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Models of the New American Research University

Academic Organization Group

**Office of Human Resources and Research Office**

**Background**

Several years ago, UD’s central administration encouraged each college to establish “hubs” to address the growing regulations associated with human resources and with research/contract matters. Some colleges (e.g., College of Education and Human Development) established such “hubs”; others did not. Because of the ever-growing number of regulations and increased oversight by external agencies, trained staff who are focused on human resource or research/contract issues is required.

**Lessons Learned**

The creation of college-level and center- or institute-level human resources and research-support “hubs” allows for stronger connections, more efficient communications, and increased accuracy in the initiation and completion of tasks, within the colleges, centers and institutes, and between the colleges, centers, and institutes and Office of Human Resources or the colleges, centers, and institutes and the Research Office.

The current structure results in several challenges, however: 1) Currently, Office of Human Resources staff interact with approximately 200 human resource liaisons; the Research Office staff coordinates with 37 different departments. When a department-level (or center- or institute-level) administrator (often an administrative assistant) is responsible for periodically engaging in human resource- or research office-related matters, he/she typically is untrained in the required procedures or processes. Errors often are made—sometimes resulting in problems such as a faculty member’s proposal not being submitted in a timely manner or delays in completing the hiring process. The department-level administrator’s lack of knowledge also often results in the Office of Human Resources or Research Office staff needing to “walk” the administrator through the process; such one-on-one training is an inefficient use of the human resources or research staff’s time. In short, too much of the Office of Human Resources and Research Office staff’s time is spent “putting out fires” with too many human resource liaisons and department-level, center-level, and institute-level staff. 2) Because department-level, center-level, and institute-level administrators’ responsibilities are not focused on human resources- or research office-related activities, their immediate supervisors often are hesitant to require, encourage or even allow them to participate in the training sessions provided by Office of Human Resources or the Research Office. The problem is exacerbated when a research proposal has an interdisciplinary focus. 3) There is no means to hold department-level, center-level, and institute-level administrators accountable for their human resources and research office actions, in part because their human resources and research office actions are sporadic and often a small component of their workload. 4) The tenor of current relationships between departments, centers, and institutes with Office of Human Resources and the Research Office is “us against them” when the purpose of these offices is to support faculty, staff, and administrators.

A consequence of these challenges is that the Research and Human Resources offices feel overwhelmed and understaffed. Faculty are writing an increasing number of grants and new contracts which the Research Office must shepherd through the approval process. Often the level of support at the department, center or institute is inadequate, resulting in an increased workload in the Research Office. Success often results in new hires that the Office of Human Resources must support; the Office of Human Resources workload has increased. Regulations and federal and state oversight of grant, contract, and human resources have changed significantly; Office of Human Resources and Research Office workload has increased. A new structure is required, one with mandated training participation, focused responsibilities, accountability for high quality work completion, and better coordinator between the academic units, centers, and institutes, and the Research and Human Resources offices.

**Short Term Goals:**

1. Each college, center and institute will create a human resources “hub” and a research office “hub,” with a sufficient number of dedicated staff to manage the unit’s business in the research/contracts and human resources areas.

2. Staff from the Office of Human Resources and Research Office should participate in interviewing the staff who apply for positions in these college hubs.

3. The Research Office and Office of Human Resources staff should provide training for all new appointees to the college “hubs.“ Future training would be required of all hub staff.

4. While the “hub” staff will continue to be evaluated by the appropriate college administrator, the college administrators will invite Office of Human Resource or Research Office staff to share their perspective on the “hub” staff members’ effectiveness and attendance at trainings.