

TIGER TIPS

Communication between the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) and Faculty

The Tiger Tips for May opened with an interesting statement... “Faculty often ask what avenues are available at Auburn University for finding funding and expertise and, more importantly, how do they utilize them”? The article goes on to discuss how the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) can help faculty find the funding they need to support their research. The May article points to a need to provide faculty with a continuing flow of information about the services that OSP can provide to ensure that faculty receive the assistance and support necessary to engage in a wide range of research activities. To be effective, however, the flow of information must be two-way. Two-way communication involves listening as well as speaking or writing. It is important to invite opinions and to hear what is said. It is essential to hear complaints, because this is a means of keeping informed about current problems that are probably being discussed in the informal channels of communication.

To meet this responsibility, the OSP has recently established an education component in its organizational structure. Headed by an Associate Director of Education and Communication, and staffed by two full time positions devoted to seeking input on faculty needs regarding research support, developing responses to those needs and, most importantly, communicating this information back to faculty, the OSP is taking seriously its responsibility to continue and enhance the two-way flow of information between this office and the faculty.

What is on the horizon? Look for the following over the next few months:

- A faculty-wide survey distributed in late August 2012 that will assess the perception that faculty have of OSP and the role it plays in supporting faculty research, what OSP is doing well, suggested areas of improvement, suggestions for new roles and responsibilities, and, importantly, how OSP can help faculty be successful researchers.
- Participation in new faculty orientation with an initial introduction to OSP followed by a series of workshops on topics such as pre- award services, proposal and budget preparation, and compliance.
- Attendance at department meetings and meetings with individual faculty
 - Assess departmental needs such as proposal development support/training, grant opportunity notification, PIVOT training

- Increase number and types of workshops; e.g. develop targeted workshops for specific colleges or faculty
- Communication on compliance with Federal and University Regulations/Policies:
 - For example, Financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI) Requirements
 - Work with Office of Research Compliance in developing procedures and educating affected faculty of FCOI requirements.
- A Departmental Administrator Certification Course
 - Scheduled for the fall of 2012, a Departmental Research Administrator (DRA) certification program will be implemented
- My Funding Dashboard
 - In collaboration with the Office of Contracts & Grants Accounting an Investigator Toolbox (My Funding) that will enable an investigator to obtain real time information on budget status is being developed. Target release is new faculty orientation.
- Grant opportunities
 - Evaluate the twice monthly grants newsletter for form and function
 - Increase information disbursement about opportunities-target individual faculty –this involves learning more about faculty research needs
 - Keep sponsored projects in the news
 - Enhance electronic search tools and resources

We realize effective communication is more than issuing information on the web or through workshops. It is sharing ideas and listening to the concerns of faculty. It is providing faculty with workable solutions and support that will enhance their ability to conduct research at Auburn University. We look forward to your thoughts as our education program evolves.

If you have questions about the OSP Education and Communication program please contact Bob Holm (rz0021@auburn.edu,x4-5877).

Some thoughts for this article were taken from: Henderson, A.D. The Desired Influence: Improving Communication between Administration and Faculty. The Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 38, No. 6 (June 1967), pp. 304-311