



TO: Senate Agenda Committee
 FROM: Research Policy Oversight Committee (RPOC)
 DATE: 9 February 2024
 SUBJECT: Final report for RPOC

Research Policy Oversight Committee (RPOC) SAC Liaison: Yingzi Lin

Faculty	Title	College
David Budil (Chair)	Assoc. Prof.	COS
Ben Davaji	Asst. Prof.	COE
Dino Konstantopoulos	Asst. Teaching Prof.	COE
Wallace Lages	Asst. Prof.	CAMD
Jessica Oakes	Assoc. Prof.	COE
Hongwei Sun	Prof.	COE
Kim Holloway	VP of Research (<i>ex officio</i>)	
Eric Stewart	(Assoc. VP, Space Planning (<i>ex officio</i>))	

The RPOC committee has had 5 meetings so far during the academic year. The committee worked on the specific charges assigned by SAC. The charges were addressed as follows with recommendations .

Charge 1

Assess how lab and other spaces and resources (including virtual resources) are being shared and document any problems that may arise.

Background

This charge is a continuing follow-up to the Charter Agreement Template entitled “Shared Space Charter Template” that was originally developed by the 2020-2021 RPOC. This template recommended 9 “points for discussion to create an efficient and equitable agreement concerning the use and operation of shared space, resources, *etc.*” The 2021-2022 RPOC followed up by surveying “administrators in each college who had responsibility for space planning and assignments to document (i) familiarity of shared space charters, (ii) college policy”. The Senate approved a resolution “that the office of the Provost adopt the template for research charter agreements for all shared resources, including shared space and equipment from the 2021-2022 RPOC report, as recorded at the link (<https://faculty.northeastern.edu/senate/resolutions/2021-2022/>). This record also shows that neither the Provost nor the Board of Trustees approved this resolution in 2022, which is why the succeeding (2022-2023) RPOC found that “this topic has been thoroughly covered in the past.” However, it did note that “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.” It concluded that the Senate should make the Charter more widely known and continue to monitor the use of shared space (which is the present Charge).

Although our Committee could not find a publicly accessible copy of the template, *ex officio* member Eric Stewart provided one, and has distributed it to several shared space planners in the colleges. The Template is included in this report as an Appendix.

Activities

The RPOC committee has met 5 times so far this academic year to consider this charge, including a consultation with the Assoc. Deans of Space and Planning from COE and COS. Since the scope of “shared resources (including virtual resources)” is very broad, the committee’s inquiry was focused on shared laboratory and office spaces in the two newest research buildings, ISEC and EXP. Questions submitted by RPOC for the Senate Faculty Survey were targeted at this type of space. The committee members also collected feedback from *ad hoc* interviews, including a discussion of shared space issues sponsored by the Diversity Committee of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology.

Findings: Results of Faculty Survey

of 597 respondents, the great majority of whom work on the Boston campus, 177 (30%) indicated that they work in a shared laboratory or office space. 150 respondents from the latter group responded to additional questions as follows.

Faculty in shared space were asked to rank on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) the following questions:

1. *How comfortable are you with working in a shared space?* Overall there was a net positive response to this question, with 72% responding 3 or higher.
2. *How much has working in a shared space promoted collaboration with your colleagues?* There was a net negative response to this question, with 82% responding 3 or lower.
3. *How well did the shared space match your expectations for moving into it?* The response to this question was relatively balanced, with 36% responding 1 or 2 and 28% responding 4 or 5.
4. *How well was the planning of the shared space carried out?* This question also received a relatively balanced response with 37% responding 1 or 2 and 30% responding 4 or 5.

5. *What is the major benefit you have found from working in a shared space?* Over half (51%) of respondents answered “none” while 28% selected access to more equipment, improved work environment, and better familiarity with research at Northeastern. The remaining respondents suggested “Other” benefits, which primarily applied to shared office space. The most cited benefits included a better collaborative and social atmosphere, accommodation to a hybrid work schedule, and addressing the campus office shortage.
6. *What is the major disadvantage you have found from working in a shared space?* Most respondents (39%) selected “Loss of personal or lab space”. The second most-selected response to this question was “Other”, and the responses focused more on shared laboratory space, emphasizing the distractions in such spaces as well as security and safety concerns.
7. The *ad-hoc* interviews revealed a set of common perceptions from those sharing newer spaces on the Boston campus (e.g. ISEC and EXP). Seven major themes were identified in the feedback: 1) improved local communication – sharing office spaces with collaborators and/or administration leads to better information flow; 2) a need for better communication of the “rules” for occupying new spaces to the occupants; 3) greater space flexibility – sharing necessitates the reallocation of lab space as required; 4) reduced interactions – the fear of disturbing others makes students and investigators refrain from spontaneous conversations; 5) lack of privacy – many existing spaces do not adequately support private and confidential meetings; 6) reduced sense of community – current rules hinder lab’s efforts to maintain identity and support a sense of belonging; 7) reduced ability to focus because of distractions from foot traffic, equipment, and noise

A comparison of the results of the Faculty Survey, *ad hoc* interviews, and the Charter Template suggests that the Charter could be better aligned to address the practical difficulties that faculty have experienced in their actual occupation of shared spaces, in particular issues with scheduling and flexibility. We found no evidence that the Charter has played a role in any of the shared spaces we surveyed.

In addition, the Charter seems more focused on shared research facilities, as opposed to shared office space or virtual resources. Much of this focus overlaps with templates that have been independently developed by the Shared Research Facility Oversight Committee (SRFOC), on which one of us (Budil) has served for 3 years as Chair or Acting Chair.

Recommendation

We recommend that RPOC reevaluate the Charter with a view to removing overlap with already existing guidelines for shared facilities and institutes and identifying best practices if possible. The Charter should also focus more on the pain points identified in our faculty survey, specifically the flexibility and scheduling of other shared spaces such as laboratories, offices, and conference rooms. Approaching such revisions in consultation with campus space planners in the Colleges and Provost’s Office could improve its chances of being approved by the Provost and Board of Trustees. We

concur with the previous RPOC's recommendation that the Senate should continue monitoring of shared space use and increase general awareness of the Charter.

Charge 2

Follow up the RPOC's charges regarding stock rooms by contacting the Associate Deans of Administration and Finance in the Colleges of Science (COS), Engineering (COE), and Health Sciences (Bouvé).

Background

The 2022-2023 RPOC submitted a survey of faculty to “investigate the feasibility and fiscal soundness of shared research stockrooms”. They found that a majority of experimental and lab based respondents believe that a stockroom on campus would make a positive impact on their research, with the remainder willing to try the stockrooms. Although some respondents suggested items that should be stocked, these were not included in the RPOC report. In contrast, 80% of the non-experimental or non-lab-based could identify no direct impact of stockrooms.

Activities

Work on this charge has been initiated but not completed by the current RPOC. One interview has been conducted with College of Science Associate Dean Sam Inman, who indicated that he has never received a request to establish a stockroom, suggesting that there has not been a perceived urgent need for one among COS faculty. He agreed that this may be because office and laboratory items may now be ordered via the internet and quickly delivered by courier or post. However, he recognized the possibility of some future need to stock specialty items that might not be so readily available. Given the investment in space, stock, and management personnel needed to establish a stockroom, he emphasized that there would need to be a compelling use case for such a thing. Associate Dean Inman noted that he has had to address other issues of accessibility to supplies in the College, which have mainly been associated with problems in local mail service within Northeastern.

Recommendation

This charge can very quickly be completed by the present RPOC. So far there does not appear to be any immediate interest from of the Colleges to establish local stockrooms. Considering the associated costs, a strong use case must be made for a new stockroom, which was not evident in the previous survey. A more appropriate locus for supply stocks may be in the shared research facilities, where specialized materials and equipment for specific applications are needed to support a user base. No action by the Faculty Senate is recommended.

Charge 3

Coordinate with the Associate Deans of Research in the Colleges, the Shared Resource Facility Oversight Committee (SRFOC) and the Vice Provost for Research to develop a plan to implement centralized listing of available shared research tools on campus.

Background

This is a new undertaking by the RPOC.

Activities

RPOC met with Erin Hale, Director of Research Development and Operations in the SVPR's Office, on Oct. 25, 2024. One of her missions is to build a University-wide list of shared instrumentation. Erin provided an update on the status of this project and shared her current list of major resources. RPOC reviewed the list and provided all the updates of which it was aware. The list is available at

<https://research.northeastern.edu/shared-research-facilities/shared-research-facilities-at-nu/> and includes all the recently established "core" or shared research facilities. The Committee discussed the need for a more comprehensive list of instrumentation on campus to improve efficiency and avoid redundancy where possible. This would require access to the equipment inventory (SAGE) maintained by the Office of the Controller and a survey of the equipment managers in order to assess what equipment is available for sharing and on what basis.

Recommendation

RPOC should continue monitoring and assisting in this effort where possible.

Other Activities:

RPOC received a request from Joan Cyr and Dana Carroll of NU-RESto consider recommending that the Senate endorse moving forward with an upgrade to the electronic Proposal Approval and Workflow System (namely ePAWS 2.0). RPOC met with them on November 22, 2023 to hear a presentation of the capabilities of this upgrade and was favorably impressed. However, the initiative was funded by the Provost's Office shortly thereafter, obviating the need for a Faculty Senate endorsement.

Respectfully submitted,



Appendix

Shared Facility Charter Template

Laboratories, offices, other physical space, and equipment supporting Northeastern University activities are valuable and limited resources requiring active management and continuous stewardship. Shared resources among University members can be assigned to address diverse space related needs in the University including: enabling efficiency in activities that require common resources, fostering collaboration between interdisciplinary activities, enabling close working relationships between University members, using and sharing common equipment, addressing the reality of shortage of space, among others. Support by the University, its colleges and its departments for the shared resources should result in better safety, community, and efficacy in the shared investments as faculty and staff can focus on the intended scholarship, teaching and service. The goal of this document is to offer salient prompts for discussion to create an efficient and equitable agreement concerning the use and operation of shared resources.

Key charter agreement points:

1. Define and describe the equipment and facilities that will be shared. Be specific. Include space, hardware, software, utilities, personnel, and all resources that are essential for the shared resource.
2. List all faculty and staff, principal investigators, etc., who will play a management role for the shared resources, as well as administrative responsibilities for those in the management roles.
3. List all stakeholders whose job functions require use of the shared resources. For each stakeholder, include the specific roles and responsibilities.
4. List the purposes intended for each of the shared resources as well as roles and responsibilities for staff. Be specific.
5. List how the shared physical space, resources, and equipment, or each component contained therein, will be utilized. For each item as appropriate, indicate: normal use and operation, training, access scheduling, required common supplies, replenishment of consumables, cost sharing, maintenance, repair, safety rules, protection of confidential information and intellectual property, and if results of shared resources will require joint attribution or credit.
6. Identify all on-going tasks, including for example: periodic management tasks, training, updating scheduling resources, performance of safety checks and follow-ups, ordering of shared consumables, coordinating of maintenance and repairs, billing for shared costs, regular communications between stakeholders, meetings between stakeholders, storage tasks, clean-out tasks, updating evergreen

documentation, updating BioRAFT, among others. Identify who will perform each task. Identify when and how tasks will be rotated among stakeholders.

7. Identify how each college administration and/or how the University administration supports the shared space, e.g. with financial budgets, lab managers or directors, support technicians, support assistants, assistance for collaborative and synergistic projects, listservs, a first point of contact for troubleshooting and dispute resolution, among others, to enable better safety, community, and efficacy in the shared investments as faculty and staff can focus on the intended scholarship, teaching and service. List how University services, such as campus mail delivery, will operate to support the shared space.
8. Describe how the stakeholders will arbitrate. Consider regular meetings between stakeholders to discuss issues. Identify an appropriate hierarchy of aforementioned contacts in section 2 above to help resolve challenges and difficult issues.
9. Define the period at which the charter will be reviewed for any needed updates and changes. Once created, this document should be reviewed both periodically, i.e. at least annually, when new people are onboarded, and when new spaces or resources become available. For tenure-track, junior faculty, planning to revisit the contract during year three may be helpful.

The undersigned comprise all those in sections 2 and 3. They hereby agree on (i) the information documented herein, (ii) the operation and use of the shared space and resources as described herein, (iii) the notification and agreement of all stakeholders before there is any significant modification to sections 1-9, and (iv) the actions mandated as described in sections 1-9.