NCURA

supporting research...together

NCURA Peer Review Program

PEER REVIEW BY RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS FOR RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Executive Summary

Report Date August 3, 2016 | Site Visit Date May 16-18, 2016

Executive Summary

The National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) would like to commend the University of Tennessee Chattanooga for undertaking an open and comprehensive review of the research administration infrastructure. The strong support for administrative efficiencies and accountability is evident with the decision of institutional leadership and the community to engage in a process that allows all members to participate and contribute.

The NCURA Peer Review Program is premised on the belief that it is a critical part of this review process to include experienced research administrators who have significant careers and are engaged nationally. This external validation allows University of Tennessee Chattanooga to incorporate best practices and models into their final action plans.

An evaluation of the research administration of sponsored programs at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga was conducted at the request of the Vice Chancellor for Research/Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. Joanne Romagni. The evaluation was performed in May 2016 (site visit on May 16-17, 2016; Appendix C for the Charge Letter and Appendix D for the site visit itinerary) by a Peer Review Team from NCURA (Appendix B for Bios).

The evaluation was framed by the National Standards (Appendix A) for the research administration of sponsored project activities. These Standards cover institutional
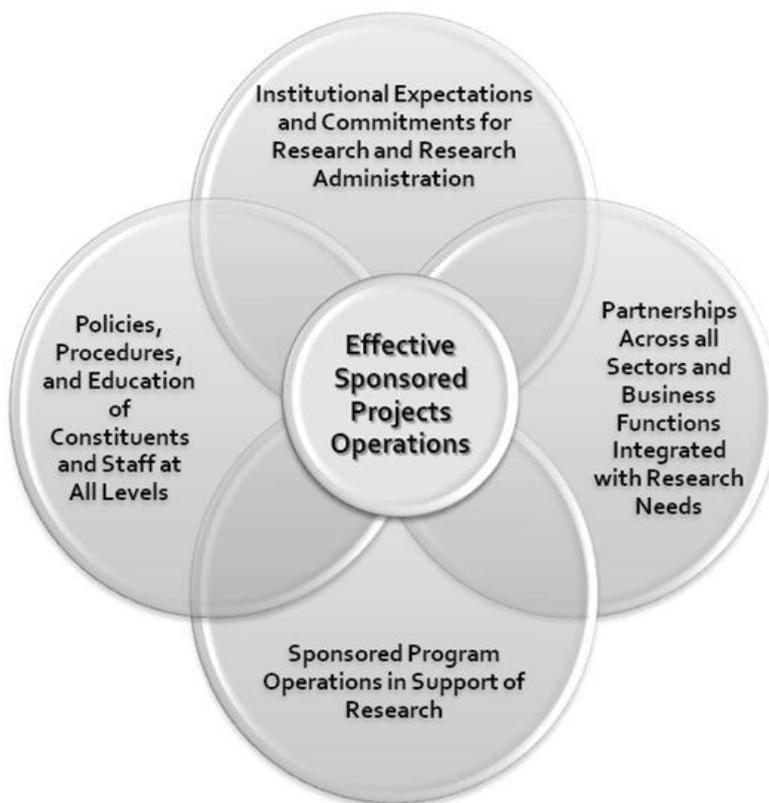
expectations and commitments, policies, procedures and education, the central and unit-level operations supporting research and scholarship, and the relationship and partnerships across all institutional functions.

Sponsored Research Review

University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) is at a critical juncture as a predominantly undergraduate institution with a growing focus on the promotion of a teacher-scholar model to enhance student and faculty experiences. UTC leadership is eager to grow and diversify the current portfolio of external funding from $8 million to at least $30 million in a five year period. Yet, the path to achieve this goal is not strongly articulated in the strategic plan for UTC or in supporting documents.

College deans, department heads, faculty, and staff have heard a consistent message from upper administration that more research, particularly research that engages the community, is desired. Hiring a new Vice Chancellor of Research/Dean of Graduate Studies is a clear and direct indication of the institution's commitment to better understand and grow the UTC research enterprise.

There is not yet a strong, intentional institutional message and branding of the research identity of UTC. Research and scholarly activity complement and promote high-quality teaching and academic excellence. More needs to be done from the top layers of the organization to communicate the vision for the research enterprise at UTC and to engage stakeholders in conversations to develop a shared understanding of how the vision will be realized at UTC. Academic administration at all levels must work together to come to a shared understanding of a research identity for UTC and how the institution will direct resources (people, funding, programs) to meet UTC's goals.

UTC is at an exciting point in time. New faculty are arriving enthused about teaching and research. The Review Team heard from multiple constituencies about a growing and shifting focus on research and scholarship as evidenced by greater expectations for scholarship in the promotion and tenure process, and particular emphasis and expectations on the College of Engineering to be a leader in the research growth. At the same time, there are faculty who have been tenured for some time who do not want UTC to lose its important identity as a teaching institution.

The University is beginning to evaluate its support of faculty. New programs, such as PREP to support junior faculty, the expansion of Research Dialogues, and hiring a dedicated director of undergraduate research are all strong investments in UTC's future. Supporting undergraduate research through summer fellowships is also a notable practice to expand. Perhaps the single most difficult challenge for UTC to address in the near future is how UTC will manage the heavy teaching load (typically 4:4) and strategically direct resources to ensure faculty have the time to conduct research.

The University appears to have a strong, committed, and dedicated staff that works exceedingly well together. This collegiality will be extremely useful as UTC explores research growth and inevitably needs to work together to explore changes in operations as the institution's research infrastructure matures.

UTC's research administrative offices will undoubtedly feel some growing-pains as the institution determines how best to consistently support scholarship. Thinking about the research administration's short, moderate, and longer term goals will be useful to plan for support. While currently the staff size in all three research administration offices (Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Office of Research Integrity and Accounting Services) appears appropriate for the institution at the current time, staffing will need regular assessment to ensure the support for proposal services, financial management, and institutional compliance grow at a rate commensurate with the planned research growth.

UTC has relied heavily on people rather than processes. While in some respects the highly personalized approach to supporting scholarship has been helpful to many, now is an ideal time to refine, document, and integrate the sponsored research practices and procedures across the institution. While faculty appreciate the depth of the support the ORSP staff provides now, the model of supporting this deeply from the central research administrative offices will need to shift to ensure colleges and departments "learn from" ORSP rather than expect staff to "do for". Building capacity of faculty and administrative support in colleges and departments will be important to achieve the desired research growth at UTC.

The Review Team has identified several specific recommendations for examining integration and linkages to strengthen the scholarly enterprise. This report offers a number of functional recommendations designed to streamline services and strengthen the institution's compliance position. There are some workflow processes that would benefit from re-examination to provide more efficient support of faculty and clearer communication and linkages among and between functional areas.

Research Compliance Review

In addition to the Sponsored Program Peer Review, the Vice Chancellor for Research asked NCURA to conduct a one-day review of UTC's compliance programs. This review was conducted on May 18, 2016 following the Sponsored Program Peer Review. The following are some of the areas that need some consideration:

➢ **Staffing:** The Office of Research Integrity (ORI) manages the research compliance functions for UTC. The Director of ORI reports to the newly appointed Vice Chancellor for Research and shares office space with the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. The IRB, the IACUC, Export Control Regulations and Management, Research Misconduct, and Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR) all fall under the purview of this office. ORI

currently consists of 1.5 FTE, will move to 2 FTE in July 2016, and will add .5 FTE beginning in September 2016.

Although the responsibilities are seemingly vast, there is not a lot of activity in any of the areas at the present time. Therefore, the current staffing for this program seems to be adequate; however, the Vice Chancellor for Research should review the staffing levels as the volume grows to ensure appropriate stewardship of federal regulations can be maintained.

➢ **Export Controls and Management**: The senior management at UTC is clearly aware that export control issues are serious. With the prospect of the classified research being conducted on the campus and the fact that campus personnel are allowed to obtain confidential information, more attention needs to given to this area. There is a need for campus-wide understanding and recognition of export control issues and regulations.

➢ **IRB and IACUC processes and procedures**: A closer look at the processes of the committees and the reviews of protocols done by both the IRB and IACUC needs to be taken. Protocols are not reviewed with an eye towards specific federal guidance, such as conflict of interest reviews and reviews of proposals with protocols, and actions of IRB decisions are not circulated. The campus should consider an outside audit of the functions of these committees to ensure they are in compliance with all federal regulations.

➢ **Technology**: The compliance committees are in need of some more advanced technologies. The protocols are Word documents that are posted on the committees' website. The investigator downloads the protocol, completes it, and then sends it to the committee via email. ORI tracks protocol activity on Excel spreadsheets. There is no communication between the Evisions platform and the compliance committees tracking. Consideration should be given to investigating a commercial product in order for the campus to be assured that the protocols are appropriate, that they are recorded and tracked properly.

➢ **Communications**: While several strategies have been in place to notify ORI of compliance issues for some time and new weekly reports from Evisions are now in place, the Review Team did hear that there may be opportunities to strengthen early communication of compliance issues among the research administration offices. Continual assessment of communication strategies and processes among and between the research administration offices is important for all aspects of the research enterprise, particularly for matters of research compliance.

The Peer Reviewers wish to express their gratitude to the Office of the VCR, especially the Offices of Research and Sponsored Projects and Research Integrity, who contributed to the compilation of materials that were provided to the Review Team, as well as to the assistance and hospitality provided during the site visits.

The notable practices and recommendations from the report are listed throughout the report. Each notable practice and recommendation includes a description and rationale.