Terms of Reference for the
Action Team on Research Incentives and Rewards

Purpose of Aspire 2020

Aspire 2020 is a bold planning initiative for scholarship on the Norman Campus including Norman Campus Programs at OU-Tulsa. It centers on the goal of Becoming the Nation’s Foremost Public Comprehensive Research University of Our Size, and involves three objectives: Transforming our Research Culture, Transforming our Research Engagement, and Transforming our Research Competitiveness. Aspire 2020 will not create a written plan, but instead will serve as both a practical framework as well as a philosophy for continuously advancing our research and creative activities. New practices and paradigms created as part of Aspire 2020 will help the University of Oklahoma achieve its full potential as one of the Nation’s research powerhouses. For more information, visit http://aspire2020.ou.edu.

Action Teams

Foundational to the success of Aspire 2020 is active engagement by faculty and administrators from every college, department and research unit. Action Teams, facilitated by faculty, are the mechanism for this engagement. For a period of approximately 2 months, starting April 15, the first three Action Teams will meet to address a specific topic and develop a set of prioritized actions leading to measurable outcomes in support of the three goals listed above. Participation in Action Teams is open to everyone and no registration or application is needed; simply attend the meetings. Summaries of each Action Team meeting will be placed in a web-based discussion forum on the Aspire 2020 site so faculty can post comments and suggestions and view the same from their colleagues.

Charge to the Action Team on Research Incentives and Rewards

The Research Incentives and Rewards Action Team will engage the important topic of devising mechanisms for meaningfully incentivizing and rewarding research and creative activity regardless of whether it involves extramural funding. This charge also includes identifying and suggesting mechanisms for removing or mitigating existing disincentives. Consideration must be given to appropriately aligning incentives and rewards to the diversity of disciplines and their related diversity of approaches to scholarship, and award and recognition programs must recognize faculty achievement and inspire creativity and boldness of thought.

Action Team Leadership

The Research Incentives and Rewards Action Team will be co-led by Professors John Antonio (Computer Science and member of the VPR Advisory Committee) and Morris Foster (Anthropology and Associate VP for Research)

Background on Research Incentives and Rewards at OU

Incentivizing Research. Virtually every comprehensive research university uses a variety of mechanisms to stimulate or incentivize research and creative activity, often for achieving specific goals such as improving the competitiveness of extramural proposals via pilot studies; meeting proposal cost sharing requirements; attracting new hires via contribution to start-up packages; ensuring the stability of institutes and centers that are especially strategic to the institution’s research portfolio; enhancing creative activity in fine arts and humanities; supplying needed equipment; ensuring faculty participation at professional conferences via travel support; ensuring that scholarship outcomes are published via the provision of subvention fees; supporting junior faculty in establishing independent research programs; and supporting general needs via the provision of discretionary incentive funding related to the expenditure of indirect costs on extramural grants and contracts. At OU, many of these needs are met by the Research Council, University Strategic Organization (USO) program, Sponsored Research Incentive (SRI) program, Competitive
College Investment Fund (CCIF) program, and other programs within the Office of the VP for Research as well as via ad hoc decisions based upon opportunity.

The largest formal research incentive program at OU is SRI, which originally was proposed in 1975 by then VP for Research Administration Dr. Gordon Atkinson. Formally instituted in 1976, SRI was intended to “provide some money to colleges and departments in which the faculty did significant sponsored research to defray the costs which the colleges and departments incurred because of this added workload [of managing the grant accounts].” In other words, SRI was created to support research administration at a time when research services as we know them today did not exist, and when OU faculty did relatively little sponsored research. However, SRI was also intended to recognize the efforts of faculty or staff who bring sponsored research and training programs into the University by making available to their colleges and departments, and sometimes to the faculty themselves, money to use as the colleges, departments and individuals see fit.”

Most public research universities operate a program similar to SRI, providing E&G funding equivalent to between 10% and 100% of IDC expended from extramural grants and contracts. A recent survey at OU shows that SRI is being invested generally along the lines described above. For many colleges, SRI represents the bulk of discretionary research investment funding and without question, it is the largest source of general M&O (maintenance and operations support). Some $2.5 million in SRI was distributed in FY09.

Other research incentive programs at OU are supported by the Research Council, which meets monthly and makes recommendations for funding to the VP for Research. These programs presently are budgeted at $150,000 per year (Junior Faculty Fellowships) and $130,000 per year (Small Grant, Large Grant, PI Investment Awards, Arts and Humanities Program). See http://research.ou.edu/funding/internalfunding.html for additional details. Additionally, the VPR Office operates directly a number of other internal funding programs that provide equipment matching support, funding for page charges or the purchase of reprints, and travel assistance for faculty. They are included in the $130,000 budget noted above. Additional information can be found at http://research.ou.edu/funding/internalfunding.html.

Rewarding Research. Rewards for scholarly activity take a number of forms. Perhaps most important is the personal and professional satisfaction received in publishing a manuscript, book, or musical score; and performing, seeing performed, or exhibiting creative works at national and international venues. Additional reward mechanisms include press releases, interviews and promotion in university or other media, and formal recognition via local, regional, national and international awards and honors given by professional societies, private foundations and government organizations.

Another equally important reward concerns financial benefits manifest as a temporary bonus or salary supplement, permanent salary increase, or other augmentation based upon performance metrics in research and creative activity applicable to a particular discipline or type of scholarship. OU has few such reward mechanisms despite the fact that other institutions have been applying them for quite some time, especially medical schools, with notably positive results.

Expectation and Accountability. Closely related to incentives and rewards are expectations and accountability. Any meaningful incentive program must include clear expectations and the ability to assess outcomes and returns on investment via standards of accountability, again with recognition given to the diversity of approaches in research and outcome measurement among disciplines. Because OU, like all other institutions, has insufficient financial resources to invest equally in all programs, its investment must be guided by factors such as quality, boldness of thought, strategic significance, comparative assessment and the setting of high potential, engagement with other organizations, and productivity.

Questions to be Addressed

The work of Action Teams is guided by a number of questions, and shown below are possible questions to be addressed by the Action Team on Research Incentives and Rewards. Answers to some will influence whether others remain valid or new ones should be added at the discretion of the Team. Note that an ad hoc task force of the VPR Advisory Committee, led by Research Council Chair Joe Rodgers, is examining the Research Council’s portfolio both an absolute sense and relative to funding programs provided by colleges and departments. Thus, although the present Action Team should consider incentives and rewards in the broadest possible context, it should communicate with and leverage the activities of the ad hoc task force.
1. Do OU’s research incentive programs, as presently constructed, achieve the goals for which they were designed, especially with regard to supporting all disciplines on the Norman Campus? Are the current goals appropriate, and if not, what should they be?

2. Is SRI an effective program for incentivizing research? Across all disciplines? If so, how might it be improved? If not, what program could replace it and what actions would be required to implement it?

3. What mechanisms could be used to reward faculty financially for achievement in research and creative activity, and what specific actions could be taken to implement (including fund) them? How should such mechanisms differ across disciplines or programs, and what metrics could be used to determine the type and level of reward?

4. What mechanisms could be used to provide faculty with appropriate internal recognition (e.g., awards, honors, notoriety) for achievement in research and creative activity, and what metrics could be used to determine the type and level of award? How can OU improve recognition of its faculty via consideration for external awards and honors?

5. What disincentives to research now exist and what actions could be taken to remove or mitigate their impacts?

**Process and Timeline**

The Action Team should meet weekly, starting the week of 19 April 2010, to ensure an ability to complete its work by 15 June 2010. Concise summaries of each meeting will be posted to the Action Team forum on the Aspire 2020 web site to ensure broad faculty participation. Support for the Action Team will be provided by the Office of the VP for Research.

**Other Materials**

Action Team co-chairs and VPR Office staff will provide on the Aspire 2020 web site additional resources relevant to the topic being studied.

**Expected Outcome**

The Action Team is expected to provide to the VP for Research a set of actionable recommendations including priorities, resources needed, and metrics for assessing progress.