

Report of the Research Funding Planning Committee
November 27, 2007

Submitted to:

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This report focuses on strategies to increase research funding at George Mason University. While some of its suggestions apply to research more generally, it does not embrace strategic planning for research and creative activity as a whole. Unfunded research and creative activity, only some of which may lead to funding possibilities later on, will remain essential parts of the overall University scholarly portfolio.

Over the past decade, Mason has achieved considerable research growth in a number of programs many of which were first identified as strategic areas in the Mason Plan for 2007. For example, the University has made great strides in strengthening its position in information technology, policy, law, and economics. Additionally, as noted at the Board of Visitors' August retreat, Mason faculty in history and new media, industrial-organizational psychology, and social complexity have taken their place among the best in the nation. Most recently, Mason has proposed new "emerging spires of excellence" to include public health, bio-medical engineering, and neuroscience, each with readily apparent opportunities for external funding.

Mason faculty members will continue to make major contributions in these and other research areas and all can be strengthened to ensure that the university's sponsored program base grows in the future. Beyond these specific areas, all of which were identified through a university-wide planning process, every academic unit must continue to search for, identify, and invest in other programs where its faculty can excel. Ongoing structured planning processes will position Mason for continuing excellence in disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research likely to be supported through external funding.

Thoughtful investment by Mason coupled with expected faculty research accomplishments have positioned the University to move aggressively toward becoming a nationally recognized research university. To build on this momentum and ensure that we will not miss out on this opportunity, it is essential that Mason continue to engage in open dialogue to identify sound strategic steps forward. It is the committee's opinion that those steps will be best determined in dialogues and planning sessions that include University senior academic and research administrators. The cornerstones for success will be the resulting decisions and institutional investments made to support their implementation. The principles and strategies outlined in this report should serve to stimulate that important dialogue across all programs.

The Ad Hoc Research Planning Committee convened by Provost Peter Stearns and Vice President for Research and Economic Development Matt Kluger brought together research faculty and research administrators from across the institution. The fundamental charge to the Committee was to craft a set of recommendations that would lead to increased sponsored program research. The Committee recognized that increased sponsored research is a necessary condition for Mason as it continues to evolve as a

major research university. The Committee also acknowledged that increased sponsored program research alone will never be all that is required for continued transformation. A broader approach to research excellence is required to nurture and grow the emergent research culture at Mason.

The Committee recognizes the enormous achievements made possible by the investments of the past decade. Within that context, we offer a set of practical recommendations to strengthen current research initiatives and support the growth of new ones. Implementation of these recommendations will require considerable collaboration among units across the campus, and we are confident that ongoing dialogue will result in the levels of cooperation required.

From the beginning, the Committee recognized that a simple “wish list” which always assumes new resources flowing from central administration would be of limited value. Instead, the Committee’s discussions have centered on the necessity and expectation that burdens associated with growth and cost must be shared by principal investigators, programs, departments, colleges, and the university. This is especially true of our most important recommendation, strengthening our capacity for research by ensuring that we compete for the best and the brightest graduate students through competitive support packages. For this particular recommendation, we suggest the creation of a joint committee with representatives from the Research Council and Graduate Council to consider funding alternatives. Still, some of the recommendations contained in this report can be implemented very quickly and most at minimal expense.

This report presents eight principles and corresponding strategies to achieve the goal of significantly increasing sponsored research. These principles are classified into the rubrics of infrastructure and support for research, Mason research culture, and engaging the community.

A key strength of the current report is its consensus support among Committee members and the collaborative process that characterized their deliberations. All have different constituencies, but the evolution of Mason as a research university is paramount to all. This alone bodes well for the future of research at Mason.

Respectfully Submitted,

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PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

Infrastructure and Support for Research

I. Compete nationally and internationally for the best graduate students, especially those seeking the doctoral degree.

1. Provide full tuition, stipend and benefits to all funded doctoral students commensurate with the median support provided by UVA, VCU and Virginia Tech.
2. Allocate GRAs and associated tuition remission in such a way as to provide incentives to growing sponsored research activity in the respective units.
3. Provide adequate and expedited visa related services with proactive assistance from the OIPS for funded international doctoral students.
4. Continuously benchmark our graduate support plans against our peer and aspirant institutions to ensure that Mason is competitive and in a position to attract high quality graduate students from across the nation.
5. Rely on the to-be-appointed Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Special Projects to champion graduate education and its relationship to the research enterprise of the university.

II. Effectively allocate responsibilities for proposal development (pre-award) and related services among Academic Units and OSP.

1. Identify the pre-award services necessary for successful development and timely submission of sponsored program proposals.
2. Identify how these services can be distributed across all units responsible for research administration in order to best meet the needs of faculty and academic units and serve to prevent barriers to proposal submissions.
3. Define clear business rules regarding proposal submissions (F&A rates, cost compliance, accurate faculty and student benefits rates, accurate budget justification, et cetera) to expedite the central review process.
4. Provide ready access on the OSP website to the tools and resources necessary for proposal development and submission (e.g., boilerplates about institutional capacity; up-to-date tuition rates, benefits, and F&A rates for budgeting; fully electronic proposal submission procedure).

Mason Research Culture

I. Provide incentives and services for faculty and administrators to increase faculty involvement in sponsored program activity.

1. Academic Units should develop appropriate research incentive and recognition plans for faculty and share these plans with the Provost and VPRED.
2. Central administration should develop an appropriate incentive plan for Academic Units that recognizes and rewards growth in proposal and awards.
3. Ensure that the allocation model for research space considers the nature of research, demonstrated success and strong potential for continued sponsored program research.
4. Raise the awareness of the importance of F&A and salary replacement funds derived from external funding and how they benefit academic units, individual faculty members and the University.
5. Develop an explicit reward structure to promote trans-disciplinary research.
6. In the interest of long-term research growth at Mason, budget allocations should consider research activity in a way that provides incentives for research activities across all academic units.
7. Provide easy access to information regarding the widest possible range of external funding opportunities, including development of active programs to identify agency discretionary funding.
8. Ensure that faculty researchers have an appropriate research administrative infrastructure to allow them to spend their time performing research activities rather than administrative activities.
9. Provide timely and accurate data to unit administrators to monitor and track the research proposals, awards and expenditures for units and individuals.

II. Faculty hiring decisions should consider, within the constraints of programmatic activities, the sponsored research potential of the hire and investments should be made to assist in the development of that potential.

1. Position advertisements and on-campus interviews must make clear that the successful candidate will provide demonstrated or significant potential for engaging in sponsored research and securing support for graduate students.
2. As part of the departmental hiring recommendations, there will be a statement regarding the candidate's demonstrated or potential sponsored research and how the successful recruitment of the candidate will benefit the departments sponsored research portfolio.
3. Engage in trans-disciplinary faculty hires where university strengths can be leveraged to compete for significant levels of sponsored funding.
4. Unit hiring plans should include strategies that consider the trends and opportunities for external funding
5. Where appropriate, the importance of sponsored research must be clearly conveyed to the faculty in published promotion, tenure and reappointment

guidelines and in annual “new hire” research and promotion and tenure orientations.

6. Report to Deans and Directors a three-year rolling average of research start-up funds for new faculty at the unit level.
7. Allocate school, college, and institute GRAs to junior faculty members expected to pursue sponsored research.

III. Create and maintain Mason's culture of research and scholarship through on-going faculty research seminars, administrative information sessions and online tools concerning all aspects of obtaining and managing sponsored programs.

1. Develop and publicize a comprehensive series of presentations addressing issues related to research development, pre- and post-award matters, and responsible conduct of research.
2. Develop a systematic strategy with the Vice President of University Relations to highlight the contributions made by individual Mason researchers through university and community channels.
3. Invite outside speakers from sponsoring agencies to discuss funding opportunities and future trends.
4. Develop a university calendar of research presentations by Mason faculty or outside guests.

IV. Establish shared responsibility for increased sponsored program activities across all faculty, administrators, and units at Mason.

1. Redefine and codify the composition of the Research Council.
2. Expand the role of the Research Council in policy development and decision making.
3. Incorporate research culture into administrative and support units (Human Resources, Purchasing, etc.) across the university.

Engaging the External Community

I. Research excellence at Mason should be a major theme in development.

1. “Research Excellence at Mason” must be a theme for the capital campaign.
2. A working group representing the research interests of the university should be created to work with the Development Office in understanding and articulating research needs (e.g., start up funds, health insurance for grad students, et cetera).

II. Connect with external stakeholders in Mason's and the region's success.

1. Promote research collaborations and partnerships among regional stakeholders.
2. Develop strategies for strengthening relationships with elected and appointed officials.

3. Develop a systematic approach for identifying and participating in regional events to strengthen relationships between the university and the community.
4. Deans and other university officials should include promotion of Mason research activities in their “elevator pitches.”
5. Academic units and, where appropriate, academic administrative units should establish advisory boards to promote the research of the units.