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The University of Georgia

®

Research Administration and Infrastructure Review

*UGA Research Administration and Infrastructure
Ad Hoc Committee*

July 2008

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Note:
This report version is an abridged version of a longer and more comprehensive detailed project report. This abridged version contains recommendations and supporting interview findings by Committee focus area. The more detailed report version includes recommendations, interview findings, observations, “best practice” support materials, models for consideration, inventories, and other information readers might find useful. The comprehensive report version is available for those interested.

1) Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Summary Project Overview

- UGA appointed a *Research Administration and Infrastructure Ad Hoc Committee* (composed of faculty and administrative staff) in the Fall of 2007 to assess and evaluate the research administration infrastructure and determine if the support structure was sufficient to enable UGA to meet its strategic goals for research. In addition, the committee was to determine if the research administration infrastructure met the needs of research faculty and staff. The principal objective of the Committee's work was twofold: (1) to evaluate aspects of research administration infrastructure within UGA, focusing primarily on roles, responsibilities, policies, procedures, training, and educational activities supporting sponsored research; and (2) to assess certain aspects of research and fiscal compliance.
- This report reflects the activities of the *Ad Hoc Committee* and makes 37 specific recommendations, ten of which are culled and presented for special emphasis, that will enable UGA to improve the services provided to the research community, more effectively manage its sponsored program activities, and mitigate compliance risk.

Executive Summary

Summary observations and common “discussion threads” from faculty members

- ***Concern for junior faculty support remains one of the highest priorities of faculty members.***
 - Ensure “we remain more than a good farm system for other places”
 - Desire for higher levels of mentoring and core proposal development support
 - Avoid “disincentives”
- ***Faculty members want additional technologies and systems that support research.***
 - Research administration systems
 - Compliance and protocol management systems
 - Research supporting databases and repositories
- ***Faculty members are delivering many signals about improving communications and synergies between key administrative offices.***
 - Sponsored Programs and Contracts & Grants (Pre/Post)
 - Other service-providing offices (e.g., contracts review, Institutional Review Board (IRB), tech transfer, Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), Institutional Review Board (IRB))
- ***Faculty members support deepening investments in compliance without hampering research or discovery and without adding administrative burden.***
 - IRB and IACUC activities, compliance monitoring, management of biohazards
 - Training and education programs

Executive Summary

Summary observations and common “discussion threads” from administrative staff

- ***Recruiting, developing, training, and retaining skilled central office research administration staff is a significant challenge for UGA.***
 - Large turnover and perceived wide variations in skill level and service skills among central office staff.
 - Less than optimal relationship-building, trust, and synergy between central and departmental administrators and faculty members.
- ***Organization for UGA research administration functions (i.e., centralization versus decentralization) appears to be at an uncertain, transitional stage.***
 - Roles and responsibilities are not entirely clear.
 - Communication flows are not optimized.
 - Wide variation in departmental research administration offices and sophistication.
 - Compliance-related knowledge varies widely across central and unit level research administration.
- ***A culture of collaboration and working together is underdeveloped at UGA.***
 - Goal: Administrators working along with faculty members to develop collaborative solutions for research-related challenges associated with policy interpretations, compliance issues, etc.

Executive Summary

Summary Conclusions

- **The research administration and compliance infrastructure at UGA should be improved.** Immediate opportunities exist for UGA to invest more deeply in people, processes and technology supporting sponsored award management and faculty research. Improvements can be made in all areas of Committee review, especially:
 1. Organizational Structure
 2. Roles & Responsibilities
 3. Policies & Procedures
 4. Systems & Technologies
 5. Research & Fiscal Compliance
 6. Training & Education
 7. Research Facilitation

- **Service levels across the University for research faculty and staff vary widely; as a whole, they are currently not sufficient.** Administrative processing and support efficiencies can be improved in many pre- and post-award areas. Interviewed faculty report that the barriers to the pursuit of sponsored award opportunities are increasing; furthermore, some faculty are increasingly frustrated with the prospects of applying for funding as they consider, and endure, the associated administrative burdens.

Executive Summary

Summary Conclusions

- **Identifiable research and fiscal compliance risks exist at UGA.** The research administration infrastructure is characterized by a number of symptomatic weaknesses contributing to this risk. Examples include: less than optimal organizational structures, a lack of a user-friendly interface to financial reporting, unclear roles and responsibilities for faculty and staff, insufficient training and education opportunities for line-level staff, weak compliance monitoring, and inconsistent application of policies and procedures supporting research administration.
- **UGA should improve research administration infrastructure and compliance immediately.** The 37 recommendations made by the ad hoc committee will help strengthen service levels, increase administrative efficiency, and mitigate research and fiscal compliance risk.
- Successful and prompt **implementation of these recommendations is a shared responsibility of administration, faculty, and staff at UGA.** Specific plans for implementation should be defined, stakeholders identified, and dependencies for all implementation timelines and actions thoroughly clarified. Administrative support units traditionally take the lead on implementation efforts and definitive cost plans and funding alternatives for these recommendations should also be identified.

Executive Summary

High Priority Recommendations for UGA

1. **UGA should develop performance and productivity measures for all staff members in key central research administration units, staff in the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP), Contracts & Grants (C&G), and academic units.** Balanced measures addressing internal operating efficiencies, research staff satisfaction and office staff development should be created. These metrics can be recorded and shared widely at UGA.
2. **OVPR should continue to refine its Strategic Plan for Research Administration and Research IT needs.** Consideration for bioinformatics, biostatistics, epidemiology, data warehousing, super-computing, and other wet and dry lab research priorities has been an integral part of this plan. The plan should continuously prioritize research infrastructure needs for IT and include timeline and cost estimates for all proposed investments. It is important that the collaborative decision-making interactions with the Associate Provost/CIO of EITS continue as strategic plans evolve and change over time.
3. To help improve service levels and increase communication, **UGA should strongly consider alternative organizational structures for the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) and Contracts & Grants (C&G),** including the possibility of combining both offices and evaluating the overall reporting relationship of the Office. If not consolidated, prompt and serious consideration should be given to co-locating the two offices.
4. **UGA should re-evaluate the current process for returning facility & administration (F&A) funds to units/colleges,** ensuring transparency, equity, and tighter alignment with current priorities of the University, and stronger research promotion. UGA has studied the issue of F&A returns to units/colleges/centers, and issued a comprehensive report on the topic in August 2004. This report should be revisited.

Executive Summary

High Priority Recommendations for UGA

5. **UGA must evaluate and determine the correct balance of responsibilities currently shared between unit/college/center-based offices and centralized research administration offices – particularly OSP and C&G.** Agreement and consensus should be reached about which functions will be performed by central Offices, and which by the units/colleges. Corresponding central office vs. unit/college roles and specific job duties can then be clarified campus-wide; these can be documented once consensus is reached.
6. **UGA should immediately undertake administrative actions that facilitate and support interdisciplinary research.** These include:
 - Defining specific administrative research management processes that support multi-team, multi-disciplinary proposals
 - Implementing guidelines for shared “credit” from multi-disciplinary awards
 - Streamlining approval processing steps for multi-disciplinary proposals, when possible
 - Assigning dedicated OSP and C&G staff to multi-disciplinary activities
 - Creating specific administrative connections and alignments with well-running centers and institutes at UGA - all to gain best practice insights and to share them widely
 - Including support of and progress toward interdisciplinary research in the performance metrics by which colleges and departments are evaluated

Executive Summary

High Priority Recommendations for UGA

7. While research-compliant in its Human Research Protection responsibilities, **the IRB can improve efficiency and facilitate research by:**
 - Conducting a comprehensive administrative review of all IRB operations – considering optimal administrative structures and processes that maximize efficiency. This review should involve faculty who are extensive users of IRB services
 - Clarifying for faculty, the decision-making criteria guiding exempt, expedited, and full-board protocol reviews, as well as the terminology and “vocabulary” used on web-site materials
 - Continuing to evaluate “turn-around” and cycle times by protocol type – constantly seeking to improve, while simultaneously evaluating FTEs dedicated to IRB reviews
 - Considering some level of decentralization and higher levels of faculty involvement to add efficiency and reduce review times
 - Circulating the monthly IRB productivity and performance metrics provided to the VPR more widely (i.e., on the IRB website)

8. While not hindering research productivity, and not further burdening PIs, **UGA should strengthen and deepen its programmatic investments in compliance across eight key program elements**, including specific additional investments in compliance staffing, monitoring, training, and education.

Executive Summary

High Priority Recommendations for UGA

9. **UGA should increase support for a formal training and education program aimed at departmental and central research administrators, as well as faculty.** OSP has historically invested heavily in formal training activities for administrators. Moving forward, OSP (in partnership with C&G and the research compliance offices) should establish an interactive training curriculum that includes elements of mandatory and other, non-mandatory professional development elements for faculty and staff. Senior leadership at UGA can be helpful by enforcing mandatory training requirements.
10. **UGA must take additional measures to ensure comparable administrative support for units and colleges who are not traditionally “research-funding heavy”** (i.e., humanities, journalism, law, etc.) – working to narrow differences in service and support between units, centers, or colleges that are heavily research funded, and those less so.

2) Detailed Recommendations

2.1 Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure

Recommendations for UGA

1. To help improve service levels and increase communication, **UGA should consider alternative organizational structures for the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) and Contracts & Grants (C&G)**, including the possibility of combining both offices and evaluating the overall reporting relationship of the Office. If not consolidated, prompt and serious consideration should be given to co-locating the two offices.
2. **UGA must evaluate and determine the correct balance of responsibilities currently shared between unit/college/center-based offices and centralized research administration offices – particularly OSP and C&G.** Agreement and consensus should be reached about which functions will be performed by central offices, and which by the units/colleges. Corresponding central office vs. unit/college roles and specific job duties can then be clarified campus-wide; these can be documented once consensus is reached.
3. **Directors of OSP and C&G should evaluate the organizational structures of their respective offices** to ensure staff are enjoying maximum flexibility and access to the resources and training they need to perform efficiently and effectively. Gaps in training should be identified and remediation plans should be developed. Resource or funding constraints can be raised to higher leadership.
4. **UGA can more clearly define and align the “career paths” for OSP, C&G staff, and research administration staff in campus units.** Individuals should have a clearer sense of where successful performance across all units could lead them. Educational and experience requirements can be more clearly spelled out for staff, and timelines for advancement and the necessary plans for job skill mastery can also be clearly explained. Career “ladders” (with salary scales) must accommodate movement into and out of all positions.

Organizational Structure

Recommendations for UGA - continued

5. **UGA should establish office-level performance and productivity metrics for OSP and C&G functions** and the individuals performing roles within those functions. UGA leadership (including faculty) can help establish service-level goals for these offices that satisfy research productivity and research priorities of faculty and the University. These metrics can be published and performance measured against them continually. A sample of office-level aspirations is included later in this report.
6. Even while alternative organizational structures for OSP and C&G are considered, **the level of communication between OSP and C&G must be increased** through additional joint departmental meetings, regular meetings between central offices and unit/college administrators, and occasional direct forums with research faculty. A quarterly OSP and C&G meeting schedule has been established. Agendas should be prepared and circulated in advance, and faculty should have maximal opportunity to participate. Meeting minutes should be kept and published. UGA's recent process for completing its DS2 could serve as a model approach for securing maximal communication.

2.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and Responsibilities

Recommendations for UGA

7. **OSP and C&G must deepen and enhance their service role supporting research staff and faculty.** High and consistent service levels need to be provided in the areas of proposal preparation, award account activation, and post-award fund accounting. Faculty service surveys should be used, at least annually, as one measure of progress and satisfaction. Results of these surveys should be published broadly and identified staff members in both offices should undergo additional “customer-service” training and education when necessary.
8. Through individual and team meeting settings, **UGA should clarify roles and responsibilities for those involved in central research administration and compliance roles.** The important roles of unit/college-level staff and research investigators should also be clarified. Some sponsored award management activities (pre- and post-award) are more effectively carried out in the units/colleges, centers, or institutes. UGA should evaluate these circumstances and redirect or clarify which duties should be performed by the decentralized unit(s). Roles and responsibilities can be restated if job duties are adjusted.
9. **UGA can take this opportunity to circulate the “Future State” matrix of roles and responsibilities, and clarify the level of delegated authority for all positions in research administration and compliance developed by ad hoc committee members.** Doing so would, among other things: (1) improve overall accountability within the UGA research enterprise, (2) foster stronger relationships between faculty and administrative staff, and (3) lower compliance risk at UGA in fiscal and research areas. The Appendix to this report contains the Future State Matrix.

Roles and Responsibilities

Recommendations for UGA - continued

10. **OSP and C&G should both regularly evaluate individual workloads and staffing levels compared to the sponsored program growth at UGA.** Both short-term and long-term staffing needs must be monitored and based on increases in the number and complexity of proposal submissions, expected growth in the research enterprise, increased post-award activities, and other related needs. Both offices can work collectively to forecast demands for services and build contingencies into staffing estimates to meet those demands. The current Associate Vice President for Research and Director for Sponsored Programs has experience with such exercises; and, such a forecast should be undertaken to confirm current staffing levels. An illustrative example of staff forecasting is included in the Appendix of this report.
11. **UGA should develop performance and productivity measures for all staff members in key central research administration units, staff in the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP), Contracts & Grants (C&G), and academic units.** Balanced measures addressing internal operating efficiencies, research staff satisfaction and office staff development should be created. These metrics can be recorded and shared widely at UGA.
12. **OSP and C&G should establish “aspiration goals” for staff performance and productivity.** Setting aggressive aspiration goals for the OSP and C&G staff is characteristic of high performing organizations: there is a correlation between setting aggressive targets and achieving better performance. OSP and C&G progress against these goals should be recorded and shared widely at UGA. Aggressive goal setting should be done in conjunction with assuring that the means to accomplish those goals are available.

2.3

Policies and Procedures

Policies and Procedures

Recommendations for UGA

13. Where missing or under-developed, **UGA must immediately strengthen formal policies and procedures for key research administration functions supporting research.** A comprehensive policy and procedure inventory has been established through the work of this Committee. As necessary, policy gaps, format inconsistencies, and missing procedural details should be addressed – particularly for research administration processes that support the work of research teams and investigators.
14. **UGA should continue to monitor and evaluate policies and supporting procedures for high risk fiscal and research compliance areas** – especially in key areas of life safety, bio-safety, post-award management and reporting areas of cash management, effort reporting, and award close-out processes. These areas continue to receive high levels of scrutiny and attention from regulators; auditors nearly always request copies of institution’s policies and procedures.
15. **UGA should immediately develop an institutionally-supported “policy on policies”** – such a policy document, usually generated by a central office source such as the Provost or President’s Office, outlines the necessary steps and processes for proposing, vetting, and approving new or revised policies and supporting procedures at UGA. By design, this policy should take into consideration the important roles of faculty governance and institutional risk management at UGA.
16. **UGA must appoint/define a single, recognized “owner” of policies and identify a centralized location for policy and procedure materials.** Faculty and staff with policy development needs or requests for clarification are encouraged to work in collaboration with the UGA “policy owner”, in addition to the department or unit responsible for the policy interpretation and execution. Further, a single electronic location should be established for policies and the electronic “search/query” processes streamlined and improved.

Policies and Procedures

Recommendations for UGA - continued

17. **UGA should form a standing, joint faculty and staff policy development committee.** This standing committee will take primary responsibility for the creation and proposal of new policies and procedures supporting research administration and compliance. This joint committee will help ensure that policy development actions are proactive endeavors, rather than a reactive process at UGA. This committee should meet regularly, be staffed with capable administrators and faculty, and regularly invite Ad Hoc members to meetings to discuss needs or new policy development priorities. UGA's recent process for completing its DS2 could serve as a model approach for ensuring wide representation.
18. **UGA can also take the opportunity to develop comprehensive training and education programs supporting newly developed or issued policies.** Training and education programs that accompany the roll-out of new policies at UGA are critical. These programs help those impacted as well as those helping implement the policy. Training and education opportunities supporting new policies are an important focus of federal and other auditors in addition to reviewing policies and procedures – auditors wish to see if the knowledge has been disseminated and is understood by those involved in research and research administration.

2.4 Systems and Technologies

Systems and Technologies

Recommendations for UGA

19. **UGA should continue current efforts to immediately improve financial status reporting and other related reports (e.g., effort reports, animal care and use reports, other self-generated reports) for research faculty and staff.** Research and fiscal compliance risk persists at UGA due to inadequate and difficult-to-understand reporting capabilities. Reports and analyses coming out of UGA's financial management system, other sponsored award reporting, and compliance monitoring routines should continue to be developed, evaluated, and tested by faculty and staff. Progress with new draft financial status report tools has been made by central Finance and Controller staff; this should continue. The Ad Hoc Committee's initial review of these draft report tools was supportive.
20. **OVPR should continue to refine its Strategic Plan for Research Administration and Research IT needs.** Consideration for bioinformatics, biostatistics, epidemiology, data warehousing, super-computing, and other wet and dry lab research priorities has been an integral part of this plan. The plan should continuously prioritize research infrastructure needs for IT and include timeline and cost estimates for all proposed investments. It is important that the collaborative decision-making interactions with the Associate Provost/CIO of EITS continue as strategic plans evolve and change over time.
21. **Adopt and implement an integrated, web-based proposal development and compliance management system in the next 12-18 months. This system should also incorporate proposal routing, submission, protocol development, and approval requirements.** There are a number of available "vendor-solutions" to satisfy this need and they have been catalogued and inventoried by UGA over the past 9-10 months. While development of functional specifications will begin by mid Summer 2008, a project manager and dedicated funding source must be identified before Fall. Full implementation of at least one module should be complete within 18 months, with plans developed to bring all requested modules online within 24-36 months.

Systems and Technologies

Recommendations for UGA - continued

22. For the support of research, **OVPR must include key research administrative staff, research faculty, and EITS in the design, selection, and implementation of all technologies, software, and reporting capabilities supporting research.** End-users of information and data at UGA are in the best position to help design reports that facilitate their work. These design needs can be vetted against the “system capabilities” and decisions about ultimate report designs can be made jointly between administration and research staff.

2.5

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Recommendations for UGA

23. While not hindering research productivity, and not further burdening PIs, **UGA should strengthen and deepen its programmatic investments in compliance across eight key program elements**, including specific additional investments in compliance staffing, monitoring, training, and education. The eight elements of an effective compliance program are outlined on page 66 of this report.
24. Within the compliance program investments, **UGA must establish more comprehensive monitoring, quality review, and quality assurance compliance functions**. Proactively monitoring for fiscal and research compliance serves to minimize intrusion on research activities while simultaneously mitigating risk:
- UGA should regularly cite compliance monitoring goals in a format that is characterized as “proactive”, collaborative, and supportive
 - A compliance and risk mitigation plan for research and fiscal areas should be defined, at least annually, for the UGA research community.
25. To further mitigate risk, **UGA must strengthen compliance communication channels where information-sharing is important** (i.e., conflict of interest, health and safety, and animal/human subject protections). Often, instances of occasional non-compliance are recognized as confidential or embarrassing circumstances for the University. Instead, they should be recognized as learning opportunities and a particularly good time to share additional knowledge and education. More information generally leads to less confusion and better decisions.

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Recommendations for UGA - continued

- 26. UGA should strengthen compliance enforcement activities.** Responses to non-compliant circumstances should be shared widely to help mitigate future risks. To this end:
- UGA should increase enforcement activities at other UGA campuses – such as Tifton
 - UGA should increase enforcement activities around high risk employee safety areas such as bio-safety, radiation safety, and chemical handling/hygiene
 - UGA must ensure compliance auditing activities are occurring on a frequent enough basis and they cover adequate sample sizes
- 27. UGA should establish a uniform process for following up on compliance “corrective actions” to ensure compliance has been reinstated.** More importantly, UGA can ensure the incident does not warrant additional investment in training, education, or policy development.
- 28. UGA must create more comprehensive, campus-wide training and education programs for compliance, particularly for faculty and departmental administrators:**
- UGA should establish a single repository for all training and education materials related to compliance
 - UGA should consider the use of web-based training tools and electronic newsletter formats, where appropriate

2.6 Training and Education

Training and Education

Recommendations for UGA

29. **UGA should increase support for a formal training and education program aimed at departmental and central research administrators.** OSP has historically invested heavily in formal training activities for administrators. Moving forward, OSP (in partnership with C&G and the research compliance offices) should establish an interactive training curriculum that includes elements of mandatory and other, non-mandatory professional development elements for faculty and staff. Senior leadership at UGA can be helpful by enforcing mandatory training requirements.
30. **UGA should develop and implement a comprehensive research education program for faculty.** Education and perspective on certain elements of sponsored award management and compliance are of high interest to research faculty. The education program can be tailored for principal investigators and other research staff who generally have less available time for training (i.e., HTML-based modules, self-study formats). Some educational opportunities might be mandatory; when so, attendance requirements should allow for travel schedules and demands of the academic calendar. Institutional leadership should be aligned to ensure attendance.
31. **Two central research administration offices (OSP & C&G) should continue to take primary responsibility for creating formal training processes** for new and existing staff and for developing training manuals to aid in the training process. Such training materials must be updated regularly and can be available in a single location on the UGA Intranet.
32. **Novel approaches to training and education should continue to be considered for all offerings, and UGA should consider supporting formal “certification programs”** for research administrators to incentivize desired behaviors and reward achievement. OSP has worked to identify many effective training approaches at UGA – these can be replicated. The effectiveness of all training and education sessions should be monitored closely.

2.7 Research Facilitation

Research Facilitation

Overview

Additional areas of Committee focus included:

- **Interdisciplinary Research Opportunities and Challenges**
- **Faculty Research Competitiveness and Development Investments**
- **Recovered F&A Cost Allocations and Investments**
- **Institutional Review Board Operations and Expectations**

Research Facilitation

Recommendations for UGA

- 33. If UGA is to remain competitive, it should immediately undertake administrative actions that facilitate and support inter-disciplinary research.** These include:
- Defining specific administrative research management processes that support multi-team, multi-discipline proposals
 - Implementing guidelines for shared “credit” from multi-disciplinary awards
 - Streamlining approval processing steps for multi-disciplinary proposals, when possible
 - Assigning dedicated OSP and C&G staff to multi-disciplinary activities
 - Creating specific administrative connections and alignments with well-running centers and institutes at UGA - all to gain best practice insights and to share them widely
 - Including instituting support of and progress toward interdisciplinary research in the performance metrics by which colleges and departments are evaluated
- 34. UGA must take additional measures to ensure comparable administrative support for units and colleges which are not traditionally “research-funding heavy”** (i.e., humanities, journalism, law, etc.) – working to narrow differences in service and support between units, centers, or colleges that are heavily research funded, and those less so.
- 35. UGA should develop a formal “Grant Mentoring Program” for junior faculty,** and align the appropriate administrative support with the program. Structured in a similar way to the successful mentoring program in the Institute for Behavioral Research (IBR), this program will help junior investigators gain valuable insights about the grant funding processes and should involve matching new investigators with senior faculty having established records of grant success. “Administration” can assist by adding educational and support investments to the junior faculty experience.

Research Facilitation

Recommendations for UGA - continued

36. **UGA should re-evaluate the current process for returning facility & administration (F&A) funds to units/colleges,** ensuring transparency, equity, and tighter alignment with current priorities of the University, and stronger research promotion. UGA has studied the issue of F&A returns to units/colleges/centers, and issued a comprehensive report on the topic in August 2004. This report should be revisited.
37. While research-compliant in its Human Research Protection responsibilities, **the IRB can improve efficiency and facilitate research by:**
- Conducting a comprehensive administrative review of all IRB operations – considering optimal administrative structures and processes that maximize efficiency. This review should involve faculty who are extensive users of IRB services
 - Clarifying for faculty, the decision-making criteria guiding exempt, expedited, and full-board protocol reviews, as well as the terminology and “vocabulary” used on web-site materials
 - Continuing to evaluate “turn-around” and cycle times by protocol type – constantly seeking to improve, while simultaneously evaluating FTEs dedicated to IRB reviews
 - Considering some level of decentralization and higher levels of faculty involvement to add efficiency and reduce review times
 - Circulating the monthly IRB productivity and performance metrics provided to the VPR more widely (i.e., on the IRB website)

3) Supporting Interview Findings

3.1 Organizational Structure

Organizational Structure

Supporting interview findings

- Interviews revealed **communication flows between Contracts & Grants and Sponsored Programs (and some other central administrative offices) are poor and result in service inefficiencies; recommended that consideration be given for more closely locating (physically/geographically) OSP and C&G to contribute to better collaboration, higher communication levels, and more effective problem resolution.**
- Faculty members and departmental administrators consistently reported a **high level of staff turnover in key central offices** (including OSP and C&G) and the associated **challenges of “getting up to speed”** with their new central office contacts – often **preventing the formation of productive working relationships.**
- Interviews revealed **many central office staff have departed for administrative positions at the college, unit, or center level** – perceived to be better jobs, generally accompanied by promotions, interactions with a larger set of research and sponsored program related responsibilities, and visibility; it was hoped that the improved career progression trajectory developed in the OSP will help stem this significant challenge.
- Interviews revealed the **level of support and service provided by central research administration offices is subject to some risk; based upon who you “end up with”** on the OSP or C&G staffs and their respective knowledge, skills, and abilities – with the perception that the skill and service levels of OSP and C&G staff are variable and uneven.

Organizational Structure

Supporting interview findings

- Faculty members reported **far too little individual flexibility from persons involved in pre- and post-award activities** and think that “too much inflexibility can stifle initiative and creativity;” faculty members also highlighted **not having a good mechanism to question, discuss, debate, or resolve issues** with offices within the Office of the VP for Finance (e.g., C&G).
- Interviews revealed **there is a lack of detailed, agency-specific expertise within OSP and C&G**, and both departmental administrators and faculty members wondered **whether organization of central research administrations by sponsor might help** them become more knowledgeable about the nuances and requirements of specific funding agencies.
- **Key departmental administrators (and their resident talent) have not been provided a forum or other opportunities to feed back into the overall research administration process at UGA** (e.g., by interacting with central offices on possible process improvements).
- Interviews revealed **some departments** have too many administrative staff members devoting a small portion of their time to grant activities, and it was felt that a **fewer number of staff members – trained in research administration and grant areas – would be more productive.**

3.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and Responsibilities

Supporting interview findings

- Interviews revealed ***too much grant management responsibility rests on faculty members*** (the burden has increasingly been pushed out to the departments and PIs over time); faculty reported frustration in having to “babysit” proposal activities from cradle to grave – ***faculty wish to receive more support from central staff and desire a more collaborative development process with research administrators***. To do otherwise constitutes a strong disincentive for faculty to seek extramural funding beyond the bare minimum.
- It was reported as being ***sometimes difficult for research administrators to know if research administration roles and responsibilities are clear enough***, but some departmental administrators reported that they could be stronger – particularly when the issues at hand are agency-specific.
- ***Some, but not all, academic units have established roles for key research administration functions***, including proposal development roles, but it is sometimes unclear how these roles relate to central office roles. (Interviews revealed, while some departments have administrators carrying out research administration activities, they are ***not always trained in the areas of grants, contracts, research, etc.*** – ***resulting in a major challenge for the overall UGA research administration system.***)

3.3

Policies and Procedures

Policies and Procedures

Supporting interview findings

Policy and procedure development, communication, and change

- Departmental research administrators reported **frustration in keeping up with all policy and procedure developments** – reporting that there is **no systematic dissemination of new policies or changes to policies** (at the federal, state, or university level).
- Administrators reported that **policy development processes should continue to involve more unit-based staff – with consideration of how policies will impact local units and research.**
- Faculty members reported that **policies and procedures continue to feel “all over the map”** and suggest that “they **need streamlining and more attention around brevity**” (i.e., “tell me what I need to know and save the rest for the administrators”).
- While faculty members **recognize that policies and produces change regularly**, they reported **not enjoying these surprises.**
- Faculty members reported that **Dr. Lee has done a “refreshing job” of addressing some of the long-established practices and standard operating procedures at UGA that did not appear to make sense or did not facilitate science.**

Policies and Procedures

Supporting interview findings

Policy and procedure application, debate, and information

- It was suggested that attempts be made to **streamline the administrative burden associated with smaller and less complex grants** – with interviewees reporting that everything faces the same level of scrutiny.
- It was requested that **more opportunities be afforded to debate, contest, and work through policy interpretations and certain policy implementation impacts** with central research administration offices.
- Department administrators reported that C&G **may be applying policies more stringently, and in a more inflexible way, than other central administration offices**. Similarly, some difficulty was noted by administrators when UGA policy is more stringent than what the sponsor requires – which may be particularly true in contract management and funding from some foundations and independent sponsors.
- Faculty members reported that **budget management policies at UGA often conflict with sponsor wishes**.
- Faculty members in the social sciences reported **some dissatisfaction when guidelines and sponsored award policies traditionally applied to physical and life sciences, are applied to sponsored award management activities in the social sciences**. Also, burdens are placed on bench scientists whose appointments are in departments traditionally associated with social sciences (e.g., neuroscientists in Psychology)
- Some faculty members reported **wanting higher levels of information on current grant activities** – e.g., advanced warnings on budget end dates and report deadlines.

3.4 Systems and Technologies

Systems and Technologies

Supporting interview findings

- **Information systems supporting research administration are reported to be weak, unsynchronized, and unhelpful.**
- Interviews revealed **UGA continues to rely upon an antiquated financial information management system** that is more work than it's worth.
- Interviews revealed the **lack of real-time accounting provided by UGA makes managing grant budgets a major burden** (e.g., supplies ordered through CRS provide a tentative price but actual price and shipping charges aren't known until the invoice arrives 3-6 months later).
 - Some faculty members expressed complete frustration and confusion about why they cannot get a “readable financial report” for their grant activities, and some have “given up.”
 - Some departmental administrators reported requesting – but not being granted – access to the Contracts & Grants financial management system to enable them increased grant administration capabilities and efficiencies.
- Administrators reported that there is **no system unification in UGA's research administration** (e.g., the compliance system is not linked to other functions) and **desire to get away from duplicate systems.**

Systems and Technologies

Supporting interview findings

- **Most departmental administrators support other, “home-grown” systems of control and reporting, and information is so crucial to some academic units that they have hired their own dedicated resources** to help with information management and control through systems.
 - Some departments support and use software systems that are more sophisticated than the university (e.g., Cayuse); these systems are acknowledged but not promoted by central offices.
 - Some faculty members have created systems and technologies to track their unique funding arrangements (e.g., corporate agreements) and certain compliance aspects (e.g., biohazard training) of their awards and for future proposals; they feel that systems should take care of this at UGA.
- Some departmental administrators reported awareness of university investigations into **electronic research administration systems** (e.g., InfoEd), but **key administrative staff have not been consulted on design or selection criteria related to review or consideration of such systems by central administration** – despite their experience with some systems (e.g., Cayuse) and knowledge of the Electronic Research Administration landscape.
- **Administrators support the use of technology in all phases of the grant award cycle** – particularly in pre-award proposal preparation, routing, and post-award financial account management.

3.5

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Supporting interview findings

- Faculty members felt strongly that ***future implementation of compliance measures at UGA must be done in such a way to not increase the net administrative burden on faculty.***
- Many research administrators ***supported the role of compliance monitoring*** and see it as a role that would complement their existing responsibilities.
- Many departmental administrators ***could not identify current compliance key topic areas*** that should be of high priority at this time (e.g., cost transfers, effort reporting, and direct charging practices) but reported that:
 - Interviews revealed many ***faculty members are not taking effort reporting seriously*** and recognizing its importance; as a result, unit administrators reported being in a bind between faculty calls to “just pay the people” and university policies – with ***administrators feeling that there has not been enough leadership and communication from the university to convince faculty of the importance of effort reporting.***
 - ***Certain research-related compliance issues*** (e.g., import/export activities, foreign nationals, intellectual property, and biohazard management) are high-risk compliance topics and areas of ***difficulty*** for them ***to keep abreast of*** – with administrators feeling that it is ***not clear if these areas are receiving sufficient central administration support.***

Research and Fiscal Compliance

Supporting interview findings

- **Some academic units** reported being **successful** in: (1) **setting up local systems** to meet early with faculty preparing proposals and work through compliance-related issues in a supportive, more relaxed manner, and (2) **crafting their own monitoring and management processes** in response to a lack of central office priority or clarity.
- Interviews revealed **UGA sometimes institutes a more restrictive compliance policy than federally required** – e.g., Interviews revealed while the NIH recombinant DNA guidelines state that universities must “review periodically,” UGA has changed its historical interpretation of “every five years” to a more recent “every year” – a move that is reported to be overburdening faculty without any improvement in compliance.
- Interviews revealed **UGA’s policies on paying research participants are overburdening, hampering to social science research, and frustrating faculty members** – with a belief that the policy discourages and sometimes prevents faculty from conducting research with some key populations (e.g., for whom acquiring social security numbers is unworkable [undocumented individuals, people with HIV, etc.]).
- Interviews revealed **while UGA’s biosafety process has improved in recent years, compliance reviews in the area of biohazards need attention.**

3.6 Training and Education

Training and Education

Supporting interview findings

- **Research administrators** reported a *‘thirst’ for additional training and educational opportunities* – reporting that training and education has improved in recent years and is provided in response to important events (e.g., new disclosure statement).
- **Faculty members desire** training and education programs with: (1) more frequent *refresher courses*, (2) *avoidance of long “sit times”* in large group settings, (3) *focusing* less on the details of what research administrators do “behind the scenes” and *more on how faculty can best interact with the offices*, and (4) *utilizing computer-based methods to the extent possible*.
- Faculty members reported wanting to *better understand the expected flow/process of research administration at UGA*, and faculty (especially junior faculty) *requested “curriculum maps”* – guidelines for exactly what’s expected of them with regard to research administration training and education. (Some faculty members also requested additional training on effective proposal preparation and grant-writing techniques.)
- Departmental administrators reported that *central research administrators display a large range of knowledge and skills and need a stronger, common baseline of knowledge* (e.g., from enhanced training – especially for new hires).
- Interviews revealed some *central staff*, while knowledgeable about grant accounting and relevant regulatory issues, *do not have an appropriate understanding of/grounding in the conduct of research and sponsored programs in higher education generally*.
- Administrators reported that *some units have been proactive in scheduling and inviting central office staff to visit regularly to interact with faculty and share information* – an approach that other units may emulate (example: marine science program at Skidaway Island).

3.7 Research Facilitation

Research Facilitation

Overview

Additional areas of Committee focus included:

- **Interdisciplinary Research Opportunities and Challenges**
- **Faculty Research Competitiveness and Development Investments**
- **Recovered F&A Cost Allocations and Investments**
- **Institutional Review Board Operations and Expectations**

Interdisciplinary Research Opportunities and Challenges

Supporting interview findings

- Faculty members and administrators ***understand the importance of interdisciplinary research for UGA*** – from tackling challenging research problems to competing for external funding – and ***appreciate research administration approaches that support and facilitate interdisciplinary research.***
- Interviews revealed, ***for multi-investigator and multi-unit proposals***, the ***IBR*** (Institute for Behavioral Research) ***represents one of the more effective administrative management approaches*** (e.g., providing NIH expertise unavailable in some units). The ***consumer-service-oriented and pro-investigator “model”*** of IBR has been explicitly praised, and faculty members ***report that this should not be an anomaly at UGA (i.e., the entire research administration on campus should be this way).***
- Interviews revealed ***some academic units channel all large-scale, interdisciplinary proposals through the IBR, whereas other units actively discourage their faculty from proposing sponsored activities through IBR*** – because of IDC return and academic credit issues; this ***may be dis-incentivizing interdisciplinary research.***
- Interviews revealed it is ***virtually impossible to manage a grant out of a social science department without specialized post-award financial accounting support of the kind provided by IBR or BHSI*** (Biomedical and Health Sciences Institute) – ***not being affiliated with one of these groups excessively burdens and discourages social science faculty from seeking external funding.***

Faculty Research Competitiveness and Development Investments

Supporting interview findings

Faculty research competitiveness

- Interviews revealed that **faculty members need more university support for the administrative burdens they face** (e.g. reductions in teaching loads for faculty holding active/multiple grants) **if UGA is going to move to the next level of research activity.**
- Faculty members reported **concerns about the retention of research-active faculty if the administrative burden of research administration does not decrease at UGA** – perhaps resulting in **decreasing abilities to compete in an increasingly competitive federal research landscape.**
- Faculty members **requested that the level of discretionary funds allocated within their unit or department be regularly evaluated** – feeling that absence of these funds can strain research and cause other administrative problems (e.g., direct charging challenges).
- **Faculty members** reported that they **assumed more help would be provided to understand the long, complex grant development and submission process** at UGA when they first arrived at the university.
- Some faculty members reported that **institutional support (i.e., matching funds) can be difficult to secure**, particularly when proposals cross unit or college boundaries, and that opportunities have been lost as a result.
- This taskforce revealed that there does not appear to be a policy or uniformly implemented program for securing bridge funds for PIs experiencing breaks in funding between grants. Demonstration of matching funds, at some level, is always seen as positive by review panels and is mandatory to complete successfully for some types of funding.

Faculty Research Competitiveness and Development Investments

Supporting interview findings

Junior faculty research development

- Faculty members **observed a risk associated with UGA becoming a “good farm system”** – with **productive junior faculty (after university investment and some research success) choosing to change institutions**. Contributing factors include lack of acknowledgement, recognition, or reward related to research activity.
- Interviews revealed **reliance on faculty members to manage grants serves as a dis-incentive for faculty to engage in research**. In today’s funding climate multiple failures are the norm before obtaining funding.
- Some faculty members **requested policies that specifically support younger faculty and those not as well-versed in seeking external funding** – policies that contain language and provisions that actually **“reward submissions of grants, regardless of funding outcome**.
- **Some senior faculty members reported that more needs to be done to nurture junior faculty at UGA**, including inviting federal agency program officers to campus to interact with faculty, assisting with junior faculty responses to NSF CAREER and related programs, and better tapping into the experiences of resident faculty with significant grant experience.
- Faculty members requested **consideration for a formal ‘Grant Mentoring’ program** where more junior faculty are mentored by senior faculty members and research administrators – suggesting that a database of interests might be created to help make the connections and proposing “buy-out time” for the purpose of mentoring more junior faculty in proposal processes and preparation.

Recovered F&A Cost Allocations and Investments

Supporting interview findings

- Faculty members reported **wanting to see more transparency into where their generated indirect costs go**; they “know” the percentages but some **seek additional insight into how these funds strategically support the overall research enterprise at UGA**. **Some faculty members reported frustration with unclear and unfair application of IDC returns** and wonder: “Has the policy and its execution been reviewed in the past few years?”
- **Faculty members in smaller units and colleges** reported **frustration** when **larger, better-funded colleges** are **provided indirect cost returns** to support **additional administrative staff for managing award activities** – contributes to a counter-productive, “everybody for themselves” environment.
- **Some faculty report that the current return of research indirects “system” is unfair**, with funds continuing to go to those “with the biggest mouths,” those who “complain the loudest”, and those who claim their research is “cutting-edge” and most relevant – frustrating some faculty members who bring in large amounts of money and receive little or no returned Indirect costs.

Institutional Review Board Operations and Expectations

Supporting interview findings

- ***Some faculty members*** reported that the ***actions of the IRB are far too slow, can make human subject involvement at various study locations difficult, and require far too many forms.***
- ***Some faculty members*** reported that ***Human Subjects review is better than it was two years ago, with current turnaround “not that bad.”***
- Faculty members ***desire for a clear university policy statement on exempted or streamlined IRB review of education projects*** – appreciating that IRB has a clear policy statement about online data collection.
- ***Some junior faculty members*** reported ***high satisfaction with the opportunity to meet directly with the IRB*** to present their research shortly after arriving on campus.
- ***One faculty member*** reported ***dissatisfaction and a lack of university guidance and support while trying to reconcile the demands of compliance agencies (i.e., HIPPA) with the requirements of the IRB.***
- One faculty member requested consideration be given to ***developing a uniform policy of deferring some IRB decisions to the consideration of duly constituted IRBs of subawardees*** – especially for large, multi-center or multi-institutional awards.

4) Appendices

Appendix 1. Project Approach and Overview

Committee charge & focus areas

Overall Charge:

- The primary focus of the *Ad Hoc Committee* was to assist UGA with their desire for a **“true and balanced culture of support”** to promote the efficiency, effectiveness, and compliance of the university’s research administration operations.

Focus Areas & Action Steps:

1. Conducting in-depth interviews with faculty members and administrators to ascertain, first-hand, insights and perceptions from “customers” about research administration infrastructure, compliance, and service levels provided by central offices including the Office for Sponsored Programs (OSP) and the Office of Contracts and Grants (C&G).
2. Assessing existing research and grant administrative and compliance policies and processes – making recommendations to improve administrative efficiency and effectively managing compliance risk, with particular consideration to the challenges presented by interdisciplinary and other emerging research trends.
3. Assessing existing roles and responsibilities for all participants involved in sponsored research – making recommendations for changes and new definitions.
4. Assessing current training mechanisms for PIs and research administration personnel – making recommendations for measures to ensure that they are properly trained and have the tools necessary to meet their responsibilities.

Appendix 1. Project Approach and Overview

Key Committee activities

1. Detailed Interviews with Faculty and Staff to Assist with Committee Data Collection

- The *Ad Hoc Committee* was to arrive at approximately 30 faculty members and 15 administrators (central and departmental/unit) for interviews in individual sessions that addressed a broad range of issues related to research administration and infrastructure at UGA. In addition, four Open Forums were scheduled.

Who	Numbers	Dates
Administrators	15	February 19-20, 2008
Faculty	33	March 3-6, 2008
Open Forums (4)	51, including 9 faculty	March 5-6, 2008

- Interview findings were organized into the following functional areas:
 - Organizational structure
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Policies and procedures
 - Systems and technologies
 - Research and fiscal compliance
 - Training and education
 - Research development

Appendix 1. Project Approach and Overview

Key Committee activities (continued)

2. *Review of Research Administration Infrastructure, Processes, Compliance, and Roles & Responsibilities*

- Undertake a comprehensive review of the organizational infrastructure, roles, and responsibilities supporting research at UGA.
- Conduct comprehensive, in-person interviews of approximately 40 faculty members and more than a dozen knowledgeable research administrators about research infrastructure and support.
- Undertake a review of more than 25 roles and greater than 274 responsibilities in research administration and compliance – each has been arrayed in a roles and responsibilities (R&R) matrix:
 - Roles supporting research have been highlighted from within Centers, Coordinating Institutes, Units, and Central Administration
 - Responsibilities were reviewed in the areas of general research administration, proposal development, proposal review/approval, award management, financial management of awards, scientific/research program management, and fiscal and research compliance
 - A “current state” matrix and a subsequent “future state” R&R matrix were developed.

Appendix 1. Project Approach and Overview

Key Committee activities (continued)

3. *Review of Research Administration Policies and Procedures*

- Inventory all existing UGA policies and procedures supporting research administration and compliance.
- Catalogue and thoroughly inventory more than 49 UGA campus policies, and supporting procedures, directly related to research administration infrastructure and compliance.
- Specifically review policies in the areas of pre and post award research administration, fiscal and research compliance, and cross-functional, institutional policies.
- Identify those policies and procedures requiring more thorough review by the Ad Hoc Committee 20 such policies and procedures were identified for detailed review; these 20 include both research and administrative policies.
- Conduct detailed reviews that entail content reviews, some peer comparison, and industry best-practice when it applies (no policy in existence).

Appendix 1. Project Approach and Overview

Key Committee activities (continued)

4. Review of Research Administration Training and Education

- Explore training and education opportunities at UGA that will help reinforce the infrastructure and UGA's priorities for research administration and compliance.
- Elicit from Committee members details around training approaches and attributes that have worked well historically, along with those that have not – for both administrative staff and faculty.
- Seek to validate hypothesis that training programs for research administration and compliance should be more streamlined, more closely linked to investigator needs, and provided on a more consistent basis.
- Evaluate the relevance and necessity for new-investigator orientations.
- Evaluate and substantiate more thoroughly the need for a comprehensive training and education program, including detailed curriculum maps, with timelines, and clear expectations for participants.

Appendix 2. Committee Membership

Committee Members:

- **Chair: Scott Angle**, Dean (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences)
- **Michael Adams**, Research Professor (Biochemistry & Molecular Biology)
- **Lee Becker**, Academic Director (Journalism & Mass Communication)
- **Barry Bozeman**, Regents Professor (Public Administration & Policy)
- **Dan Colley**, Academic Director (CTEGD), Professor (Microbiology)
- **Steve Dempsey**, Associate Vice President (Public Service and Outreach)
- **Vicky Freimuth**, Professor (Speech Communication)
- **Chicki George**, Program Coordinator (Pharmacy)
- **Andrea Hohmann**, Associate Professor (Psychology)
- **Ginny Lyman**, Financial Director (College of Family and Consumer Sciences)
- **Mary Ann Moran**, Research Professor (Marine Programs)
- **Jessica Muilenburg**, Assistant Professor (Public Health)
- **Pamela Orpinas**, Professor (Health Promotion & Behavior)
- **Paul Roman**, Academic Director (Sociology)
- **Deborah Rucker**, Department Manager (College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences)
- **Kathy Wilkes**, Business Manager III (Cellular Biology)

Appendix 2. Committee Membership

Central Administrative Support:

- **Chad Cleveland**, Associate Controller (Accounting and Financial Reporting)
- **Chris King**, Assistant Vice President (Office of the Vice President for Research Animal Care & Use)
- **Holley Schramski**, Associate Vice President and Controller (Finance and Administration)
- **Regina Smith**, Associate Vice President for Research (Office of the Vice President for Research Sponsored Programs)
- **Tracy Walters**, Director (Contracts and Grants)

Appendix 3. Interview List

Departments of interviewed faculty members and administrators included

- Ag & Applied Economics-Ces
- Anthropology
- Arts & Sc-Special Programs
- Biochemistry & Molecular Biology
- Biomedical and Health Sciences
- Cancer Center of Excellence
- Cellular Biology
- Center for Applied Gen Tech
- Center for Applied Genetic Technology
- Center for Remote Sensing & Mapping Science
- Center for Tropical & Emerging Global Disease
- College of Business
- College of Education
- College of Family & Consumer Sciences
- Complex Carbohydrate Center
- Crop & Soil Sciences
- Ecology
- Elementary & Social Studies
- Engineering
- Entomology Research
- Faculty of Engineering
- Family & Consumer Services
- Forestry & Nat Res Res / Sch Forestry & Nat Res
- Genetics
- Geology
- Gerontology
- Health Promotion & Behavior
- Horticulture Research
- Infectious Diseases
- Institute for Behavioral Research
- Institute of Higher Education
- Journalism
- Kinesiology
- Mathematics
- Microbiology
- New Media Institute
- Pharmaceutical & Biomed Science
- Physiology and Pharmacology
- Psychology
- School of Social Work
- SPIA

Appendix 3. Interview List

Positions of interviewed faculty members included

- Assistant Professor (3)
- Associate Dean
- Associate Professor (5)
- Department Head (4)
- Director (3)
- Part-time Professor
- Professor (15)

Appendix 3. Interview List

Positions of interviewed administrators included

- Accountant (2)
- Administrative Financial Director (2)
- Administrative Manager II
- Administrative Manager III
- Business Manager II (3)
- Business Manager III
- Program Coordinator II (2)
- Program Coordinator III (2)
- Scientific Administrative Specialist



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