Preliminary Report of ASPIRE 2020 Incentives and Rewards Action Team

Low-Cost Items that Should be Pursued
These items received unanimous support from group members

- **Create research endowment.** Possible sources of funding: private sector, donors, OTD, athletic program. Possible programs to support: post doc awards, graduate student support, faculty research awards, internal seed/bridge funding awards.

  *Comment:* The creation of a research endowment has the potential to enable us to greatly expand our source of internal funds for support of research efforts. It seems likely that we can take the first steps to increase our efforts to create a research endowment without significant internal monetary investment. For example, the work in OU’s development office could be organized to give a better balance between efforts to increase undergraduate scholarships and efforts to increase funds for graduate research. Revenues from OU patent licenses could also go into a research endowment.

- **Limit “top down” dictation of research themes**

  *Comment:* Faculty can in large part be incentivized and rewarded by enhancing the ability of individual investigators and academic units to chart their own research agendas, and then having resources available (particularly at the academic unit level) to realize those agendas. Top-down dictation of research emphases or themes is often ill-informed and highly discouraging to otherwise productive faculty whose own research may not fall within designated strategic foci.

- **Get more research accomplishments in popular press**
Comment: One way in which OU researchers can be assisted is by higher profile placement of news media stories about OU research success. Many universities have offices dedicated to promoting their faculty research stories both in the science press (such as Science and Nature) and in the media generally. Often, media strategies are developed as significant publications are “in press” and being considered for cover art through pre-embargo press releases and news conferences through follow-up on NPR and other media venues. Our national reputation and some funding would benefit from such comprehensive media strategies to promote OU research.

• More recognition for researchers already doing multi-disciplinary research

Comment: There remain barriers within academic units and colleges to multi-disciplinary projects that involve collaborators from other academic units and other colleges. Such work is perceived as less highly valued on annual evaluations, both with respect to publication credit in journals outside one’s discipline and with respect to sharing smaller amounts of SRI credit among a large number of co-investigators. Annual evaluations and SRI credit could be adjusted to provide more positive rewards for taking part in larger multidisciplinary proposals and projects.

• Support and recognize arts & humanities fellowships and awards

Comment: University could provide staff assistance and release time for faculty to prepare materials for A&S fellowships and awards. Some faculty continue to experience barriers within departments and colleges in allowing release time to accept prestigious fellowships.

• Help all faculty in seeking and receiving national awards
Comment: University could provide staff assistance and release time for faculty to prepare materials for national awards. Some continue to experience barriers within departments and colleges in willingness and effort in nominating faculty for national awards.

• **Increased support for large institutional research proposals** *(e.g., IGERT, ERC)*

Comment: Providing teaching release to prepare large institutional proposals is vital to being able to submit competitive applications.

• **Create opportunities for funded researchers to add a “13th month” for additional summer salary from grants and standardize guidelines for using salary release from grants to fund administrative supplements to reward external funding success.**

Comment: Other institutions use both these mechanisms to reward faculty who have successful, externally funded portfolios. These and other mechanisms would be entirely funded from grants, so would be budget neutral internally. Academic units and colleges could be empowered to make use of these and other incentive tools by developing general policies and guidelines that would promote their use.

**Low-Cost Items Discussed, but should not be Pursued**

*Only a small percentage of group members favor these items*

• **Modification of pink sheet for assigning research credit to investigators**

Comment: Filling out a pink sheet is usually based on the PI’s best estimate of the % contribution of those involved in the proposal, and all the Co-PI’s are involved because they have to sign the pink sheet.
There is concern among some faculty that internal credit assigned on pink sheets in some academic units is not done fairly. University-wide standards or guidelines for internal credit assignment should be considered.

- **Develop and enforce policy to prevent SRI from being used for M&O type expense**

  *Comment:* It seems like a very legitimate use of SRI by science and engineering departments to pay for M&O to keep its research effort going. SRI is being used to pay for M&O expenses related to research, such as for lab renovations, work by the Physical Plant, updated computers for faculty members, shop supplies, telephone charges, and copy charges. The funds for M&O now received from the State are not nearly large enough to cover all of the actual M&O expenses related to research. A policy to prevent SRI from being used for M&O expenses should be adopted ONLY IF funds for M&O from the state are increased substantially. Otherwise, such a policy will have a very negative effect on research. In general, there was strong support for the university providing more M&O through the E&G budget so that SRI could be focused more effectively in supporting academic unit research efforts.

- **Treat SRI as an aggregate pool rather than tied to particular faculty**

  *Comment:* This was discussed, but the group concluded that by doing this, we would remove an important incentive to faculty members to submit research proposals.

**Items Requiring Significant Investment**

These items received unanimous support from group members

- **Increase seed/bridge research funding.** This includes funds
from the PI Research Investment program for research to strengthen
an unfunded proposal and research to produce an external proposal.

<Comment: Research Council funding and other sources of pilot and
bridge funding are too small in individual award size and too small in
aggregate. These funds should be much more robust.

- **Increase the size and scope of SRI program**

<Comment: A consistent issue in the meetings was the greater value
of faculty-initiated research themes compared with top-down
strategic themes “imposed” on faculty. One way in which faculty-
initiated themes can be better supported is to return a greater share
of IDC to academic units through the SRI program. That would
enable academic units to make more direct investments in pilot
funding, new equipment, and new faculty startup.

- **Improve GA salaries**

<Comment: A consistent issue in the meetings was the need to raise
GA salaries (particularly GTA stipends) to enable OU to recruit
higher-quality applicants.

- **Improve GA working environment**

Comment: This is mainly a comment about GA salaries and also was
part of a discussion about the need for GA fellowships not tied to
teaching.

- **Increase support for post docs**

<Comment: The cluster hire of postdoctoral researchers presents a
lower cost opportunity to reward faculty who have funding success
and also to accelerate progress in preliminary research that can lead
to funding success.
• More internal awards for early stage research

Comment: Early stage research is critical to developing competitive funding applications. Currently, OU has no awards that recognize early stage research success. Creating such awards would be a way of bridging recognition and perhaps some summer salary support from initial pilot funding (available through the Research Council) toward funded application. Many OU faculty end up in a sort of Death Valley between those two end points, especially those with promising initial grant scores that just miss out on funding.

• Increased support for small research groups

Comment: Tomorrow’s large research centers begin as today’s small research groups. Currently, the university lacks funding to assist small research groups in starting out. The college-specific counterpart program to USOs was funded for only one year and then no more. Consistent, forward-looking support for small research groups will have long-term benefits.

• Increase funding for recruiting graduate students

Comment: A number of funded faculty have observed that a primary barrier to expanding their grant portfolios is the shortage of high quality graduate students to work on projects as GRAs. In part, this shortage is due to the relatively low stipends that OU pays GTAs, which comprise the pool from which GRAs are recruited as new projects are funded.

• Increase funding for faculty and graduate students to travel to professional meeting to present papers

Comment: Multiple research studies about faculty research productivity have shown empirically that national and international
networking is a key determinant of greater research productivity.

- **Increase teaching release time for researchers**, particularly those working on large, multi-investigator proposals that have a greater institutional impact.

  *Comment*: This could be coordinated with the new Proposal Development Center and envisioned as an extension of the support that center can provide.

- **Maintain flexibility in using residual fund accounts to support research**

  *Comment*: We have one mechanism now in place that has served some of us quite well—ability to establish a residual account for an individual researcher, where amounts remaining when fixed-price contracts are completed can be moved (minus indirect costs). This has provided up until now a long-term “safe savings account” that can be used to support a range of research activities and research support. One can save up funds to use for a variety of research activities—examples are: allowing one to save up funds to purchase major research equipment, to provide support for ongoing research-equipment costs (e.g. service contracts on equipment, equipment repair and replacement), fund personnel during transition periods, fund other start-up research projects, support graduate-student research, support undergraduate research, support postdoctoral visitors to a laboratory, and support publication costs. Some of these activities involve multiyear commitments of resources in order to develop a long-term research program. This kind of research planning and development should be encouraged.