I am pleased to introduce the first edition of the Research @ Mason newsletter. We hope to use this quarterly newsletter to highlight many of the outstanding and innovative research efforts of the Mason faculty. This certainly is an exciting time for research at Mason as we continue to see growth in many of our programs. As we grow, and the landscape for externally sponsored funding gets increasingly competitive, we need to look for new ways of organizing and managing the many requirements the federal government and other sponsors impose on sponsored funding. In an effort to keep the Mason research community informed, we will also be using the newsletter to provide updates on federal, state and university policy changes, organizational updates and other topics of interest to all faculty and staff involved in research. We understand that success in research administration is dependent on clear and consistent communication.

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Balancing Customer Service and Compliance within the Office of Sponsored Programs – The Importance of Teamwork
Matthew J. Kluger, Vice President for Research & Economic Development

From the Office of Sponsored Programs home page: “The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) is the pre- and post-award administration office for all externally sponsored projects for George Mason University. OSP provides assistance in proposal budget development and proposal submission. The office also reviews and signs off on all proposals to external sponsors. All contracts with the University which involve sponsored projects are reviewed, negotiated, and executed by OSP. When awards are received, OSP generates budgets in Banner. OSP works with researchers, departmental administrators and other administrators to resolve problems of institutional cost sharing, contractual terms, and budget matters. Changes to the accounts, communication with sponsors and project closeout are also coordinated through OSP. OSP reviews and advises George Mason on matters of new or revised federal and state laws, rules, and regulations that affect research administration.”

In my experience overseeing two offices of sponsored programs, I’ve found that the fundamental concerns raised by faculty are similar – (1) Why can’t service be better? and (2) Why the emphasis on compliance? (continued on page 2)

Welcome to the OSP Newsletter, Research @ Mason
Mike Laskofski, Director, Office of Sponsored Programs

I am pleased to introduce the first edition of the Research @ Mason newsletter. We hope to use this quarterly newsletter to highlight many of the outstanding and innovative research efforts of the Mason faculty. This certainly is an exciting time for research at Mason as we continue to see growth in many of our programs. As we grow, and the landscape for externally sponsored funding gets increasingly competitive, we need to look for new ways of organizing and managing the many requirements the federal government and other sponsors impose on sponsored funding. In an effort to keep the Mason research community informed, we will also be using the newsletter to provide updates on federal, state and university policy changes, organizational updates and other topics of interest to all faculty and staff involved in research. We understand that success in research administration is dependent on clear and consistent communication.

Improved communication and collaboration have been a major focus of the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) over the past several months. During this time, we have engaged the Huron Consulting Group to perform a review of OSP. This review was focused on the OSP organizational structure with the goal of clarifying roles and responsibilities between OSP and the research community, streamlining business processes, strengthening internal partnerships and improving communication and customer service. In mid-November, Huron issued a draft report of their findings and recommendations that was shared with the research community and presented at a Town Hall meeting by Huron in early December.

(continued on page 2)
Balancing Customer Service and Compliance within the Office of Sponsored Programs – The Importance of Teamwork

(continued from page 1)

The answers to those questions aren’t simple. Offices of sponsored programs have multiple stakeholders. The faculty of the university represent one, and for them we must make the office as customer friendly as possible. The staff in OSP should be expected to be knowledgeable, responsive, conscientious and pleasant. But another equally important stakeholder is the “institution,” which must be protected by ensuring that all processes and procedures related to research funding are being carried out in full compliance with state and federal laws. And it is often this balance that creates tension. When an investigator is told that something he or she wants to do within a grant is not allowable, it’s easy to forget that OSP doesn’t create the rules and regulations that may be inconvenient or seem unreasonable.

The leadership at Mason has heard the complaints of faculty and administrators (many justified, some not), and that has led to major changes within OSP, with more to come shortly. Mike Laskofski has been appointed Director, and the early results are very positive. He has demonstrated in the initial months of his leadership that OSP will be more responsive to faculty (as an aside, I often receive copies of Mike’s emails, responding to questions raised by faculty, that have been written late at night or on weekends and other “off” hours).

We recently brought in a highly regarded firm - Huron Consultants - to assess whether there are structural problems within the office that hinder quality service, and to suggest ways in which service can be improved. After spending about two weeks on campus and interviewing over 100 faculty and staff, Huron made numerous recommendations for streamlining the operation of the office, which Mike and his team will now begin to implement. Some will require reorganization of functions within OSP. Others will involve determining which responsibilities related to proposal submission and grant management should rest with OSP, with the faculty members themselves, or with departmental staff. One of the Huron recommendations is that OSP recruit an assistant/associate director for training, which I believe can be a very important position for the education of both the staff of OSP and the faculty across our university.

Change will take time – and the office needs the support of the faculty. Provide the staff with constructive feedback. Share with the leadership of OSP the ideas you have for improving any aspects of customer service. If there are problems, please don’t complain to administrators within your unit or across campus as a surrogate for letting the appropriate individuals within OSP know about them.

The staff of OSP will continue to look for creative ways to solve the myriad of complex problems that they routinely deal with. But good customer service cannot mean sacrificing compliance. It is important for everyone to realize that this is a team effort - with the “team” being defined as the staff of OSP, the faculty principal and co-principal investigators, and the staff within departments and major academic units.

Welcome to the OSP Newsletter, Research @ Mason

(continued from page 1)

There are many recommendations in the report, some of which require longer term solutions that will need to be developed collaboratively with the impacted schools, colleges and institutes. Huron will be returning to campus in late January to meet with senior leadership across the university to review the report and address questions. In the meantime, we continue to move forward with a restructuring of our office and are confident the changes will result in improved service to the faculty and staff we support. We also are responding to other recommendations in the Huron report and look forward to continued progress in the coming months as we make improvements to the OSP website with the addition of a FAQ and proposal development section, update policies and procedures surrounding high risk areas such as subrecipient monitoring and effort reporting and increase outreach and training efforts.

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed their time and constructive feedback during the OSP review effort. We remain committed to making any changes necessary that will result in improved service to the faculty we support. If you have any suggestions or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at mlaskofs@gmu.edu.
On August 9, 2007, the President signed the “America COMPETES” Act into law. Fortunately for university researchers, this law provides three things:

- It doubles NSF’s budget from $5.6 billion in FY06 to $11.2 billion in FY1;
- It doubles the Department of Energy’s Office of Science budget over the next 10 years; and
- It increases NIST’s funding by more than $200 million between FY08 and FY11.

The Act also comes with several compliance provisions of particular concern to research universities. The first is mandated cost sharing. The Act directs NSF to require institutions of higher education to provide at least 30% cost share on all applications made to the 2008 Major Research Instrumentation Program.

Another compliance provision of the Act requires all grant applications that include funding for postdoctoral research to include a description of the mentoring activities to be provided to the postdoc fellows. These required mentoring activities are to be included as part of the merit review criterion. Project reports may also be required to discuss mentoring activities.

Also under the new law, an institution applying for financial assistance for science and engineering research or education must describe in its proposal its plan to provide “appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research to undergraduate students, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers participating in the proposed research.”


Information was obtained from the November 2007 issue of the Report on Research Compliance

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**Washington Watch**

The Office of Sponsored Programs has been called a number of things; the latest was “punctilious”. Our ruffled feathers were smoothed after looking up the definition -

**punc·til·i·ous** —Synonyms precise, demanding; careful, conscientious

We hope our Principal Investigators see us as helpful allies in obtaining and managing their sponsored projects. If federal auditors find us punctilious, we will have succeeded in one of our important roles, that of protecting George Mason and our PIs from fines and the reputation damaging press that can accompany an adverse audit finding. For more information on audits see the Federal Office of Management and Budget Circular A-133 (Audits of States, Local Governments, and Non-Profit Organizations), which explains federal audit requirements. The circular can be accessed on the OSP website: [http://www.gmu.edu/research/OSP](http://www.gmu.edu/research/OSP).

Look to future Washington Watch columns for the latest hot button audit topics, federal factoids, and other information related to federal funding, including more specific information from the three OMB Circulars regulating the management of federal grants and contracts (A-21, A-110, and A-133). If you have a specific matter you would like to see discussed here, please contact Donna Donaho, ddonaho@gmu.edu.

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**America COMPETES Act Public Law 110-69**

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**Funding Sources Databases— SPIN**

Finding sponsored funding opportunities can be a challenging process. Links to a variety of resources to assist faculty in identifying and locating funding sources for research opportunities are available on the Office of Research Development and OSP websites.

One database we would like to highlight is the Sponsored Program Information Network (SPIN). SPIN provides web based information resources and searchable databases for federal and non-federal funding opportunities. It includes the InfoEd Commerce Business Daily and a SPIN keyword thesaurus. It also provides listings of upcoming deadlines and allows you to customize your own e-mail notifications of funding information using SMARTS/GENIUS. Using this functionality will allow you to receive automatic email notifications to your inbox that match your specific areas of interest.

See [http://www.gmu.edu/research/ResearchDev/FundingSourceDatabase.html](http://www.gmu.edu/research/ResearchDev/FundingSourceDatabase.html) for more information.
All National Science Foundation (NSF) proposals are evaluated using two merit review criteria. The first asks the question “What is the intellectual merit of the proposed activity?” and the second asks “What are the broader impacts of the proposed activity?” These review criteria must be addressed in the Project Summary of the proposal and must address considerations relevant to the proposal.

1. Change to NSF Intellectual Merit Review Criteria
To effectively address the intellectual merit review criteria, NSF suggests addressing the following considerations or questions:

- How important is the proposed activity to advancing knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields?
- How well qualified is the proposer (individual or team) to conduct the project?
- To what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
- How well conceived and organized is the proposed activity?
- Is there sufficient access to resources?

It is important to note that the third question under the intellectual merit review criteria has been revised to include “potentially transformative concepts” and all proposals reviewed after January 5, 2008 will be reviewed under this new criterion. This change in review criteria is a part of a general effort of NSF to support more transformative research. As defined in the NSF Notice 130 issued on September 24, 2007, “The term “transformative research” is being used to describe a range of endeavors which promise extraordinary outcomes, such as: revolutionizing entire disciplines; creating entirely new fields; or disrupting accepted theories and perspectives – in other words, those endeavors which have the potential to change the way we address challenges in science, engineering, and innovation.”

2. Funding Available to Support Broader Impact Review Criteria
There are also a set of considerations that may be addressed in response to the broader impacts criteria. These include:

- How well does the activity advance discovery and understanding while promoting teaching, training, and learning?
- How well does the proposed activity broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g. gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.)?
- To what extent will it enhance the infrastructure for research and education, such as facilities, instrumentation, networks, and partnerships?
- Will the results be disseminated broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding?
- What may be the benefits of the proposed activity to society?

When preparing a proposal, it is strongly suggested that you discuss this review criteria with the program officer for the funding area you are interested in, as it may be possible to dedicate a portion of your budget to activities designed to respond to this criteria. Additionally, NSF has a supplemental program, Communication Research to Public Audiences (Program Solicitation NSF 03-509), which accepts requests for funding up to $75,000 to support projects that communicate to public audiences the process and results of current research that is being supported by any NSF directorate through informal science education activities. The purpose of these efforts is to disseminate research results, research in progress, or research methods.
The audit of the facilities and administrative (F&A) rate proposal for FY08 - FY10, which is being conducted by the Defense Contract Audit Agency (DCAA), is nearly complete. Once complete, DCAA will submit their report to our cognizant agency, the Office of Naval Research (ONR). ONR is responsible for negotiating a final rate with the University. The rate will be based on actual sponsored projects and overhead costs incurred in FY06 and projected costs associated with Research I building (FY07 actual activity was used for the projection). We truly appreciate everyone's efforts in the space survey area, which went very smoothly during the audit. We hope to have the final rate soon!!

Faculty Profile

Future issues of Research @ Mason will include a “Faculty Profile” column, providing an in-depth look at George Mason University faculty involved in innovative and exciting new research. Working with the Research Council to identify individual faculty and their projects, this quarterly spotlight will offer insight into their activities and highlight the depth of research expertise at Mason.

Emerging Researcher, Scholar, Creator Awardees - Congratulations!

Philip Auerswald, director of the Center for Science and Technology Policy and assistant professor at Mason’s School of Public Policy, focuses his work on the linked processes of technological and organizational change in the contexts of policy, economics, and strategy.

Todd Kashdan, assistant professor of psychology and director of the Laboratory for the Study of Social Anxiety, Character Strengths, and Related Phenomena, has published more than 70 original publications in peer-reviewed journals or edited volumes. His work largely focuses on understanding emotional, social, and motivational factors associated with various emotional disturbances.

Karen Sauer joined the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Mason in 2002 where she is an associate professor. Her primary research deals with experimental atomic and molecular physics, with an emphasis on magnetic resonance phenomena.

Information obtained from Mason Research 2008
### Spring 2008 Scheduled Workshops

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<td><strong>RESEARCH RESOURCES SERIES</strong></td>
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<td>Locating Funding Sources using Spin</td>
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<td>10a-11a</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Laskofski</td>
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Workshops are being coordinated through the Office of Research Development. To register for any of the sessions, contact Jennifer Bazaz at jbazaz@gmu.edu.

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**About OSP**

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**Office of Sponsored Programs**
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**Fax: 703-993-2296**

**Research @ Mason.**

If you have suggestions for articles or topics you would like to see highlighted in future editions of Research @ Mason, please contact Eileen Gallagher in OSP at egallagh@gmu.edu

**We’re on the Web:**
http://www.gmu.edu/research/OSP/