness in establishing grant accounts, and personnel assistance in monitoring budgets and handling paperwork.

**Identify and Support Faculty with Potential For Securing Extramural Support**

Review of grant/contract data indicates that only about 10% of the faculty consistently submit proposals for external grants and contracts. Efforts should be made to engage additional existing faculty in these endeavors. Although workshops for proposal preparation and information related to funding availability, as well as support through small grants (up to $2,000 each) and summer salary stipends ($6,250 each) are being provided, their effectiveness in increasing faculty participation in proposal submission remains uncertain. The Office of Research needs to carefully evaluate the outcomes of the above efforts, and implement modifications as deemed appropriate. An initial review of the Summer Stipend Program indicates that the outcome is marginal, since only 9 out of 56 individuals receiving these awards during the period 1999-2003 submitted proposals for external support, and only one out of 9 was a new applicant. Part of the problem was that the expected outcomes of these awards were not clearly communicated, and some faculty received these awards repeatedly without showing noteworthy effort for submitting proposals for external funding. Suggested actions include:
1. Deans, directors, and chairs identify faculty whose potential for securing external support has not been fully explored (and who did not receive notable intramural support).

2. Review and provide on an individual basis the assistance needed – i.e., mentoring, financial support, student assistance, released time, and collaborative opportunities – for proposal submission.

3. Earmark at least 50% of the currently disbursed intramural support for research (small grants and summer stipends) towards the above selected faculty, with appropriate oversight and mentoring targeted towards the development of successful proposals.

4. Participation in interdisciplinary endeavors, collaboration with Centers/Institutes and with other institutions, and strengthening/sharing of core facilities should be encouraged.

**Recruit, Support, and Retain Additional Research Oriented Faculty in Selected Disciplines**

External funding sources are available for research and training programs in all disciplines, although the magnitude of awards and success rate vary considerably. As part of the strategic planning process, the university needs to recruit additional research oriented faculty with potential for bringing grants in selected areas (targeted for growth; opportunities for funding; institutional/regional needs), including some leading researchers who can quickly help build strong externally-funded programs.

UWF’s success in recruiting research-oriented junior faculty, as well as distinguished researchers, depends on the ability to offer competitive start-up packages of support. In recent years, several junior faculty (who were recruited based on their research potential) left UWF because of inadequate support or recognition for research during their early career. Suggested actions include:

1. As new faculty positions are created, an appropriate share of these positions should be targeted to recruit research-oriented faculty in selected areas.

2. Recruitment of tenure-track or tenured faculty with joint appointments in an academic department and an appropriate center/institute may be an effective approach in some cases.

3. The institution needs to establish reserve funds (possibly through foundation sources) to be able to offer competitive start-up packages and early career development support for newly recruited faculty.
4. Besides the start-up packages of support, research-oriented faculty should be given adequate time (50% time) for research during the academic year to ensure that their potential to engage in an externally-funded research program is realized.

5. The existence of programs to recognize, reward, and retain faculty with high productivity in extramural grants/contracts would be an asset for recruitment and retention of high caliber faculty.

**Centers and Institutes**

As noted earlier, the university’s grant/contract funds are generated largely by the Centers and Institutes. The most productive of these units are well integrated with the university’s core missions in research, teaching, and service. Based on evaluations and identified needs, the Centers and Institutes need to be strengthened to enable them to foster additional collaborative programs and enhance extramural funding. As opportunities arise, based on regional needs or acquired faculty expertise (including distinguished scholars), new Centers/Institutes should be created. Suggested actions include:

1. Review and strengthen productive Centers/Institutes that are integral for the mission of the university.

2. Through strategic planning, identify areas of focus for the creation of new Centers/Institutes.

**Epilogue:**

It should be noted that, based on the charge given to the SRAC, this report and recommendations focus only on sponsored research and training activities. All research and creative activities, carried out with or without external support, contribute to the intellectual vitality of the institution, but the ability to support campus-wide research and creative activities is to some extent dependent upon discretionary funds derived through sponsored research and training programs.