

Suggestions to Improve the Office of Grants and Research

The dean of Humanities and Natural Sciences requested from the Division of Natural Sciences a report outlining specific issues regarding the functioning of the Office of Grants and Research. This report is written in the spirit of continuous improvement of our university and its standard practices. Our aim is to give guidance from the perspective of the faculty grant-writer of what could work better. We note here that other components of the University also rely on the Office of Grants and Research and may have different or similar concerns.

Staffing Issues

Our sense is that staffing is the major issue that prevents the Office of Grants and Research from working effectively. At present, a well intended staff appears overwhelmed with the many tasks this office is asked to undertake. It is a fact that the size of the office has decreased since Katrina, and was inadequate before the restructuring. The office used to have a full-time, professionally-trained director and a grants coordinator. Currently, the office only has a grants coordinator, who simply is unable to do the professional work of two people, and the administrative assistant work. If Loyola intends to maintain and improve its capability to secure external funding, Loyola will need to invest in an effective staff at the office of grants and research. The office should be staffed with a full-time director, a grants coordinator, a grant writer, and at least one full-time administrative assistant. In support of the staffing request, we researched the staffing of the corresponding grants office at our peer institutions. We learned that at least 10 of the 23 institutions in our comparison group have staff of three or more members in their office of grants and research. The complete list is included in the appendix to this report.

Goals for the Office of Grants and Research

The 2004-2005 annual report from the office of grants and research states that the “overall goal of the office is to provide high quality advice and assistance in order to enhance ‘teaching, research, creative activities, and service...’” We wholeheartedly support this overarching goal. We would like to give some specific examples of how the office can fulfill this goal:

- First and foremost, the office should act as an **advocate** for faculty engaged in grant writing and research. The office should work proactively to help faculty members identify and secure funding. In particular, Grants and Research office staff can facilitate the process by navigating internal issues like securing matching funds, assisting in facilities planning, walking grants through the approval processes, double-checking budgets, etc. The staff must be well-versed in all policies and procedures (including other University Offices, especially Financial Affairs) and know who to contact for support and approval. The current staff cannot effectively undertake all of these points,

which has resulted in many hours spent by faculty members navigating these issues. This is not an effective use of faculty time.

- There are usually many parts of a proposal that are administrative in nature and have nothing to do with the academic expertise of the faculty grant-writer. The office should be able to correctly complete those parts. Budgets dealing with salaries, fringe benefits, indirect costs, etc. should be completed, and thoroughly checked by the office in coordination with the faculty member. Many applications request administrative information that the faculty writer has no knowledge of (i.e. facilities planning, sustainability plans, business plans, etc.). A grant writer from within the Office of Grants and Research should be available to assist by writing these administrative sections of grant proposals. Again, many faculty hours have been spent chasing down information and without adequate access to that information producing an inferior product, to the detriment of teaching, research, service, and the proposal.
- The Office of Grants and Research should be able to assist faculty members by reviewing grants before they are submitted, ensuring that the proposal is responding appropriately to the request for proposals, and is presented in the most effective manner. They should also maintain and make available data and “boilerplate” language to assist faculty in writing proposals such as enrollments, percentage of minority students, national rankings, etc.; information that is often need in proposals.
- Accurate internal procedures for grant writing should be available (i.e. web and/or office intranet).
- Before procedures and policies are changed, the proposed changes must be vetted with the faculty, especially with faculty who have received external funding and who regularly submit external proposals. When there are proposed changes to procedure, an ad-hoc committee of the successful grant-writers over the past five years should be convened and consulted. The goal should be to make the procedures more effective, so that the university increases its ability to secure more external grants.
- Once a grant is funded, contracts should be correctly completed and reviewed in a timely manner with the assistance of the grants office. In a proactive fashion, templates for anticipated required documents, such as subcontracts, should be formulated and vetted through the required offices (Risk Assessment, General Counsel, etc.) so that development of these documents doesn’t hold up implementation of the research.
- The IRB should review applications and provide the required written documentation of the committee’s conclusions to faculty in a timely fashion.

- Once a grant has been funded and the contract has been executed, the university must provide funds to faculty member to start working immediately even if funds have not been received from the funding agency. The University should honor sufficient funding so that PI can secure materials, equipment and personnel. If the grant includes summer faculty stipends, the university should also honor these ahead of receiving funds from the granting agency. This is especially important at Loyola where a majority of research is accomplished during the summer months. Delays during the summer are very costly.
- Once the grant has been funded, the office should carefully manage the grant, e.g. by monitoring and assisting faculty with completing required reports.
- The current purchasing system is inadequate for modern grant transactions. A sizeable number of vendors in the sciences no longer work with purchase orders. It would be much more time efficient to provide departments with departmental credit cards to be used for such purchases.

To summarize, we feel that the Office of Grants and Research should be a positive force in effectively advocating for and assisting faculty in the pursuit of grants. There should be a “can do” spirit that permeates from the highest administrative levels. Faculty should feel supported in their endeavors, not restrained, discouraged from, or having to fight obstacles at Loyola in order to secure funding needed for our research and improvements in our teaching. We believe we share a common goal of improving our success in obtaining grant funding and look forward to working with the administration to help achieve this.

Appendix: Staffing for “Grants and Research” at peer institutions

Mills College 78

We could not determine the staff of the Office of Grants.

Loyola Marymount University 78

The Office of Research and Sponsored projects has a staff of five: an executive director, a director of pre-award services and associate director, an assistant director for pre-award services, a grant specialists, and a coordinator of the office and of IRB.

John Carroll University 78

The Office of Sponsored Research has a staff of two+: a director of sponsored research, an administrator, an administrative assistant (also administrative assistant for the Associate Academic Vice President).

Mercer University 79

It appears that the Grants and Contracts Office has a staff of two.

Bradley University 80

The Office of Sponsored Programs has a staff of two: a director of sponsored programs and a secretary.

The College of New Jersey 82

The Office of Academic Grants and Sponsored Research has a staff of five: a director of grants operations, Director of Corporate, Foundation, and Government Support, Corporate and Foundation Relations Assistant, a Program Assistant, and a Grants Accountant.

The University of Mary Washington 82

We could not determine the staff of the Office of Grants.

Drake University 82

The Office of Sponsored Programs has a staff of one: a director.

Loyola University New Orleans 83

The Office of Grants and Research has a staff of one: a grant coordinator.

Butler University 85

Butler’s Institute for Research and Scholarship has a staff of three: a director, a grant writer/proposal manager, and a Program Assistant.

Faifield University 85

We could not determine the staff of the Office of Grants.

Bentley College 85

Office of Sponsored Research has at least one staff member.

Providence College **86**

We could not determine the staff of the Office of Grants.

Valparaiso University **87**

The office of Sponsored Research had cuts in May of 2009. Currently the Assistant Provost and his staff serve the office.

Loyola University Maryland **87**

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs has a staff of three: a director, an assistant director for grant development, and an assistant director for grant administration.

James Madison University **88**

The Office of Sponsored Programs has a staff of seven: a director, an associate director, two grants specialists, a research coordinator human/animal research, an executive assistant, and a director of research compliance

Xavier University (Oh) **89**

The Office of Grants services has a staff of four: a director, an assistant director and two secretaries

Santa Clara University **90**

The Sponsored Projects office has a staff of three: a director, a senior administrative assistant, and an accountant

Stetson University **91**

Corporate Funding and Foundations (deals with institutional advancement and faculty external grants) has a staff of three: a director, a corporate relations officer and a foundation relations officer

Elon College **94**

The Office of Sponsored Programs has at least a director

Trinity University **100**

We could not determine the staff of the Office of Grants.

Creighton University **100**

The Office of Grants Administration has a staff of four: a director, an assistant director, a grant specialist and a vice president for research and compliance

Rollins College **100**

Rollins College has a director of Grants and Contracts under the Dean of Faculties Office

Villanova University **100**

The office of Research and Sponsored projects has a staff of four: an assistant V.P. of academic affairs for research and sponsored projects, an associate director, a senior research grant administrator, and a research information officer