

CHAPTER 5

5. Research Organization

5.1. Introduction

Scholarly endeavors, research, intellectual property development within a discipline, and creative activities (henceforth, called “research”) are basic missions of the university. The university expects faculty members to conduct research and produce scholarly work, as broadly defined within the faculty member’s discipline, as part of their academic obligations. Peer-reviewed research and scholarship plays an essential role for faculty in questions of promotion, tenure, and salary review.

The senior administration of the university should facilitate the success of faculty-led efforts by encouraging, assisting, recognizing, and rewarding research-related endeavors. The Vice President for Research and Economic Development (VPRED) is charged with providing leadership and support of research and economic development throughout the university. The Vice President for Research and Economic Development should also foster the development of working relationships with local, state, and federal governments, as well as with business and industry.

The content and conduct of research and scholarship are primarily the responsibility of the faculty and research staff. The guidance of students, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels in these projects is considered an important part of faculty research involvement.

5.2. Research Council

The Research Council provides a forum for the interchange of information on research activities of broad interest, advises on long-term collaborative research venture developments, reviews recommendations by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development for the creation, continuation and dissolution of research units, and annually reviews the research centers, advises on the performance of research administration units and research-support operations. The Research Council is comprised of representatives of the research units appointed by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, the deans of schools and colleges, and two faculty representatives elected by the Faculty Senate. The Research Council is chaired by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development (or Associate Vice President for Research and Economic Development in the Vice President’s absence) who provides a written annual report on the research performance of the university’s research centers and/or institutes to the university community.

5.3. Organized Research Administration

The administration of university research contracts and grants is carried out under the direction of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and the Associate Vice President(s) for Research and Economic Development. Several offices, institutes, centers, consortia, and laboratories report to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development. An organization chart is available from the Vice President's office.

5.3.1. Office of Sponsored Programs

The Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) primarily provides pre-award and limited post-award services in support of sponsored research programs. Pre-award assistance may include identification of potential sponsors and the preparation of non-technical portions (e.g., budget preparation and the business/management aspects) of proposals. The research administration staff assists principal investigators in complying with the policies and procedures of the university and the external sponsor. It is the responsibility of this office to review all proposals, as well as to negotiate changes in the terms and conditions of existing research programs. The technical content of proposals for contracts and grants are the prerogative and responsibility of the faculty and appropriate research staff. After a contract or grant is awarded, the OSP staff and the offices of the Vice President for Finance and Administration provides post-award contract administration services, in accordance with sponsor policies and procedures, and assists the principal investigator in resolving administrative problems related to the project. The Office of Sponsored Programs works closely with the appropriate staff within the Office of the Vice President for Finance and Administration to insure that contract and grant work is accomplished in accordance with the rules and regulations of the sponsor.

5.3.2. Office of Technology Commercialization

UAH encourages the commercial development of intellectual property, including patents, copyrights, and trademarks, that will benefit the public as well as the faculty and staff of the university. The Vice President for Research and Economic Development, acting through the Office of Technology Commercialization, has general responsibility for the evaluation of inventions in which the university has an interest. Rule 509 of The Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama and established UAH policies set forth the procedures to be followed when an employee develops employment-related inventions or copyrightable material, as well as the guidelines for distributing the revenue from such intellectual property to the employee and the university. (The relevant appendices contain details on the Patent Policy and the Copyright Policy)

5.3.3. Office of Research Security

UAH is engaged in work that is subject to U.S. Government export control regulation and work that is of a classified nature. The Office of Research Security reports to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and is responsible for overseeing the protection of research-related classified projects and artifacts, export control enforcement, mandatory training related to research security, advising research faculty and staff on matters of research security, and maintenance of security clearances of UAH employees. The Office of Research Security serves as the liaison between UAH and external government organizations with respect to security or export control related concerns.

5.3.4. Proposal Development Office

The UAH Proposal Development Office reports to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and is charged with identifying research opportunities for UAH faculty and staff, assisting with large scale proposals involving significant effort and multiple collaborators, and proposal development training for faculty and staff.

5.4. Internal Support

The Vice President for Research and Economic Development provides a variety of internal grant programs for advancement of faculty research capabilities in all academic disciplines including a program that focuses on junior faculty research and creative activities. The Vice President for Research and Economic Development will announce such opportunities to the faculty and staff at UAH and will be responsible for evaluating responses and making awards. Internal grants programs are contingent on the financial ability of the Vice President's office to fund.

Awards in internal grant programs offered by the VPRED are made by the Office of the VPRED based on a review process established by the VPRED. The program focusing on junior faculty research and creative activity makes decisions based on recommendations from a review committee that includes one senior faculty member from each of the colleges or schools that has tenured faculty members. The faculty committee member for a college or school is appointed by the college or school's dean. Guidelines on eligibility, content and format of the proposal submissions will be published by the Office of the VPRED.

5.5. Research Units (Institutes, Laboratories, Centers and Consortia)

Research units may be formed within colleges or as separate entities with university resources beyond and above those available to chairs and deans. A consortium will typically have strong industrial participation in its operation as well as in allocation of resources. Research units report either through a dean or directly to a Vice President. The reporting route will be established at the initiation of a research unit.

At the end of each fiscal year, research units submit to the responsible administrator a detailed report on research achievements, publications, interaction with faculty and students, teaching provided by center personnel, sponsored research funding, and short-term as well as long-term goals.

5.6. Establishment, Review, and Dissolution of Research Units

Proposals for new research units are submitted through the appropriate chairs and deans, or directors, to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development prior to submission to any approving authority and/or potential sponsors. Proposals must include the following: a mission statement for the proposed research unit; a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of establishing the unit, including the potential impact on the university's academic and research programs; and a detailed five-year plan outlining the space, equipment, and budgetary resources required together with existing and potential funding sources.

Proposals for new research units are reviewed by an ad hoc committee appointed by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development and consisting of faculty of the relevant college(s) involved as well as members representing the existing research units. The recommendations of this review committee are presented to the Research Advisory Council for its consideration and recommendations. The recommendations of the ad hoc review committee along with the recommendations of the Research Advisory Council are submitted to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, who will approve or disapprove the proposal after consultation and agreement with the Provost and the President.

A new research unit may require approval by The Board of Trustees of The University of Alabama according to Board Rule 517, Establishment of Designated Centers and Institutes:

Any center that has a major involvement in instruction or research must be approved by the Board of Trustees after being reviewed and approved on the campus. Centers that are primarily focused on providing service will follow the same internal campus review and approval procedures but will be submitted to the Board of Trustees as an information item, unless creating them requires a significant commitment of institutional funds and/or physical resources. In that case the proposal for creating the center will be submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval rather than as an information item.

Existing centers are reviewed annually for fiscally sound management and performance. The performance and relevance of each research unit are also comprehensively reviewed at least every five years, following the same procedure as the review of proposals for new units. Findings and recommendations are submitted to the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, who decides on continuation or dissolution after consultation and agreement with the Provost and the President. A report of the findings is made accessible campus-wide.

5.7. Research Unit Personnel

Directors of research units are appointed by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development with the concurrence of the Provost and the President. Directors must have demonstrated national research leadership, as appropriate to the research unit mission, and have the appropriate terminal degree. In the interest of an optimal interaction with faculty, it is desirable that research unit directors should have academic experience. Except in the most unusual of circumstances, center directors will have experience commensurate with someone meriting appointment as an associate (or full) professor. Directors may, but do not need to have, an academic appointment. The academic appointment process is outlined in Chapter 7.

In addition to the annual performance appraisal of all university employees, a comprehensive evaluation of the performance of a director of a research unit is conducted every five years, following guidelines similar to those used for the evaluation of deans, under the chairmanship of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development.

In the interest of promoting cooperation and interaction between colleges and research units, a large percentage of the senior research staff employed by research units should be eligible for faculty appointments. Research staff may also be appointed as research faculty within a department. Details on the research faculty appointment process are in Chapter 7.