

Report of the Research Policy Oversight Committee (2017-2018)

Date: April 3rd, 2018

RPOC committee members: Sanjeev Mukerjee (Chair, COE), Phil Brown (CSSH/BCHS), Jerry Hajar (COE), Joanne Miller (COS), Sheila Puffer (DMSB), Carey Rappaport (COE) and Gary Young (DMSB/BCHS), Nick McGruer (COS).

Committee charge:

- The RPOC shall review ORAF post-award processes to identify how they can be made more efficient to better serve faculty and their funders. In particular, RPOC shall consider processes that increase faculty ability to monitor ORAF transactions. RPOC is requested to work with the administration team focused on improving ORAF policies and practices and to review the 2016/17 RPOC recommendations. RPOC shall provide its independent recommendations.
- In collaboration with ITPC, NU ITS and ORAF, RPOC shall review existing IT post-award reporting tools within units at Northeastern and at other universities, and recommend a grant management system that will be implemented, expanded, or developed, and adopted University wide by September 2018. The grant management working group shall include principal investigators from each College.
- In collaboration with ITPC, LPOC, the Provost's Office, NU ITS, and the NU Library, RPOC shall identify and/or recommend a full suite of integrated services supporting the research data lifecycle. This group will consider protocols for data management and related data curation activities, including the option of systematic back-up of university computers. The data management working group shall include principal investigators from each College.
- Other priorities, to be determined by the Senate Agenda Committee, may be charged as they arise.

Committee Recommendations:

1. The committee notes that the bicameral nature of ORAF with pre and post award functions remains a serious impediment to its proper functioning, i.e., serving the funded. This is particularly challenging when the post award function technically does not reside in the realm of ORAF but in finance. One of the consistent recommendations of the prior year RPOC committee is to enable better communication/synchronization between the two functions. However, this is admittedly a complex mission which remains to be fulfilled. Towards this goal the first step is the upgradation of the software. The committee notes that acquisition and commissioning efforts being made towards implementing 'Priority 1' (onboarding and forecasting software) and 'E-paws' are in progress. As noted specific tailoring of these software is necessary for its proper implementation. For this an implementation committee has been instituted.
2. The committee notes that 'Banner' system is now outdated, and the university has to begin the process of either its upgradation or preferably find a replacement. This committee notes that since this process is time consuming an earlier decision would be of prudence.
3. It is also noted that the turnover of personnel at ORAF needs to be addressed.

4. The increasing backlog at all levels in ORAF functions need most urgent attention. These functions cover a wide milieu such as signing contracts, NDA's, setting up accounts etc. Some of these can be as lengthy as six months. Faculty get no reporting of expenditures since the e-print information is often outdated. There is no appropriate dashboard for faculty to make information on Banner decipherable. This fact has remained as a problem for more than a decade (since the implementation of Banner).
5. The committee also notes with some trepidation the depersonalization of communications with faculty. The recently implemented system involving mandatory UPAF makes this too formal and brings difficulties when dealing with issues requiring urgent attention.
6. The committee however notes with some satisfaction on the progress made towards addressing shortcomings on IRBs.
7. The committee deliberated on the seed funding of research and recommends a relook at priorities and expected outcomes. In addition, some steps need to be taken for a similar program designed for fostering undergraduate research.
8. Practices and procedures related to enable course buyout using overhead returns need to be addressed.