

Work Under Way to Respond to Issues Raised by STEM Faculty April 20, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

I write today with the first update about the ways in which the college is responding to the letter of March 23 from tenure-track STEM faculty, which was supported by the chairs of STEM departments. Thanks again to all who brought these issues forward.

Ongoing Discussions of Concerns

Addressing many of the concerns that were raised will require significant collaboration with offices beyond the provost's division. Resolving issues involving the submission of grant proposals will necessitate working closely with the Finance Office; determining policy around grants, including the acceptance of federal contracts, will be a joint effort that involves my office and the Office of the General Counsel. Accordingly, I have begun meeting with the following senior administrators: Kevin Weinman, chief financial and administrative officer; Lisa Rutherford, chief policy officer and general counsel; David Hamilton, chief information officer; and Jack Cheney, associate provost and associate dean of the faculty. We are reviewing the letter line-by-line and together will seek to solve the problems at hand.

Work by the Grants Office

Website Review and Revisions

Staff in the office reviewed the websites of grants offices or equivalent sponsored research offices at some of our peer schools (Bryn Mawr, Carleton, Grinnell, Haverford, Middlebury, Mount Holyoke, Smith, Swarthmore, and Williams) and spoke in depth with their counterparts at five of these institutions. Based on what was learned, the staff made a list of features and approaches that they thought were most effective. They are now working with Mike Reid, web and digital communications specialist, on a redesign of our webpages for grant seekers, focusing first on the pages devoted to preparing a proposal for submission. The goal is to have a new design finished by April 30, with a May rollout.

Institutional Boilerplate Language with a Focus on the Sciences

The Grants Office has developed a boilerplate document for faculty to use in their grant proposals. It provides demographic information, as well as statistics on external science grants, Amherst's ranking in terms of graduates who go on to earn science doctorates, student fellowship awards, and publication data. There is also a description of the methods and data sources used to develop the boilerplate text, so faculty can see the strengths and limitations of the information that is available and when it was last updated. This text will be updated annually. Information about publications with student co-authors is summarized in the boilerplate document and is also available in a Google spreadsheet that can be sorted by department, year, etc. In addition, the Grants Office is working with Jess Martin to obtain facilities and equipment information for all the departments in the science center, with a goal of completion by May.

Changes to Workday

In addition, some significant changes are happening on the Workday front, with the goal of making Workday easier to use for faculty and ADCs. First, new administrative roles will be added to Workday by the end of the month. ADCs will be able to review and edit all expense reports, invoices, and PCard

purchases associated with their academic departments (cost centers). They will also have the ability to create job requisitions and hire student workers, and to access and monitor internal awards for faculty in their departments. Second, additional training will be offered to ADCs, and training will also be incorporated into the orientation program for new faculty. It will feature practical information about using Workday and the guidelines for financial transactions. In the meantime, training and support is available through the Workday at Amherst website, at workshops and drop-in sessions, and during one-on-one meetings. Finally, the Workday team is working to improve reporting so faculty and ADCs can more easily monitor departmental budgets, as well as internal and external awards. New grants reporting functionality was released last week, but there is more work to do. The Finance Office will continue to update faculty members, as the tools are improved.

I will write again in the coming weeks to report on additional progress.

All best,

Catherine

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