

MEMORANDUM

FROM: College of Engineering Faculty Affairs Committee
TO: College of Engineering Dean Dr. Mung Chiang
SUBJECT: Areas in which CoE faculty face challenges
DATE: December 10, 2021

At the beginning of Fall 2021 semester, representatives on the College of Engineering Faculty Affairs Committee (CoE FAC) were tasked to solicit feedback from the schools/programs they represent on the areas in which their faculty face challenges and/or have major concerns. These areas are essential to the main operations of our faculty, including staff hiring, pre-award services, post-award services, and business office services. Representatives used different forms (e.g., department faculty meetings, informal hall-way exchanges, written comments via email) to solicit feedback from the departments they represent from early October to now. We had one meeting on November 11, 2021 to share and discuss the feedback. Based on the information provided in that meeting and additional written information through email exchange between Dr. Nan Kong (Chair of FAC and Representative of BME) with other representatives, we compile, categorize, and present the feedback in the following.

In general, the biggest challenge is related to post-award services. Here are a few aspects with commonality across departments.

1. Contract negotiation and contracting service. There is significant time delay and lack of response when negotiating contracts. Particular concerns regard legal terms.

Samples of specific evidence from written feedback:

- *A faculty member was working on setting up a new project with a sponsor.... The contract took three months to get set up and sent out. There was no sense of urgency by contracting. By the time that the contract was sent to the sponsor, they had decided to move on and set-up work with a researcher at another university*
- *A faculty member indicated that the contracting office was not responsive and it was taking much too long to get a contract set with XXX. He indicated that as a result of the delay, XXX decided to move on and not proceed with a study. The faculty member indicated that this was two or three years ago did not seem to be willing to provide more details, and did not believe that anything would change.*

2. Project reporting. The communication between PIs and the post-award is not effective. There is a disconnection in reporting process and confusion/miscommunication regarding the roles of post-award staff.

Samples of specific evidence from written feedback

- *There is no support for reporting to some agencies (e.g., NIH) and in fact my last grant report was 3 months late because SPS didn't let me know that there was one due until the NIH contact threatened to pull funding on the grant and even I had to reach out to SPS to get the (minimal) assistance provided.*
- *In particular, they are unable to provide support for the progress reports on NIH grants. For the last couple of NIH reports, I had to ask for help from administrative assistants of my grant collaborators at other institutions in order to have the reports completed. Also, it took an*

unreasonably long time to set up sub-awards with other institutions for the NIH grants led by Purdue.

- *To other agencies, the agency reports the PI on issues regarding grant reporting for their grants. However, the PI does not know when or what SPS finally reports to the sponsor, except when they need the PI to fill out a form for them.*

In addition, there are concerns about business office services. Here are a few aspects with commonality across departments.

1. Travel. The new central booking process for travel takes more time, is less convenient, and is more costly with “preferred vendors”
Samples of specific evidence from written feedback:
 - *A faculty member went to a meeting in Los Angeles. During the meeting time, there was a need to make some changes and go to a vendor for a research project in Cleveland rather than return directly to Lafayette. However, trying to work that out over the weekend was not really possible.*
 - *There are always restrictions and “preferred vendors” that make things less convenient, more time consuming and more expensive. I am sure some bean counter has shown it “saves money” but probably only to them and then the University gets a kickback.*
2. Purchase. The process takes too much time, and “preferred vendors” make things more difficult and time-consuming.
Samples of specific evidence from written feedback:
 - *For capital purchasing, things have to go through many loops and take too long.*
 - *Purchasing a piece of \$50K equipment has taken 3 months to get an order submitted and it is still not yet approved. It was sent to 15 different people who each required a new set of forms. Between COE Procurement and Purdue overall procurement this request has received approval at the PI, Department Head, Dean, Business office, Property Accounting levels, as well as numerous confirmations that we do not have this equipment at the department level, sole source, quotes, and now awaiting some sort of new fiscal approval.*
 - *Some previous approved vendors are no longer on the approved list. The new alternative vendors cannot really cover the needs.*
3. Staff support on a number of potential time-consuming services, e.g., meeting scheduling, expense reporting, budget/expense update for travel, purchase, and major awards.
Samples of specific evidence from written feedback:
 - *Remote work for the business office is not working well. Unable to go to see staff to quickly resolve small issues, and it is not possible to reach them by phone.*
 - *Scheduling meetings consumes a non-trivial portion of the day. A strong push – along with some training – on how to use the features of Outlook for scheduling would save both time and frustration when trying to find a common time to meet. Ensuring that people effectively use their calendars would allow for easier scheduling of meetings with more than three attendees using Scheduling Assistant. Adding conference rooms to the scheduling location would also ease the issue regarding where to meet.*
 - *Challenges in staff retention negatively impact the quality of service. The impact is two-fold, offices remain understaffed for a long time due to (i) challenges in hiring new personnel, (ii) the much-needed training of a new employee is a sunk of time for an already under-staffed office.*

The high internal turnover rate should be better understood to improve this issue – there is an apparent consensus that the same positions in different Schools are not equally demanding.

There is universally positive feedback on pre-award. One minor ongoing issue include there doesn't appear to be any updates to current and pending and Other Support by NSF/NIH and each time the same issues are had for grant funds and descriptions that have already been corrected in the past.

Limited feedback on staff hiring. A main concern is much paperwork and slow approval process.

Other challenges and concerns:

- Export control management.
- Opaque response for NDA process. Personnel assignment is not clear.
- Academic calendar (e.g., a J-Term could be nice to help faculty work with graduate students before the end of the calendar year instead of spending much time working with undergraduate students on teaching, mentoring, etc.).
- ITAP and ECN should not be in the loop when purchasing computers using discretionary funds,
- Lack of technician support for shared equipment in some Schools, and new Discovery Park shared facilities (e.g., Herrick Laboratories and FlexLab do not have the same level of support).
- Clearer guidance to newer faculty on lesser-known awards and proposal calls to apply.
- IRB, the process is lengthy.
- ISSS, advising international students on travel and work permission issues as non-immigrant aliens.