Report of the 2020-2021 Research Oversight Policy Committee (RPOC)

April 6, 2021

Committee members:
1. Tamara Bonaci (NTT Prof-Khoury-Seattle)
2. Kim Holloway (VP of Research; *ex officio*)
3. Amy Lu (AssocProf-CAMD/BCHS-CommStudies/HealthSciences)
4. Steve Lustig (AssocProf-COS-ChemEng)
5. Patricia Mabrouk (Prof-COS-Chem)
6. Michael Arnold Mages (AsstProf-CAMD-Art&Design)
7. Eric Stewart (AssVP, Dir., Space Planning; *ex officio*)
8. Richard Wamai (AssocProf-CSSH-Cultures)

Background to the Charge:
The Committee will review and assess the direction and implementation of the university's research mission, advocate broadly for research needs of faculty and research staff, review periodically and make recommendations on the university's 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.

Charge 1: The Committee 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 leading to recommendations: (a) Adoption of template contracts and Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) to expedite contract approvals; (b) Future phases of ePAWs that can track expenditures on existing research accounts – verify the implementation of a "dashboard interface" for faculty to monitor status and delays; (c) Establishing a set of key performance indicators that can meaningfully be used by NU-RES and RPOC to monitor productivity and process efficiency for faculty investigators.

Procedures: The Committee had its first meeting on November 11, 2020 and decided to invite members from the NU Office of Human Subject Research Protection (HSRP) for a joint discussion. On February 22, 2021, the Committee met with NU HSRP Director, Nan Regina and exchanged ideas re. the current status of the NU HSRP/IRB process and infrastructure. Additionally, feedback via email was solicited from other senior leaders within NU-RES via the Vice Provost for Research Administration, Robin Cyr.

Findings: (Appendix 1)
(a) Adoption of templates contracts and NDAs was proposed by NU-RES to RPOC in 2019–20. This is completed. NU-RES has created Non-Disclosure, Sponsored Research and Material Transfer Templates that incorporate NU accepted terms and

conditions and an expedited review process when the other party uses these templates available here: https://research.northeastern.edu/nu-res/lifecycle-management/agreement-review/. Additionally, NU standard agreement templates can be found here: https://research.northeastern.edu/nu-res/corporate-sponsored-research-agreement/ Further action on this point would include promoting the availability of these templates and related expedited procedures to faculty investigators.

(b) Future phases of ePAWs. This is to be determined. ITS is currently hiring several dedicated positions to transition support and future development of ePAWs v2.0 in-house. We recommend that the RPOC committee follow up during Fall of 2021 with NU-RES and ITS on this point.

(c) Establishing a set of key performance indicators for NU-RES. NU-RES has established KPIs and provides a weekly productivity report to Vice Provost for Research Administration, who in turn shares these data on a weekly basis with the Research Continuity Task Force, including the ADRs for each college. The survey has been completed, and results shared with stakeholders at NU as needed. Additional indicators and processes are recommended to identify and resolve contracts that are not progressing with effective expediency, particularly in cases that cannot use the standardized contract templates. Unfinished contract indicators do not indicate the process step and responsible party currently pending.

Recommendations: The Committee recommends a continuous exchange of operational information and system/platform updates on a regular base among the NU-RES, HSRP, and RPOC to facilitate faculty/research staff members' understanding of the university's progress. The committee recommends that RPOC meet (once quarterly?) with NU-RES and HSRP staff to review KPIs and progress towards goals. Additional indicators and processes are likely needed in NU-RES to identify and resolve contracts that are not progressing with effective expediency.

Charge 2: The committee shall examine the policies related to research activities and space. In particular, the following items should be examined leading to recommendations: (a) Implementation of template agreements regarding shared resources (space and equipment) in accordance with the recent senate resolution and with the Provost's Office (Sr. Vice-Provost for Research); (b) Shared research activity and space restrictions, limitations (and opportunities) implemented by NU initiatives for combating COVID-19, along with recently-established policies and procedures for their execution.

Procedures: The RPOC discussed historical and current cases of shared resource issues and dynamics that underscore the need to implement shared resource charters, particularly when resources are shared across departments and colleges. The RPOC members (a) shared and discussed personal experiences, (b) interviewed postdoc, junior and senior investigators in COE, CSSH, Bouvé, Khoury currently involved in shared spaces, and (c) engaged University administrators having roles in research and

space allocation. The RPOC drafted a template for shared resource charters and sought feedback from those interviewed who are currently stakeholders in shared spaces. The template charter was refined using the feedback.

Findings: (Appendix 2)

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 the following: 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 and its colleges 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 College of Engineering operates with a Research Space Policy that already includes a provision for the operation of shared spaces. In shared lab spaces the faculty, the Dean and the unit-heads will create a shared lab space policy specific to that lab. This policy addresses 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 not currently enforced by other Colleges.

Strategies and planning can be implemented to help stakeholders of shared resources, particularly to avoid common challenges associated with shared resources between departments and colleges. Since most instances of shared resources are unique situations, the RPOC can offer templates to stakeholders to identify potential pain points and plan to prevent them through discussion and agreed charters. These generalized strategies and plans can be documented into a template that requires specific instance definitions, including: definition of the shared resources, definition of those with management roles of the shared resources, definition of the stakeholders, definition of the purpose and operation of the shared resources (e.g. budgeting for shared consumables, use and scheduling of shared equipment), definition how University administration supports the shared resources, definition of procedures for regular communication between stakeholders as well as conflict mediation and arbitration. The RPOC has compiled a *Charter Agreement Template* ("Shared Space Charter Template") comprising recommended strategy and planning points to offer salient prompts for discussion to create equitable agreements concerning the use and operation of shared resources within and among departments and colleges.

Recommendations:
- The RPOC recommends that the charter agreement template be hosted in perpetuity by the office of the Provost and disseminated to college Deans' staff for use in all instances of shared spaces.
- In the next academic year, RPOC should solicit feedback from the colleges and update the charter template accordingly.

Charge 3: Other charges may be determined by the Senate Agenda Committee as new priorities arise.

Postdoc Policy Implementation: In January 2021, a new University policy on postdocs with external funding was announced. Working with the Provost's office, ADRs and college leadership the RPOC sought to understand the context/background of the new postdoc policy and worries about it being implemented from faculty so as to come up with recommendations for the Provost's office via the Senate. The RPOC determined that the background discussion came about as a result of requests from Human Resources and the Office of the General Council at Northeastern to have postdoctoral hiring practices aligned and compliant with the Fair Labor Standards Act. A report has been prepared with the full background and 14 areas of concern concluding with 5 recommendations from the ADRs and RPOC as follows (Appendix 3):

Recommendations**:**
1. A definitive list of fellowships/examples [NU-RES are working on putting this type of list together], a list of which have fallen into what category- as many as possible that could give a sense of how many fellowships are subject to the policy. The list should be updated bi-annually.
2. We recommend that the process related to research personnel policies involve research leadership at the institution at an earlier stage, if not to inform the policy, but to also give a sense of input and ownership.
3. We recommend a specific process for determining the type of fellowship-promoting consistency in implementation, meritocracy, and process. Who will be involved? How shall the procedure be carried out? How do we decide whether a position is project vs. merit based? It makes sense for this to be performed at the award stage? How do we capture those fellowships NOT going through NU-RES that are subject to this policy? Northeastern needs to develop a decision tree, with input from NU-RES, colleges and finance.
4. Extend time to apply for Provost matching funds for this policy to Dec 30, 2021.
5. We recommend a thorough review of the career development activities available to postdoctoral associates and fellows across the board. The activities that are mentioned in point 10 above, as well as any other career development engagements, should be available to all postdocs at Northeastern.

Proposed Future Charge: *Graduate student-advisor relationships*

In ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts, the University recognizes the importance of a relationship between a graduate student and their advisor(s). While in most cases, such relationships are positive, in some instances, a student may have to switch their advisors, labs and programs because of the incompatibility of research focus, or advising style, but also because of more serious issues involving misconduct or abuse from colleagues or advisors. The committee is tasked to conduct a University-wide examination of possible troubling student-advisor relationships. The committee will review and assess the reasons for students to switch labs and programs, and make recommendations about the procedures involving student transitions. More specifically, the committee will: (a) gather information about the students transitioning between faculty/labs/programs, and about transition procedures for different colleges and program, (b) investigate existing policies and procedures for handling allegations of misconduct against faculty and staff, (c) investigate existing policies for preventing and publishing retaliation against transitioning students, and (d) investigate existing policies for possible transitional funding.

Appendixes:
1. Charge 1 - NU-RES _Questions & Feedback
2. Charge 2 - _SharedSpaceTemplate-v20210406
3. Postdoc Policy for Senate Report.DRAFT v2

I asked the questions of NU-RES from last years report. See answers below:

The committee 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 leading to recommendations:

(a) Adoption of template contracts and Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) to expedite contract approvals; https://research.northeastern.edu/nu-res/lifecycle-management/agreement-review/ Completed. NU-RES has created Non-Disclosure, Sponsored Research and Material Transfer Templates that incorporate NU accepted terms and conditions and an expedited review process when the other party uses these templates. NU standard agreement templates can be found here: https://research.northeastern.edu/nu-res/corporate-sponsored-research-agreement/

(b) Future phases of ePAWs that can track expenditures on existing research accounts – verify the implementation of a "dashboard interface" for faculty to monitor status and delays;
We don't know if this is working or not. Refined implementation of these interfaces. TBD, ITS is currently hiring several dedicated positions to transition support and future development of ePAWs v2.0 in-house.

(c) Establishing a set of key performance indicators that can meaningfully be used by NU-RES and RPOC to monitor productivity and process efficiency for faculty investigators. Any impediments, whether this can be done, indicators to do that. Could NU-RES share the information they received from their survey. COE has also done the same- a survey related to how they are progressing with Research Admin. Internal to COE. Perhaps could be leveraged to be used by other colleges. NU-RES has established KPIs and provides a weekly productivity report to VPRA, who in turn shares these data on a weekly basis with the Research Continuity Task Force, including the ADRs for each college. The survey has been completed, and results shared with stakeholders at NU as needed.

Shared Space 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 and its colleges 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 physical space, staff, facilities (e.g., supplies, computing), and equipment, etc., that will be shared. Be specific. Include space, staff, and resources that are essential to your enterprises.

2. List all College Deans and operating unit heads, i.e. department chairs, institute directors, core directors, principal investigators, etc., who will play a management role for the shared physical space, staff, resources, and equipment as well as administrative responsibilities for those in the management roles.

3. List all stakeholders whose job functions require use of the shared physical space, staff, resources and equipment. For each stakeholder, include the specific roles and responsibilities.

4. List the purposes intended for each of the shared physical space, resources and equipment 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, 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, 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.

Research Policy Oversight Committee: response to Postdoc Policy Implementation

Background and context on the new postdoctoral fellowship policy:

1. The discussion of the hiring practices for postdocs with external funding came about as a result of requests from Human Resources and the Office of the General Council at Northeastern to have postdoctoral hiring practices aligned and compliant with the Fair Labor Standards Act. It ensures all postdocs are paid at the standard postdoctoral salary, as per Northeastern HR and federal guidelines.
2. Historically, postdocs with external fellowship funding who were otherwise supported by faculty grants or other sources of funding, would have that funding reduced by the amount of the fellowship. This often results in postdocs losing specific benefits that are afforded to Northeastern employees, such as their access to benefits, amount of 401k contribution, Northeastern's 401k matching contribution etc.
3. The postdoctoral landscape has changed in recent years, and in specific fields, whereby postdoc terms can be 4 or 5 years, meaning that these individuals can have a significant portion of their working life not covered by Northeastern benefits.
4. Northeastern undertook a benchmarking exercise, together with college administration representation, to understand the landscape of funding these positions at peer institutions, including the Broad Institute.
5. As an additional benefit of this policy, postdocs being able to retain their external funding is a way of making Northeastern University more appealing for potential top-level candidates (the ones likely winning these fellowships) than other peer institutions with more "brand" appeal, who do not have similar policies.
6. The policy of retaining the fellowship funding only applies to funding benefitting the *person*, not a *project*. This excludes many, if not all, federal fellowships from this policy, and many postdoctoral fellowships from non-federal sources. Therefore, the number of fellowships to which this policy applies is likely 2-3 per year, per college.
7. Any faculty unable to meet the demands of paying for these postdocs under this policy may apply for matching funds from the Provost's office through 6/30/21.
8. Any postdoctoral fellowship tied to a *specific project* will be the primary form of compensation for the postdoc.

Specific points of discourse from colleges, with responses in red:

1. **Lack of shared governance** - seeking faculty input early in the decision-making process can help build support and a sense of a shared mission, but this was not done.
    1. **This should certainly have been taken into consideration**. I propose we make a recommendation as part of our report to Senate that decisions that affect research so clearly be communicated to the research community earlier in the process, to both allow for input, but also to ease the transition to a new policy coming into effect.

2. **Bad Optics** - Northeastern has great researchers and can offer postdocs a quality experience and unique opportunities for career advancement. We should develop and stress these benefits rather than promote a policy that makes it seem like we need to pay A LOT to entice postdocs to come.
    1. **I think the two can be done in parallel**. We can certainly recommend specific action items in terms of elevating Northeastern's profile among graduate student populations as part of a nationwide postdoc recruitment effort, but this type of reputation change takes time, and so should be performed in conjunction with other avenues.
3. **Lack of Equity** - the policy will result in some post-docs having much higher compensation rates than others doing similar work, in some cases, in excess of their faculty mentor.
    1. **Not the case in the majority of instances**. We have looked at postdoc salaries across Northeastern and compared them to faculty across all ranks of the tenure track, and this is simply not true. Even if a postdoc earning the standard salary for postdoctoral fellows was awarded their entire salary as a fellowship (not the usual scenario) they would still be under the salary of most tenure track/tenured professors, but all of those who would be in a position to hire top performing, fellowship-winning postdocs.
4. **Inconsistency** - Extra payment is required for some categories of fellowship and not allowed for others. Some fellowships also expressly disallow additional compensation. This will result in an odd category of postdocs: high performing fellowship winners who are not paid extra.
    1. **Need to look in to this one further**.
5. **Lost leverage** - Fellowships are *usually* used to stretch grant (or startup) dollars - when one postdoc is externally supported another can be hired, or a grad student can be supported, yielding more productivity per research dollar. This is how Harvard PIs (for example) can support multiple post-docs per R01.
    1. **This practice can result in the postdoc losing their Northeastern benefits and is not an example of a postdoc friendly research environment**. In many of these instances, when a postdoc fellowship is used to supplement their salary, the postdoc loses Northeastern benefits, including their 401k and match for 401k from Northeastern. Quite simply, the postdoc is being punished for their excellence and obtaining external fellowship funding.
6. **Reduced postdoctoral recruitment** - This policy may have the unintended consequence of reducing the number of postdoctoral scholars. Faculty who have money to support a postdoc for a year or two, may recruit intending that the postdoc can apply for funding to continue their work -- obviously not a viable strategy if they are required to continue paying salary even after a fellowship is secured.
    1. **Again, the vast majority of fellowships, including ALL project-based fellowships and those awarded under the federal government, would not be subject to this policy.**
7. **Decreased incentive for faculty to assist with fellowship preparation**- this policy strongly undercuts faculty incentive to help postdocs apply for fellowships. A common

rejoinder I have heard is 'ok, we just won't apply for fellowships, then'. This is a shame because mentored proposal preparation is an important part of postdoctoral training.

1. **Again, the vast majority of fellowships, including most project-based fellowships and those awarded under the federal government, would not be subject to this policy.** We could recommend a list of fellowships that would or would not be subject to this policy, but the vast majority of fellowships would not be subject. Most federal fellowships and those fellowships that are project based from non-federal would only be subject to topping up the fellowship to pay the postdoc at the FLSA rate. It is also a boost to the career of the faculty mentor to have trainees that have received these types of prestigious fellowships, so definitely an incentive for most to encourage their trainees to apply.

8. **Inappropriateness of using grant funds to support a fellow who is already funded** - faculty are concerned that federal funders will find supporting an already-compensated postdoc an inappropriate use of grant funds, or that it will be difficult to justify percent effort of the postdoc on grant funded work.

    1. **Project vs Person**. Federal grants and fellowships will support the project, not the person. So there is no conflict here in terms of that. Merit based fellowships do not have associated effort, nor do they support specific projects or deliverables, and thus would not fund the same work as federal grants.

9. **Extra work** - each fellowship will now need to be scrutinized and categorized to determine whether or not the post-doc will receive the fellowship as an addition to their salary - in many cases this is not going to be obvious and is going to require real work and negotiation.

    1. **Agreed**. Again this would be minimal in number on an annual basis, as it would only apply to merit-based or financial awards to the person. We should recommend a specific process through SVPR to determine this at the time of award.

10. **Effects on postdoctoral career development:** The prime interests (not in order of importance) of a postdoc are: 1. Mentoring, 2. Experience/Achievement in academic field, 3. Augmentation of academic pedigree, 4. Financial support. It is clear that doubling a postdoc's salary only addresses one of the four interests. A postdoc candidate who focuses on mainly salary would not be appropriately motivated on the entire scope of the position. The top institutions provide excellent career development and mentoring- this is the better role modeling for NU.

    1. **Agreed**. Strong and structured career development is needed for postdoctoral scientists at Northeastern, and we will add this to the recommendations.

11. **Unfairness of policy across the bard:** Such a policy would be unfair to other academic positions in the University. For example under current University rules, faculty are not permitted to double their salary from sponsored grants.

    1. **Faculty fellowships are subject to the same rules.** Faculty are not allowed to double their salary from research grants, however if faculty win similar prestigious fellowships that are awarded to them based on merit (for example a MacArthur Fellowship), they would be able to keep the funds for themselves in such an instance. It is the same in this scenario.

12. **Postdoctoral salary changes at Northeastern:** The more relevant issue facing postdocs at NU is that their PIs can neither raise their salary nor provide achievement rewards based on excellence in achievement. Our Department lost a postdoc because the postdoc could not be provided a raise, despite excellent performance.
    1. **Don't think this is accurate**. The Provost's office is aware of no such rule preventing faculty from raising postdoctoral salaries, there is only a minimum salary requirement to align with National standards. Appropriate end of year raises are entirely appropriate for successful postdoctoral employees. No bonuses or other one-off forms of compensation should be paid from sponsored funding. Need more information about this specific case scenario.
13. **Proposed "double dipping" on research awards:** Under the proposed postdoc resolution, a postdoc is motivated to behave unethically. First, they would be motivated to spend inappropriate time/effort to gain a second fellowship to double their salary, instead of focusing on the work for which they were originally hired. Furthermore, the increased salary does not necessarily reflect job achievement and they might think they are now owed a position, even if they are performing subpar, just because they have a fellowship. The postdoc supervisor should have direct influence to reward a postdoc with job performance.
    1. **Not an issue.** Again, it is only a very small proportion of fellowships that would be subject to this policy. The vast majority of fellowships are effort or project based, and as such would not fall under this category. Postdocs with fellowships who are underperforming are subject to the same job related performance appraisals as any other postdoc, and the choice of whether to allow them to continue in a position is at the discretion of the faculty mentor. However, these high-performing postdocs are some of the most unlikely to fall into this category.
14. **Increased costs** - this policy has already resulted in increased costs to COS, when we were required by the office of the Provost to cost-share in order to help a PI meet this unexpected cost, and we don't have the budget for it.
    1. **For those anticipated costs as a result of this policy, the Provost's office has a matching fund until June 2021**. We could ask that this matching fund be extended through the end of the year so that faculty have time to determine their budgets.

Recommendations for faculty senate (from ADR meetings and RPOC):

1. A definitive list of fellowships/examples, a list of which have fallen into what category- as many as possible that could give a sense of how many fellowships are subject to the policy.
2. We recommend that the process related to research policies involve research leadership at the institution at an earlier stage, if not to inform the policy, but to also give a sense of input and ownership.
3. We recommend a specific process for determining the type of fellowship- promoting consistency in implementation, meritocracy, process- who and how? How do we decide project vs merit based? It makes sense for this to be performed at the award stage- but how do we capture those fellowships NOT going through NU-RES that are subject to this policy?

4. Extend time to apply for Provost matching funds for this to Dec 30, 2021.
5. We recommend a thorough review of the career development activities available to postdoctoral associates and fellows across the board. The activities that are mentioned in point 10 above, as well as any other career development engagements, should be available to all postdocs at Northeastern.