Chapter 5.2: Administratively Supporting Research

Three groups provide administrative support for the College of Engineering’s research enterprise. Support for the Atmospheric Science department research activity comes from a recently created centralized departmental organization with a director that reports jointly to the department head and the assistant dean for operations. CIRA has maintained a centrally organized staff since the inception of the Center with direct funding from NOAA augmented with indirect cost return dollars (RA/RSP). Administrative support for the engineering departments is accomplished through a central college organization (Research Support Center, RSC) that was established in FY’00.

The College of Engineering has seen significant growth in research activity over the past decade. Total college research volume has doubled with the distribution by college unit as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Increase</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Departments (RSC)</td>
<td>164%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmospheric Science Department (ATS)</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA)</td>
<td>47%</td>
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</tbody>
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Objective: Provide Professional Support to Researchers in Engineering Departments of the College of Engineering

The primary mission of a research support staff involves the balance of two, sometimes competing objectives:

1. Leveraging the time and talents of college faculty and other researchers, and
2. Providing adequate compliance oversight and risk mitigation.

Goal: Convert existing Research Support Center post award positions from a technical support orientation to a project management orientation.

Strategies

- Separate accounting technician functions from project management functions and create separate, formal position descriptions for each assignment.
- Create a new organizational structure that defines the project management positions in the administrative professional employee classification and the accounting technician positions in the state classified employee classification series
- Provide formal training for both classifications to include general project management issues and compliance training through nationally recognized contract and grant professional organizations.

Goal: Determine the appropriate staff size for the Research Support Center

Strategies

- Develop an acceptable workload analysis for RSC positions to determine capability to migrate to a project management approach to research support and to meet the current and anticipated research proposal activity levels.

Author: Jupe Herrick (August 2011)
• Using the ATS and CIRA organizations for comparison, identify workload metrics of dollar volume, number of accounts, proposal activity and other measures to determine optimal workload.
• From the optimal workload analysis, determine appropriate staffing levels for the RSC and initiate a plan to increase staff over a defined period of time.
• Develop an algorithm that would index staff size to the workload measures obtained from this exercise.

Goal: **Assure that adequate resources are available to meet research proposal deadlines**

**Strategies**

• Continue to encourage faculty and other researchers to self-identify anticipated proposal submission plans.
• Design flexibility in new RSC positions to allow for certain staff to have post-award PI assignments but also to have the ability and availability to assist with proposal support in times of multiple deadlines.

Objective: **Incorporate new tools and efficiencies into the operations of all research support units.**

Goal: **Increase use of automated financial reporting tools.**

**Strategies**

• Create a college team to learn eThority and collectively develop summary financial reports for individual research projects with the ability to “drill down” progressively to transaction level documentation.
• Develop automated reports that combine all accounts of an individual researcher into a “portfolio” of financial information.
• Develop eThority queries that inform account managers of impending due dates.
• Make all report distribution electronic.

Objective: **Provide adequate college-wide training to be able to function effectively in an environment of increasing research administration complexity.**

Goal: **Insure that all college research support staff have adequate professional-level training**

**Strategies**

• Provide funding to attend National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) formal training programs. Courses of study should range from the introductory Basics course through the Sponsored Project Administration Level II workshop series.
• Continue regular meetings with the college Sponsored Programs teams to facilitate communication and to review university and federal guidelines on an issue-specific basis.
• Establish regular, ongoing meetings of all staff, in all units in the College of Engineering that provide research administration support, in order to insure communication and sharing of knowledge.

Goal: **Insure that all researchers in the College of Engineering have adequate knowledge of regulatory and other sponsored projects administration requirements.**

**Strategies**

• Continue and expand the practice of annual orientation for new faculty and staff associated with sponsored research.
• Develop ongoing and regular meetings with engineering department heads to review problematic projects, communicate deadlines and strengthen the collaboration between the departments and central college staff.
• Upgrade the Research Support Center website to incorporate additional policy statements, frequently asked questions and additional interactive forms useful in the conduct of sponsored research.
• Encourage face-to-face meetings between researchers and RSC staff to enhance communication and compliance management.

Objective: Provide adequate and convenient support to researchers at the Engineering Research Center (ERC).

Goal: Establish a remote site of the RSC to be located at the Engineering Research Center facility.

Strategies
• Relocate RSC team members to the ERC to specifically support researchers in that facility.
• Add a new staff member to assist with travel, purchasing, payroll and general administrative duties at the ERC.

Objective: Provide superior management oversight and coordination among all research support units in the college.

Goal: Define the appropriate college administrative organizational structure to support management of research support functions.

Strategies
• Create a new position, Director of Business Operations, reporting to the Assistant Dean of Operations, to manage and provide leadership to the research support areas in the college.
• Determine the appropriate reporting relationships for the ATS and CIRA administrative groups to insure coordination and appropriate internal controls.
• Determine appropriate reporting relationships for departmental labs, facilities and Centers with respect to central college administration.