

**TO: Faculty Senate, Idaho State University**

**RE: Rewarding research and scholarship at ISU**

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**In this document the term ‘research’ applies to research, scholarship and creative activities** in accordance with the bylaws and representative membership of the Research Council of Faculty Senate.

Faculty have reported to Research Council members a feeling of dissatisfaction with the reward system for research accomplishment at ISU. The dissatisfaction stems from a variety of sources including a lack of adequate compensation for significant research success, and insufficient procedures for performance evaluation and merit assessment. The request by upper administration to increase research output is widely viewed as unfeasible within the existing workload and evaluation framework. The situation might lead to failure of junior faculty who need research accomplishment for promotion and tenure, and the increased likelihood that productive researchers will leave for positions that provide greater recognition and reward for their efforts.

AIMS: Evaluate potential sources for dissatisfaction with the research reward process at ISU. Suggest affordable yet significant approaches to improve research satisfaction among ISU faculty.

#### SUMMARY OF ISSUES:

- Two general factors contributing to dissatisfaction were identified: (i) lack of consistent, official recognition of research success, for instance in the form of letters of commendation, and (ii) adequate rewards and incentives (e.g. merit pay, promotion, salary increases, space). Both factors will need significant improvement to resolve the issue of dissatisfaction.
- Constituents have commented to Council members that (i) a culture and infrastructure exists at ISU that emphasizes teaching and service above research; (ii) they must defend time spent on research and justify it to their colleagues; (iii) successful research programs can be viewed by colleagues as a burden to their departments when there is worry that teaching loads will be shifted to accommodate; (iv) when the intention is to reward research, merit is not consistently applied; (v) some units on campus undervalue the research and scholarship mission of faculty; (vi) ISU can appear to undervalue scholarship that does not lead to external funding; (vii) chronic low salaries of ISU faculty affect recruitment and retention; (viii) hiring freezes and loss of faculty in recent years have increased teaching loads for those who already carry heavy research loads.
- Faculty feel under-rewarded for their research efforts. When asked what benefits most ISU researchers currently receive, the Council was at a loss to name any of significant value. Two exceptions might be (1) promotion and tenure in units that value research and scholarship; and (2) the Outstanding and Distinguished Researcher program, which provides recognition but little tangible benefits to those who are honored.

- Faculty feel that ISU lacks an evaluation system with adequate metrics of merit and that is acceptable to the majority of faculty. Many worry that someone outside their particular field of research will be evaluating productivity and quality of work. Levels of acceptable research performance vary dramatically among units at ISU and appear to be difficult to standardize.
- In August of 2008, the Research Council (formerly Research Coordinating Council) produced the report, "*How can I help you?*" *Research at ISU: Support and Barriers*. The report was based on Focus Group conversations with faculty involved in ISU's research endeavor and listed in detail a number of limitations or "barriers" to research that currently exist at the university. The Vice President for Research has used the report to help prioritize improvements to ISU's research infrastructure but the process has been hindered by the recent budget cuts.
- In terms of what research-active faculty expect from their university, Council discussion and the *Barriers* report of 2008 suggest among other things (i) a more flexible workload policy to reduce teaching and service loads of research-intensive faculty; (ii) availability of necessary tools to perform research including electronic library resources, statistical support, improved grant submission support, travel funding, and a streamlined purchasing pathway; (iii) adequate rewards and incentives for exceptional research performance; and (iv) protection of junior faculty time during the establishment of their research programs. A concern at present is how to attract research-strong faculty to ISU. Several Council members reported failures to do so in recent hiring attempts. It is expected that improving the research climate and infrastructural support at ISU will be a significant step toward attracting, and retaining, high quality research talent.

#### SUGGESTIONS:

- Funding of research-related travel: Research rarely happens in a social vacuum, and the ability of faculty to attend and present at scholarly events such as conferences, or perform in venues outside our region, is critical to both the development of strong research programs and the satisfaction of researchers with their institution. When possible, internal funding opportunities for research-related travel should be maintained and even increased for faculty at ISU.
- Public relations: The university should continue to invest in and develop its public display of research accomplishments through various outlets. Benefits would include an increased awareness regionally and nationally of ISU's research prowess, provide a source of pride for university faculty, and increase satisfaction of researchers with the public and university's appreciation of their efforts.
- Sabbaticals: The university should build on its sabbatical program. It is likely to be an effective tool for boosting overall research output and it rewards researchers by guaranteeing them time for focused pursuit of their scholarly agendas. If at all possible, a reinstatement of supporting funds for sabbaticals would be a proportionally inexpensive way of increasing ISU's research productivity. It could also strengthen ISU's research connection with other institutions through joint sabbatical research experiences.
- Curriculum revisions: If done well, curriculum revisions have the potential to reduce total number of class hours required per faculty and thus free up time for research endeavors. Teaching loads are generally much higher at ISU than at research-intensive universities, which is partly due to the limited number of faculty available to teach a very broad curriculum. An effort is being made on campus to revisit curricula and improve teaching loads without sacrificing the quality of education offered to ISU's students.

- Flexibility in teaching schedules: An effective method for promoting research activity is to combine teaching assignments into one semester so that there is uninterrupted time for proposal development, manuscript writing, and active scholarship in the other semester. This model is common at many research-intensive universities but is underutilized at ISU.
- Merit raises: Previous attempts to offer merit raises to faculty with significant research accomplishments did manage to increase morale among those who conduct research programs on top of their other expected duties. When applied fairly, and not simply as a predetermined percentage of any particular unit (irrespective of that unit's total research output), predictable merit raises can serve as reward, incentive and a source of satisfaction for ISU faculty.
- Merit assessment: Determination of research merit in any given unit should be based on national standards for that field. The development of such criteria for units across campus is necessary for standardizing merit assessment at ISU.
- Tracking research accomplishments: The university could improve its ability to track accomplishments by faculty. Having a readily accessible source of information about research outcomes derived from course releases, sabbaticals, research travel, and internal grant awards would also improve ISU's ability to assess returns on research investments. The Council was informed that efforts are under way to create better tracking mechanisms through the Office of Research and the Office of Sponsored Programs.
- Fulfilling agreements: Chairs, Deans, and upper administration must make every effort to fulfill agreements made with new hires and with researchers preparing grant proposals. If there is any doubt prior to the agreement that a term or condition cannot be fulfilled, then it must not be offered and agreed upon. This could help rectify the loss of trust by some faculty that such agreements when made will be upheld by the university.
- Indirects to PIs: It is worth exploring whether a guaranteed percentage of ISU's indirects from grant awards can be allocated to the Principal Investigators. At present, returns of indirects to PIs is highly variable and can require negotiation. By guaranteeing a return, there is firm incentive to write winning grant proposals as well as a small monetary reward to the PI for research excellence that will be reinvested directly into ISU's research endeavor. The guaranteed return need not come at the expense of returns to Departments or Colleges.
- Commendation: Better efforts could be made on behalf of the university to directly communicate its congratulation and appreciation to faculty who make significant research contributions. For example, letters could be sent to faculty for such achievements as the publication of a book, the attainment of a competitive grant, the winning of a prestigious award, or the recognition by peers of significant accomplishments in scholarship, performance, and creative works. Clear and public appreciation by the university of quality research activities is a cornerstone for changing the culture at ISU.
- Service: While there has been discussion about reducing the burden of service work for faculty, a concerted effort to not simply shift service workloads but reduce the total amount of institutional service required of faculty may be necessary to create a productive research environment at ISU. Strong leadership may also be required to make this happen, especially where a culture that values service and teaching at the expense of scholarship persists in certain academic units.

Report prepared by Scot Kelchner, edited and approved by the Council.