

# Report of the 2019-2020 Research Oversight Policy Committee (RPOC)

March 23, 2020

## **Committee membership:**

Alexandros Makriyannis - George D Behrakis Chair of Pharmaceutical Biotechnology; Darien Wood (Committee Chair) - COS – Physics; Gary Young - DMSB/BCHS - International Business and Strategy; Steve Lustig - COE - Chemical Engineering; Daniel Noemi Voionmaa - CSSH - Cultures, Societies, & Global Studies; Michael Arnold Mages - CAMD - Art + Design, Library and Information Collaboration Committee (LICC); Deniz Erdogmus (SAC Liaison) - COE – Electrical and Computer Engineering

**Background to the Charge:** The Committee reviews and assesses the direction and implementation of the University’s research mission, advocates for its needs, reviews periodically and makes recommendations on its research resources, infrastructures, and policies, serves as a research “ombuds-body” to address structural impediments and faculty complaints, and works 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.

Charge 1, which focuses on assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of NU-RES operations, was formulated by SAC as the initial charge to RPOC. Charge 2, regarding the policies applied to shared research space, emerged from discussions within RPOC. With the agreement and encouragement of SAC, this charge was pursued as well.

**Charge 1:** The RPOC shall review NU-RES and Accounts Payable pre-award and post-award processes to identify how they can be made more efficient and more visible to faculty to better serve faculty and their funders. In particular, the following areas should be examined:

1. Expedited contract approval
2. Expedited Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs)
3. Expedited issuing of purchase orders and possible ways to decrease the number of purchase orders needed
4. Future phases of ePAWs that incorporate the ability to track expenditures on existing research accounts
5. Systems to make invoicing on grants more timely and transparent
6. Streamlined and effective communication between NU-RES and faculty investigators and between Accounts Payable and administrative staff

**Procedures:** On January 14, 2020 the RPOC invited Jeff Seo (Interim Vice Provost of NU-RES Administration; AVP Research Compliance) to meet with the committee, along with members of his team representing some of the key functions of NU-RES: Alex Tran (Director – NU-RES Finance), Eva Pasadas (Director, Grants and Contracts) and Joan Cyr (Associate Director -

Research Operations and Systems). Along with the general discussion, there were presentations from Tran, Pasadas and Cyr to illustrate the functioning of their domains.

**Findings:** NU-RES Finance administers a portfolio of \$12 M/month on average, comprising 898 active externally-funded awards. Banner billing started in January, 2019. About 200 invoices per month must still be done on paper. Vendors asking for increased documentation. The diversity of the portfolio is a challenge. Some metrics of performance are available on dashboards.

The Research Enterprise Services Administration handles proposal review and submission, compliance review, and compiles complete award obligation setup packages to hand off to Research Finance. There can be delays for information privacy with industry contracts.

Contract tracking is now visible in the dashboard in eCLAWs, which went live in December 2019, in addition to the tracking log in SharePoint. NU-RES has implemented an "escalation and redistribution" process, whereby the status of contracts is reviewed at least weekly and redistributed within the team and/or escalated to Director, depending on the scenario, so as to avoid delays on the part of NU RES. A monthly report flags any delays greater than 90 days. The information is housed on sharepoint. A form of dashboard has been created via eCLAWs, which is currently in use and available to faculty today. Enhancements to the dashboard are expected in the future.

It was noted that templated contracts can achieve very fast turnaround times (around five days for unmodified NU templates). A large variety of templates are available.

It was noted that the turnaround times for contracts have improved over recent years. In particular, Non-Disclosure Agreements can be processed very quickly when they are straightforward and modest in scope.

**Recommendations:**

- The use of templated contracts should be strongly advertised and encouraged.
- We encourage the establishment of a set of key performance indicators that can meaningfully be used by NU-RES and RPOC to monitor productivity and process efficiency.
- We encourage further development of the eCLAWs dashboard interface for faculty to monitor status and delays.

**Resolutions:**

None.

**Charge 2:** The RPOC shall examine the policies for shared research space.

**Procedures:** The RPOC met with Eric Stewart, Director of Academic Space Planning and Jim Brand, Director Space-Capital Planning-Campus Planning & Real Estate. The meeting was also attended by several members of SAC.

**Findings:** The growing trend at Northeastern University is that laboratory resources (space and equipment) will be frequently shared, however there are no charters or guidelines for operating with shared resources. There have been difficult challenges in the earliest shared space labs, notably in Mugar and ISEC, that might have been prevented if charters had been established. The Directors agree that establishing agreements and expectations in each case is a great idea. The College of Engineering (COE) has recently formulated a Space Policy that includes a section Shared Space Policy. A recent draft of the Shared Space Policy follows:

“Use of a shared lab space could address diverse space related needs in the College including fostering collaboration between interdisciplinary faculty, enabling close working relationships between collaborating faculty, using/sharing common experimental equipment/instruments, addressing the reality of shortage of lab space on campus, among others. In case, a shared lab is established, the group of faculty along with the Dean and the unit-heads will create a shared lab space policy specific to that lab. This policy will address operational, cost and personnel related topics, such as: lab rules, guidelines and procedures for lab access, safety, EH&S requirements, normal operations, equipment scheduling, repairs, supply stocking, and cost sharing. Before any changes in occupancy assignment, space usage, and equipment, all stakeholders will be notified and permitted feedback/approval. In cases in which the space is shared between different University operating units, department heads/chairs of all stakeholders will approve the policy. This requirement is retroactive to all existing shared lab space involving the COE.”

**Recommendations:**

- Agreements on the operation of shared resources (space and equipment) should be established between the colleges and/or departments involved.
- The Sr. Vice-Provost for Research should work with the Deans' Council to formulate template agreements.

**Resolutions:**

**Whereas the sharing of research laboratory resources is becoming more common at Northeastern University,  
BE IT RESOLVED that that the Senate recommend that the Provost act with the Deans' Council to establish a framework and related process for agreements that would be required for shared research resources (space, facilities, equipment).**