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CPI Newsletter – February 2010

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Update on Research Administration Shared Services (RASS) Committee

The Research Administration Shared Services (RASS) Committee was formed by The Texas A&M University System (TAMUS) Board of Regents (BOR) to explore opportunities for increasing efficiencies and reduced costs through shared services. It includes two CPI members, Terry Thomas (Science) and Mary Meagher (Liberal Arts). The Committee's final report, which was submitted to the BOR on December 3, 2009, provided a cost analysis of research administration and concluded that research grant administration costs across TAMUS were roughly comparable. In January 2010, Chancellor McKinney announced that an independent, external consulting firm would soon be hired. The RFP for the external consultant contains the RASS final report, which will serve as a baseline for bench marking TAMUS processes. The RFP requests proposals from external consultants that will assist with a comparison of existing research administration structure with comparable systems or institutions in the United States, a review of legal and regulatory requirements applicable to research administration, the identification of potential research administration efficiency opportunities, and the identification of research administration models. The RFP indicates that proposals must be received by 2:00 P.M. CST on February 17, 2010. For more information, please see the RFP and RASS report posted on the CPI website at <http://cpi.tamu.edu/records/RASS/>

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Update on Biosafety Advisory Committee

The Biosafety Advisory Committee (BAC) met for the first time on Friday, January 29, 2010. This meeting was largely organizational, although some substantive items were discussed. Dr. Bhanu Chowdhary, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, will serve as Chair of the committee. The BAC consists of 9 members, including CPI representatives Terry Thomas (Science) and Greg Reinhart (COALS). The charge to the committee is to provide advice and council to the Vice President for Research in matters related to biosafety on campus, including the actions of the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) and the Office of Research Compliance (ORC), which is directed by Dr. Bruce Whitney. By University rule, all projects involving biohazards and recombinant DNA must be reviewed and approved by the IBC before the research is initiated. The ORC can approve recombinant DNA projects that exclusively involve exempt organisms (e.g. E coli K12). The website describing ORC activities is: <http://researchcompliance.tamu.edu>. PIs should note that IBC meetings are open to the public and hence PIs are welcome to attend the IBC meeting during which their biosafety permit application is being reviewed. This would be beneficial to all concerned, since items might be clarified, if necessary, during the meeting, thereby avoiding the approval being deferred to the IBC's next meeting. The IBC meets monthly, and meeting times and locations are available at the biosafety website: <http://biosafety.tamu.edu/institutional-biosafety-committee/ibc-meeting-schedule.html>. Please inform Terry and/or Greg about any issues or concerns you may have regarding the implementation of biosafety compliance on campus.

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Update on Maestro Working Group

Maestro, the new system-wide research information system, is nearing its formal startup for the PI community. Maestro will be accessed by PIs through the SSO at <http://epikmaestro.tamus.edu> by using UIN and SSO password. All PI's will be given access soon. Availability of Maestro will be announced by the University, the Research Foundation, and by each of the TAMUS members to their PI's. At the time of that announcement they will have set up systems to help the PI's through the learning phase and will have designated individuals to help PI's with any problems they have using the system. The system should allow PI's to look at the finances of all their accounts using a single information system. Future developments of major importance to PIs will be automated preaward systems and budget preparation systems. CPI representatives on the Maestro Working Group include Norman Guinasso (Geosciences) and Charles Phillips (HSC). The CPI had an additional representative when Maestro was being developed. We are looking for additional CPI members to serve on this Working Group to provide input as Maestro is further developed. Please contact Norman or Charles if you have feedback on the system or if you are interested in serving on the Working Group.

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Update on the Responsible Conduct in Research Working Group

The Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR) Working Group met on Monday, February 1, 2010. The charge of the working group is to review and make enhancements to the University's initial implementation plan to meet the NSF requirement that all undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers supported by NSF complete training in the responsible and ethical conduct of research. The group discussed the current University Plan in place to meet this requirement, including issues related to Principal Investigators, students, and cross-agency considerations. Other topics discussed included current training and education that takes place in the university in various departments as well as the current Citi training available. The group made a number of initial recommendations that will be refined as the working group moves forward with its activities. The group will meet again on February 15, 2010, with final recommendations from the group due to the Vice President for Research no later than March 10, 2010. Additional information or feedback can be provided to Beverly Kuhn (TTI), the CPI representative on the RCR Working Group.

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Update on the International Programs Enhancement and Coordination Committee (IPECC)

The International Programs Enhancement and Coordination Committee (IPECC), chaired by Dr. Emily Y. Ashworth, Executive Associate Vice President for International Programs, meets monthly during the academic year to advise the International Programs Office on program development, to recommend policies and guidelines on international matters, to plan and coordinate international activities and to promote international awareness. At the February meeting the IPECC, received updates from subcommittees on student engagement and on memoranda of agreements (MOA). The MOA subcommittee, chaired by Dr. Cesar Malave, Associate Dean for Recruitment & International Programs, College of Engineering, focused on dual degree programs. These programs currently have complex rules that have likely been a deterrent to their popularity. The MOA Subcommittee will continue their efforts to simplify the rules and any suggestions will be welcome. The IPECC also held an extensive discussion on international student health insurance issues. The main issue is the TAMUS requirement that all international students have health insurance. This has created problems for those who have alternate coverage, i.e., are insured by providers that are not on contract with TAMUS. About 800 international students currently have such coverage. International Student Services (ISS), who is responsible for monitoring insurance compliance, reports numerous problems. Under consideration is a proposal to recommend removal of the requirement to show proof of alternate coverage. Input can be provided to Ramesh Talreja (TEES), the CPI representative on the IPECC.

Contact:

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Update on Export Controls task Force (ECTF)

The Export Controls Task Force (ECTF) approved a draft Rule at its last meeting on January 26. The draft Rule will now be circulated to university stakeholders for review and comment. The Task Force working groups are proceeding with developing an export controls manual. The next Task Force meeting will be scheduled shortly after the working groups have submitted their draft contributions to the manual, which is anticipated before end of March.

Contact:

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Regents Approve Two TTI Transportation Research Centers

Two new transportation research centers were approved by the Board of Regents on January 21, 2010. The centers are part of the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI).

The Transportation Economics Center (TEC), directed by Katherine Turnbull, will provide economic-based analyses in formulating transportation policies and programs at the national level. TTI was selected to operate this center through a competitive procurement process by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The Center for Strategic Transportation Solutions (CSTS), directed by Cynthia Weatherby, will focus on long-term transportation issues for the state of Texas such as: transportation financing, mobility, freight movement, public transportation alternatives, border transportation planning, air quality issues and energy-related implications.

For more information see:
<http://tamunews.tamu.edu/2010/01/22/regents-approve-two-tti-transportation-research-centers/>

Contacts:

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Request for Examples of University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University Collaborations

The CPI has been asked by the Office of the Vice President for Research to assist in soliciting and collecting examples (a brief paragraph) of research collaborations between the University of Texas at Austin (UT) and Texas A&M University (These two campuses only). Information about collaborative grants (i.e., amount, funding agency, researchers involved and the outcomes) between the faculty at both of these institutions would be helpful. This information will be used to help highlight collaborations between the state's tier 1 research institutions. Information should be submitted to cpi@tamu.edu by noon on February 12, 2010.

Contact:

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Request for Assistance with OPD Director Search

Dr. Luis Cifuentes, Chair of the Office of Proposal Development (OPD) Director Search Committee, has asked the CPI for assistance in building the applicant pool for the new OPD Director (formerly Mike Cronan). The search advisory committee is looking for individuals that show evidence of significant expertise and involvement in the following: Supporting institutional priorities related to research, education, scholarly and creative activities, and diversity; Providing long-term strategic support and coordination to increase funded research and scholarship; Advancing capacity for center-level research initiatives; Developing research, scholarly and creative partnerships; Enhancing the quality and competitiveness of large, multi-investigator, multi-disciplinary, and multi-institutional proposals toward a goal of increased funding for centers, institutes and similarly large research endeavors; Supporting individual faculty members, including new and junior faculty, creative artists and others, that are expanding into new program areas, or need special assistance to sustain high-quality, discipline-specific research, scholarly and creative work; Providing long-term strategic support for interdisciplinary research groups through a coordination program to encourage sustained communication to identify and pursue funding opportunities; Informing the community of funding opportunities, including targeting funding announcements to specific individuals and groups; and Providing training programs and information resources to help relevant personnel acquire the skills and knowledge needed to write more competitive proposals. If you know of any viable candidates, please forward their names, institutional affiliation(s) and email address(es) to Dr. Cifuentes by Friday, February 12, 2010.

Contact:

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Request for Judges and Call for Submissions for Student Research Week

Student Research Week (SRW) will be March 22-27, 2010. Each year, approximately 150 faculty, staff, and graduate students volunteer as judges for SRW. According to past survey results, one hundred percent (100%) of the judges enjoyed interacting with students and talking to them about their research. One judge commented, "this is a terrific program. I think it is one of the most important things students can get involved in at Texas A&M." Faculty members also play an important role in encouraging their undergraduate and graduate students to present their research or attend SRW events. The deadline to register to present research or to volunteer as a judge is February 28, 2010. To volunteer as a SRW judge or to present research, log in and register at <http://srw.tamu.edu>

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