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Improvements to Customer Service of Office of Research – Audit from Spring 2020

Submitted by: Helen Bland

4/17/2020

Question(s):

1.As an R2 institution, there is a higher expectation for faculty to seek external funding. However, the lack of support for this process is causing frustration among faculty. In January, an external firm was contracted to review processes and make recommendations to improve the external grant process. During sessions with faculty, we were informed that the report would be completed in 2-3 months. Faculty in focus groups and serving in this report all shared similar frustrations. Faculty are optimistic that recommendations will be implemented to improve the grant process. With that stated, we have 2 specific questions:

Rationale:

Due to the current status of the pandemic, faculty don't want to lose sight of re-igniting our research, external funding opportunities are still being released, and research collaborations are still being developed. Transparency on the process on what changes, if any, are to be implemented are appreciated and will allow faculty to be aware of any changes to procedures that are implemented. Maintaining research and writing for external funding, while rising to the challenge of higher course enrollment and increased loads can be challenging for all faculty (new and experienced), especially in this current environment. Now more than ever we need timely information in order to continue to conduct our scholarship.

Response:

SEC Response: Approval of RFI.

Dr. Chris Curtis provided the following response:

RFI Response – Improvements to Customer Service of Office of Research
Response provided by Dr. Chris Curtis, VP for Research and Scholarship

The Office of Research recently participated in an external review of its policies, procedures, and practices, which was conducted by the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA). The review was performed in January 2020 and included a three-day site visit (January 22 -24) where the team met with various stakeholder groups, faculty, and staff to enhance their understanding of the research enterprise at Georgia Southern. I would like to thank everyone who participated in this valuable process. The Provost and the Vice Provost for Research received the final report from the NCURA review team on April 6, 2020.

The Office of Research leadership team began preparing a response and implementation plan following their review of the preliminary draft in March. The report is formatted in alignment with the Standards for Effective Sponsored Programs Operations and makes recommendations based upon professional best practices relative to each of the twenty-six standards. For our initial purposes, individual recommendations have been pulled out from the framework of the respective standards and realigned to correspond with the units and the workflow of research services at Georgia Southern. The leadership team met again on April 17 to establish priority objectives based upon some ongoing initiatives that anticipated specific recommendations and to create a tracker system for addressing other recommendations. The team is currently meeting on a weekly basis.

The NCURA report also highlighted some larger structural issues that need to be reviewed and addressed (i.e. IDC cost re-distribution, institutional return on investment, research center and lab operations, and the role of the Research and Services Foundation). These issues require collaboration with other university stakeholders. Accordingly, the report will be shared out for review with the Research Council, Dean's Council, and President's Cabinet to discuss the recommendations pertaining to the allocation of university resources to support the research enterprise. The intended timeline to begin these discussions has been delayed by the more pressing issues of the COVID-19 pandemic but they are still expect to take place following the spring term and throughout the summer.

The NCURA report will be accessible to faculty along with other supporting materials upon release of the Research Strategic Plan at the end of the summer. Please direct any additional questions to Dr. Christopher Curtis (ccurtis@georgiasouthern.edu).

