

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAAC)
1 p.m. on Monday, March 1, 2021
via Zoom

Present:

Jeremy Alajajian	Paul Cryer	Angelica Martins
Darlene Booker	Stafford Farmer	Nikki Simmons
Lesley Brown	Elaine Jacobs	Peter Szanton
Audrey Callahan	Rachel Ladenheim	Mary Welsh
Vikki Cherwon	Stacy Leotta	Shanda Wirt
Valerie Crickard	Sherry Loyd	Ellen Zavala

Absent:

Carl Mahler
Stephanie Sanchez-
Esparragoza

Meeting Opening:

- I. Approval of meeting minutes for 2/1/21 RAAC meeting
Jeremy Alajajian moved to accept the minutes as submitted, which motion was seconded by Valerie Crickard and passed without opposition.

Old Business:

- II. Revised Policy 50.5

A revised draft of this policy was circulated prior to the start of the meeting. Dr. Tankersley highlighted changes since the last draft was circulated including (a) the Graduate School has been removed from the policy; (b) all approval of compensation packages will go through Academic Affairs; (c) the deadline for approving packages is no longer annual – instead, approvals will be made on a rolling basis and changes to compensation packages will be updated on the GCA website with subsequent proposals and contract awards will reflect the new terms of the compensation packages; and (d) all allowable financial components of the compensation packages must be reflected in the budgets for proposals and all students receiving the packages must receive the full compensation packages from the awards. Stacy Leotta asked how to handle situations in which the faculty member may not know whether the students will need the differential for out-of-state tuition support and Dr. Tankersley replied that the PI's will need to anticipate whether this differential will be needed. Mr. Alajajian asked how centers such as the Urban Institute, which do not teaching colleges, should budget for incoming students to their programs; Dr. Tankersley responded that the packages are set by the graduate programs that recruit the students, so the compensation package for students in programs such Mr. Alajajian described would be set by the "home" program (for instance, public policy or geography) as the standard packages for their programs. Ms. Crickard noted that the policy only mentions tuition and asked whether the compensation package would also include fees. Dr. Tankersley responded that most compensation packages do not include fees, but some programs may

choose to include fees in their compensation packages. It is very unlikely that fees will be included because fees cannot be paid using State funds. Shanda Wirt asked if there is flexibility to go above the “standard” amounts specified for student stipends in compensation packages; Dr. Tankersley replied that paying above the standard amount is not allowed, although there is a pro-rating mechanism for paying less than the standard amount. Lesley Brown asked if stipends above the standard amount could be paid if the sponsor is not a federal sponsor and Dr. Tankersley replied that the status of the sponsor would make no difference because the same policy is being adopted for all awards. Peter Szanton asked if the Graduate School would continue to pay the differential for out of state students and Dr. Tankersley responded that this decision remains to be made by the Graduate School; with respect to budgeting, this means that the budgets should be created with the assumption that the Graduate School would not be paying this differential. Dr. Tankersley will keep the RAAC members informed of any further changes that are made to this policy.

III. Standardization of Excel Spreadsheets for Budgets

Paul Cryer has made numerous revisions to the proposed spreadsheet so as to make it similar to the budget template that is used in Niner Research. The most current version of the spreadsheet was circulated on Friday, January 29. Per Ellen Zavala, the current version is the final one and Mr. Cryer agreed, although he did say that some minor adjustments might be needed to be made to it for unusual situations. Ms. Zavala noted that she would send the spreadsheet out to all RAAC members again and would maintain a copy of it on the ORSO website.

IV. Revision of Policy 20.2

A revised draft of this policy was circulated prior to the start of the meeting. Dr. Tankersley has discussed this draft with the Associate Deans and made some minor changes to clarify its language. Proposals that deviate from the usual 10-5-2 day timing will require approvals by the PI’s immediate supervisor as well as the College Dean or equivalent. A justification of the deviation as well as approval must be sent to the office that will submit the proposal and if the revised timeline is accepted by the authorized official in that office, that office will so inform the PI; failure to meet the new deadlines will result in the proposal be removed from the submission queue. Mr. Szanton noted that on rare occasion a proposal is submitted before being entered into the electronic research administration database and asked how this should be handled (this has happened for graduate students who apply for external funding). Dr. Tankersley responded that such situation should be handled on a case-by-case basis but added that he did not want exceptions to the guidelines to become the norm; he also noted that such cases still require some sort of acknowledgement from the student’s supervisor and Dean that proper procedure were not followed. Dr. Tankersley noted that the Associate Deans were concerned about the multiple steps required by the policy and asked why not have just the chair approve and send the proposal forward or have some other “streamlined” process that might bypass the college office. He noted that his understanding from previous RAAC meetings was that

many of the RAAC members reported to their College's Deans and that these members wanted to ensure that the Deans understood and approved of deviations from the guidelines. He then asked the RAAC members whether this understanding was accurate. Mr. Szanton replied that he thought this was correct and that the incentives of the Department Chairs would be to approve all deviations from the guidelines, resulting in few or no consequences for investigators who repeatedly missed the deadlines. Mr. Szanton also asked if there might be situations in which there would be no opportunity to provide an investigator with a waiver for the guidelines. Dr. Tankersley replied that the Associate Deans felt that there needed to be some flexibility to the guidelines and that meeting the 10-5-2 deadlines would not always be achievable. He noted that waivers were not exceptions to the policy itself but rather alternative procedures that were available at the discretion of the Deans, for instance in situations in which the usual procedures would result in large proposals with multiple subawards not being submitted because of delays on the part of the subawardees. Mr. Alajajian clarified that the 10-5-2 deadlines only applied to proposals for which the sponsors had set submission deadlines rather than for internally funded grants that had no set submission deadlines. Elaine Jacobs and Ms. Brown highlighted several wording changes that were needed to the draft. In addition, the language in the second paragraph of the Procedures section regarding investigators "wishing to deviate" from the required timeline will be replaced with language along the lines of "requests for deviations from this timeline will be considered" under certain conditions and the entire section titled "Exclusions/Exceptions" should be deleted. The policy will be reviewed one more time after several edits are made and will be reconsidered for final approval at the April 5, 2021 RAAC meeting with the intention that it will go into effect on May 15, 2021 concurrently with the replacement of the NORM software by the Niner Research grants modules.

V. Delays in Hiring Personnel on Sponsored Awards

Dr. Tankersley has had several discussions with Gary Stinnett in Human Resources about lifting or modifying this policy; the policy originated in the UNC System Office and requires that all hires, regardless of the source of funding, must be approved by Academic Affairs and be approved by HR for a waiver. The policy is still being enforced by the System Office and the University has no leeway to "work around" it. At least three other institutions within the UNC System follow the same procedure as UNC Charlotte currently does with respect to positions that are supported by research awards. Mr. Stinnett noted that although this policy was imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been no discussion of removing it after the pandemic subsides. Ms. Crickard reported on her discussions with Academic Affairs to determine whether there is a way to streamline the process so as to have a minimal delay in hiring for positions that are supported by sponsored awards; one way to do this would be to have the proposed position be reviewed GCA before it is submitted to Academic Affairs so as to avoid further delays if any problem is discovered with the award. Ms. Crickard also proposed that Academic Affairs review proposed hires more frequently than once per week. (Under the current process, Academic Affairs requires all hiring proposals to be submitted by noon on Tuesday and

approvals are made on Fridays; Mr. Alajajian noted that this means that if he is informed at 12:15 on at Tuesday of a proposed hiring supported by an award he has to wait a minimum of ten days before filling the position. He asked that the minutes of the meeting reflect his frustration with the current process.) As of the time of the RAAC meeting Ms. Crickard was waiting for a response from Academic Affairs to these proposals. Ms. Wirt asked whether it is possible to speed up the process if a student has previously been hired for the same position under a different award. Ms. Crickard responded that situations such as this are technically reappointments and must be approved by the process imposed by the System Office; the only way around this would be if the student were previously appointed for a set period of time such as on a 139 fund and the student's support was reallocated from a new grant. Mr. Alajajian noted that even in the situation described by Ms. Crickard the initial hire would need to be approved by Academic Affairs. Dr. Tankersley asked for members of the Committee to consider creative ways of shortening the approval process while complying with the System Office's requirements. Ms. Crickard noted that if delays of two to three weeks in the hiring process continue then the concerns might be elevated to the level of Associate Deans and Deans.

VI. Follow-up on Year over Year Tuition Escalation on Grant Proposals

Ms. Zavala reported that she and Ms. Brown have generated a statement that should be acceptable to sponsors justifying year over year increases in salary, tuition, and other changes. If approved, Ms. Zavala will post it on the ORSO website under the "Budget Preparation" section. Mr. Szanton asked if it would also apply to health insurance, which has increased about a higher rate than has tuition in the last few years; Ms. Brown suggested wording the justification so as to include escalation of tuition, salary, and other charges (including health insurance) at a flat rate of three percent. Dr. Tankersley noted that our previous practice had been to specify increases in tuition, salary, and other charges separately but that nothing prevents us from grouping these charges together when estimating year over year increases. Ms. Zavala reviewed the current layout of the ORSO "Budget Preparation" web page, which breaks out various types of student financial support separately, and noted that when submitting budgets to potential sponsors this information could be replaced with the newly drafted statement, suitably modified for the proposal. Ms. Crickard asked if the 3% escalation rate was sufficient and noted that at least one College was in deficit because of unexpectedly high increases in actual costs of fringe benefits. Stafford Farmer noted that at present there are no projected increases in costs of fringe benefits and that it is not clear which office would be responsible for making projections of increases to those costs. Ms. Crickard will have GCA do an analysis of increases in the previous five year and ten year periods and will forward that analysis to Dr. Tankersley; this analysis will be provided to the members before the April RAAC meeting. Dr. Tankersley noted that tuition has not increased at as rapid a rate as had fees and that fees cannot be charged to grants so that references to increases in fees should not be included in estimates of cost escalations.

New Business:

VII. Award Budgets in NORM/Niner Research

A discussion of this topic as it pertains to post-awards was postponed to a future RAAC meeting.

The meeting lasted 1 hour and eight seconds.

Respectfully submitted,

Carl P. B. Mahler, II