



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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Office of the Provost

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David W. McLaughlin *Provost*

MEMORANDUM

To: The University Leadership Team
The Research Deans

From: Provost David McLaughlin and Executive Vice President Michael Alfano

Re: The Administrative Infrastructure for Research at Washington Square

Date: September 30, 2009

This past spring, at the Provost's request, an external team of distinguished and highly experienced research administrators was convened to conduct an independent review of the administrative infrastructure for research at the Washington Square campus. We write at this time to share the committee's report of findings and recommendations as well as NYU's response.

Reviewers were asked to evaluate the organizational structure and operations of all of the offices involved in research administration, with a view to strengthening the support of research on the Washington Square campus. The review encompassed the full scope of activities -- ranging from the humanities and arts, to the sciences and professions -- carried out in the schools and institutes on the campus. The review was timely, given the University's recent decision to invest in new research administration systems, the wide diffusion of new electronic submission requirements, and the continued drive toward research excellence in the schools and departments. Many of you contributed to the review by preparing material for the briefing book and participating in individual interviews or focus groups. Your suggestions and input were invaluable and greatly appreciated.

The [full report, including an Executive Summary, is attached](#) for your information and for your distribution, if appropriate, to colleagues within your units.

The report confirmed some of our own observations, raised some new issues to our attention, gave us a window into best practices at other institutions, and crystallized our strategic options in moving forward. The report establishes that notwithstanding the

creation of the Office of the Senior Vice Provost for Research (SVPR) in 2004, the University's stated commitment to research is not adequately matched by the needed level of service, particularly in post-award financial administration. This area, including systems like Payroll and Accounts Payable that support research (but are not directly part of the research infrastructure), needs to be strengthened with respect to personnel training and skills. The reviewers observed that in pre-award administration, the University Office of Sponsored Programs is evolving toward provision of higher level review and institutional coordination and away from client –based service, creating needs that must be accommodated at the school level. We know that schools are uneven in their expertise in processing and administering research proposals and awards, providing support to faculty investigators, and interfacing with University offices, and it is clear that building a strong school-level administrative framework for research is crucial. University offices and school offices, which have been brought together through SVPR research meetings, need to be better coordinated.

The external reviewers issued a set of 11 recommendations for improving research support at Washington Square. Our ambitions are great, and while in the current climate of limited resources we cannot move forward swiftly on all fronts, there are steps we can take together now.

We are very pleased to report that the University has established a new position of Assistant Vice President for Post Award Research Administration, and, under Marty Dorph's leadership, is working with a search firm to identify best candidates. The AVP will lead a systematic effort to standardize policies and processes within the functional areas of responsibility to industry-leading standards and will integrate the function's activities with the University's pre-award activities. The AVP is also the official responsible for financial research compliance and in that capacity he/she will work closely with the pre-award research compliance staff and the University's Compliance Office.

The AVP will ensure that the post-award sponsored programs administration function at NYU is highly responsive to the needs of faculty, researchers, and research administrators and that it demonstrates a strong customer service ethic. The AVP, in partnership with the Office of the newly appointed Senior Vice Provost for Research, Paul Horn, will work to improve communication among all University offices as well as school research administration offices, building on the foundations laid by former SVPR Pierre Hohenberg. Importantly, all offices involved in research administration must ultimately, be 'accountable' to the Senior Vice Provost for Research, who is the University-wide advocate for research and scholarship.

The University is also implementing the recommendation of the reviewers that the Contracts Office be moved to the Office of Sponsored Programs. Steps have already been taken to begin the transition of this function to OSP which will be finalized in early 2010.

Schools must play an active role in critically reviewing the mission and staffing of their research administration offices. Skills, training, and a service orientation are as

important in school offices as in University offices. Some school offices are strong, while others need to be improved. Some schools already take advantage of the training and information sessions that OSP and the Finance Office regularly offer for research administrators, and they may want to suggest new or different kinds of workshops. All schools need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of their research administrators. Schools should in particular consider what is required to provide the necessary client service to their faculty investigators in pre-award and post-award administration. Schools are strongly encouraged to develop plans for strengthening their research administration offices and to discuss these with Paul Horn and Marty Dorph. That discussion can clarify priorities within the context of the University's ongoing re-engineering challenge.

To further help improve communication, establish priorities for development and investment and balance university and school missions, an administrative research council will be convened later this year. Chaired by the Senior Vice Provost for Research, it will serve in an advisory capacity to the Provost and the Executive Vice President.

The report of the external reviewers is sobering in its broad observation that "NYU's ambitions in research outweigh the resources allocated to the support of that function." We continue to be ambitious – and committed to improving the environment for research at Washington Square. Going forward, we want to strengthen the broad partnership that already exists among faculty, school administrators and university administrators. Paul and Marty will be working closely with the research community, armed with the observations and suggestions that our community and our external reviewers shared in the review process.

Thank you.