

Report of the 2022-2023 Research Oversight Policy Committee (RPOC)

Report date: February 13, 2023

Research Policy Oversight Committee (RPOC) SAC Liaison: Mike Gonyeau		
Faculty	Title	College
Ben Davaji	Assist. Prof.	COE
Justin Manjourides	Assoc. Prof.	BCHS
Richard Wamai	Assoc. Prof. (<i>Chair</i>)	CSSH
Lichuan Ye	Assoc. Prof.	BCHS
Nizar Zaarour	Assoc. Teaching Prof.	DMSB
Kim Holloway	(VP of Research; <i>ex officio</i>)	
Eric Stewart	(Ass.VP, Dir., Space Planning; <i>ex officio</i>)	

Committee Charges
1. Follow up on previous recommendations related to the creation of research charter agreements for all shared resources, including shared space and shared equipment.
2. Following the committee's recommendation from 2020-2021 report, the committee shall meet quarterly with NU-RES and HSRP (Office of Human Subject Research Protection) staff to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Exchange operational information and system/platform updatesb. Facilitate faculty/research staff members' understanding of the University's progressc. Review KPIs and progress towards goals
3. Survey researchers, departments and colleges to investigate the feasibility and fiscal soundness of shared research stockrooms to allow internal distribution of bulk items.

Background to the Charge:

The Committee will review and assess the direction and implementation of the university's research mission, advocate for its needs, review periodically and make recommendations on its research resources, infrastructures, and policies, serve as a research "ombuds-body" to address structural impediments and faculty complaints, and work with the Provost, the Senior Vice President for Administration & Finance, the Senior Vice President for Institutional Advancement, and the President to insure the best possible environment for research and scholarship.

Procedures: The Committee had its first meeting on October 18, 2022, elected the Committee Chair and created a plan for the Charges, and for communication and document exchange.

Charge 1: Follow up on previous recommendations related to the creation of research charter agreements for all shared resources, including shared space and shared equipment.

Procedures: The Committee discussed this question during our meetings in January and February 2023. We also reviewed the RPOC committee of 2021-2022.

Findings: The 2021-2022 Committee had been charged to “examine progress on the university-wide adoption of the Charter Agreement Template entitled “Shared Space Charter Template” that had been developed by the 2020-2021 RPOC. The 2021-2022 RPOC had therefore “surveyed administrators in each college who had responsibility for space planning and assignments to document (i) familiarity of shared space charters, (ii) college policy”. Survey results showed there were no “existing charter agreement in place” for shared spaces or equipment”. That committee thus recommended that “Faculty Senate should continue to monitor and advocate for the creation of charter agreements for all shared spaces/equipment” and advised a future charge that “office of the Provost adopt the template”.

The 2020-2021 RPOC had compiled the *Charter agreement* comprising 9 recommendation points whose goal is “to offer salient prompts for discussion to create an efficient and equitable agreement concerning the use and operation of shared space, resources, *etcetera*.”

Given the above, our committee find that this topic has been thoroughly covered in the past. There are various shared spaces on campus such as ISEC, and this may be a bigger issue in the expanding global university. The template is available as a valuable grounds-rules resource to university groups as needed. We support the previous call for the adoption of the template but do not see a path where the university adopts it as mandatory.

Recommendations: (1) We recommend that the Faculty Senate make the charter more widely known. (2) We advocate for monitoring how lab and other space is being shared (and document if/where problems arise). (3) We propose a future Committee could write a survey (perhaps periodically), especially drawing on insights from the “stockroom” survey (Charge 3, below).

Charge 2: Following the committee’s recommendation from 2020-2021 report, the committee shall meet quarterly with NU-RES and HSRP (Office of Human Subject Research Protection) staff to: (a) Exchange operational information and system/platform updates; (b) Facilitate faculty/research staff members’ understanding of the University’s progress; (c) Review KPIs and progress towards goals.

Procedures: The Committee invited Robin Cyr and Anita Balgopal from the NU Office of Human Subject Research Protection (HSRP) and NU-RES meeting both during the 12/8/2022 and 2/9/2023 committee meetings for briefings and discussions on the current status of the NU HSRP/IRB process and infrastructure. Robin is the Vice Provost for Research Administration and Anita is the new Exec Director of the Human Research

Protection Program (HRPP, including IRB). Also on the February 9, 2023 committee meeting Amanda Humphrey, Chief Research Operations Officer in Research Administration attended. Additional feedback via email was solicited from these leaders.

Findings: Robin Cyr informed the committee some recent changes related to research administration at the 12/8/2022 meeting and via email (Feb 9). These include:

- An additional person was hired to negotiate contracts in order to decrease the length of time to review and contracts negotiation.
- A new dedicated data team was tasked to speed up research grant accounts set up, research finance review, and QA checks.
- A new Global Safety Program was created to oversee safety, biohazard waste management, and safety training for research staff. This is in urgent need as in 2022 calendar year there were 50 accidents in labs on Northeastern campuses. Talented leaders have been hired for this new office.
- Other work in progress include key performance indicators (KPIs) developed for pre-award team, and research finance (post-award) just started to develop KPIs.
- The University Compliance Office and NU-RES Research Compliance have been working to improve the annual Electronic Conflict Disclosure system (eCD) disclosure process in an effort to reduce administrative burden. Whereas last cycle, there was a separate Microsoft Form questionnaire on international engagements, all questions have been combined into the eCD with a new 'nested question' feature that only reveals follow up questions based on answers to previous questions. A TEST questionnaire was shared with us for review.

Amanda Humphrey, from Robin's office, updated a few more items on 2/9/2023, including

- Federal funding agencies are increasing emphasis on safe work environment, with new measures developed to facilitate safe working environment globally.
- Change and improve operations around responsible conduct of research. New training modules will be developed including mentorship training this year. RCR training for faculty on NSF projects will become mandatory with mentorship as the first topic required by NSF.
- The new eCD form is expected to be out in March 2023 for this year's cycle.

Anita Balgopal shared with the committee some exciting changes of IRB in recent months.

- A new email box is dedicated to IRB submission: IRBReview@northeastern.edu
- Growth of the office to be a team of 6 staff members. Long-time director of the Office of Human Subject Research Protection Nan C Regina retired. More experienced staff and additional staff reviewers have or will join the team.
- 12 new IRB members have been recruited, including faculty members on Boston and Oakland campuses.
- Other actions have been implemented recently including 1) A new modification form is developed for approved protocols; 2) Guidance has been provided on reliance agreement / one IRB; and 3) A new coordinator is hired to oversee appliance agreement.
- Moving forward, Anita shared the goals including 1) to increase visibility of the IRB office, 2) to refine the IRB protocol review process from exclusive in-house staff review to the review engaging board members with expertise, 3) to speed up the

review time, and 4) to develop more proactive approaches in terms of compliance. In addition, the office will increase training and education opportunities such as graduate students' seminars and will increase transparency in the review process. Additional efforts will lead to comprehensive database tracking and one coherent online system for IRB review in the future. With the streamlined submission and review process, the newly hired staff member and increase training, the goal is speed up the IRB process in the near future.

Charge 3: Survey researchers, departments and colleges to investigate the feasibility and fiscal soundness of shared research stockrooms to allow internal distribution of bulk items.

Procedures: In our first meeting of October 18, we discussed creating this survey and designated one of us to draft the survey questionnaire. Over the next week we exchanged ideas over email and worked on the draft finalizing and submitting it before deadline on October 28 for the general SAC fall 2022 survey. Survey results were received on November 23, 2022. Summary charts were returned together with the raw data in excel. We conducted further analysis of the data from 270 faculty member responses, and we summarized the findings based on the two categories.

Findings: The survey showed:

1. Participation from both experimental and lab-based faculty members (21%), as well as non-experimental and non-lab-based faculty members (79%) (Figure 1a).
2. Experimental and lab-based faculty members (21% of overall responders) in majority believe that a stockroom on campus will make a positive impact on their research, and rest of responder are willing to try the stockrooms. In this category, there is no response that finds stock rooms will have no impact (Figure 1b).
3. Four out of five (79%) of responders, non-experimental or non-lab-based faculty members, identify no direct impact for stockrooms, and a small number of outlier data points find stockrooms impactful and willing to try (Figure 1c).
4. The stockroom received strong positive responses from experimental/lab-based faculty members and suggestions for the items to include. The data suggest a reasonable demand for having stockrooms on campus; also, the data indicates this demand will be limited to experimental and lab-based faculty members, so a favorable location for future stockrooms will be close to experimental/lab-based faculty members.

Recommendation:

RPOC recommends including a follow-up process regarding the stock rooms on the RPOC next year's chargers. This charge assigns RPOC to contact the Associate Deans of Administration and Finance in the colleges that would likely be interested in a stock room (COS, COE, Bouvé) and report college-level interest.

Proposed Future Charge: The committee suggests following up on decision for having stockroom(s) on campus, timeline and location with SVPR’s team in the future.

Attachments:

1. Charge 3_Shared stock room survey questions

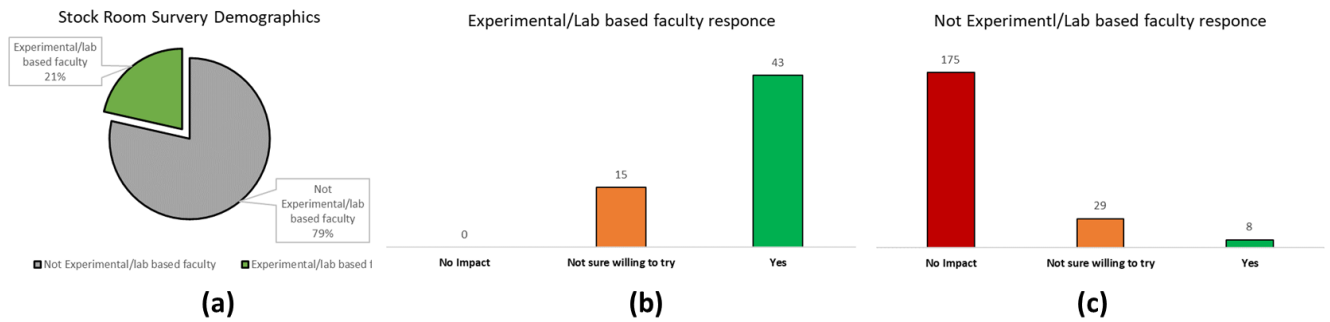


Figure 1. The Fall 2022 stockroom survey data. **(a)** show the response breakdown with faculty research, **(b)** shows the breakdown responses from experimental and lab-based faculty members in support of stockrooms, and **(c)** non-experimental/lab-based faculty members did not find that stockrooms directly impact their research.