Office of Research Services: meeting the needs of SFU researchers

Ellen Loosley, Director, Office of Research Services (ORS), met with researchLinks to discuss recent accomplishments, changes within ORS, and the future of delivering research grant and contract services to Simon Fraser University (SFU) researchers.

RL: Back in 1991 when ORS was created, SFU’s total research funding was about 60% of what it is today. How has the increase affected the work of ORS?

At that time, ORS consisted of 2.5 FTE staff members who handled internal and external research grants and contracts and Ethics review. By 1993, the volume and workload of Ethics review made it necessary to move that responsibility away from Research Services. The national granting agencies were expanding their programs of support into strategic and industry partnership programs. The Networks of Centres of Excellence were funded and SFU benefitted with hundreds of thousands of dollars in new research funding; with it came related infrastructure support from the provincial government. Science Council of BC had an active university granting program and eventually Forest Renewal BC pumped millions of dollars in grant support to BC universities. When the Canada Foundation for Innovation came into existence with its millions of dollars for research infrastructure, the result for ORS was increased responsibilities and workload in the area of administration of the application and awards processes.

In the meantime, research funding under the terms of legally binding research contractual agreements started increasing in both volume and complexity of negotiation. To meet the need for professional representation for review and negotiation of contract terms, we hired a Contracts Officer with a law degree. As the University/Industry Liaison Office’s (UILO) intellectual property management role grew, the Contract Officer’s

The teachers’ teacher

Dr. Phil Winne, Research Funding Mentor for the Faculty of Education with Dr. Eugenie Samier.

Research funding mentors are senior SFU faculty with strong records of successful application for grant funding from the Canadian national granting councils and/or service on grant selection committees of those councils, who agree to make themselves available to their colleagues for consultation and advice on the preparation of grant applications. Dr. Eugenie Samier notes, “What was most important to me about Phil Winne’s assistance was not just the feedback and support he provided for my SSHRC proposal, but that he also helped me to establish relationships within the Faculty. He knows how to handle collegial mentoring, which can be a rather tricky relationship where academic freedom is involved, and where we are working across disciplines.”

“Grant applications that benefit from such expert advice have an increased chance of success in national competition, so I encourage faculty members to draw on the experience the mentors have to offer,” comments ORS Director Ellen Loosley.

An updated list of Mentors for 2000/01 is inserted into this issue of researchLinks.
The Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program will provide some very welcome, very substantial assistance to Simon Fraser University’s faculty renewal activities.

Excellence in research is of paramount importance in the selection of Chair holders and Chairs will be in priority areas identified in our strategic research plan. The plan was approved by the Senate Committee on University Priorities in July, after development by the Deans and Vice-President, Research, in consultation with Chairs and other faculty members. The plan summary has been posted at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/crc.

Allocation of CRCs to each university is based on federal granting council funds received by its researchers, using a three-year moving average. For 2000-01, SFU was allocated nine CRCs (four each in the NSERC and SSHRC areas and one in the CIHR area). An additional 39 were tentatively allocated over the following four years. We expect some reduction in our allocation for later years as the allocation method is adjusted to make it internally consistent.

There are two types of chairs:
- Seven-year renewable Tier I chairs ($200,000) per year for current research “stars.”
- Five-year Tier II chairs ($100,000) per year, renewable once, for future research “stars.”

Chairs will be evenly divided between Tier I and Tier II and may be used either for recruitment or retention.

Each CRC carries with it $125,000 in infrastructure funding from the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), whose matching requirements will apply, so that another $187,500 in matching funds must be obtained. The funds allocated per CRC are not tied to the individual CRC’s so varying infrastructure needs in different disciplines can be accommodated.

The first nominations have been submitted, with decisions expected in December.

For full information see: www.sshrc.ca/english/programinfo/chairs_program.html.

RL: What changes are being made in ORS to accommodate the increased workload, especially in the area of contracts and research agreements?

ORS is in the process of hiring a Contracts Assistant, reporting to the Contracts Officer, who will be responsible for processing standard research agreements. The addition of a Contracts Assistant will allow ORS to provide quicker file processing, more efficient administration of existing agreements, and better assistance to researchers in following up on funding opportunities. This will free up time for the Contracts Officer to perform the necessary legal review of documents SFU is asked to sign, and to negotiate the terms and conditions of complex funding arrangements.

RL: How has the development and use of the Internet affected the activities of ORS? Specifically, how will the grant application process be affected and what services is ORS offering to smooth the transition for SFU researchers?

Today the Internet is used for informing researchers of available funding opportunities and allowing them access to sophisticated databases of funding sources; providing grant information, application forms and guidelines; submitting applications electronically; and informing applicants of the results. Soon research grant applicants will type all their applications into boxes on Web forms and the Grants Officer will press a “send” key on behalf of SFU following completion of internal approvals. The changeover from a paper-based to a Web-based grant application process will provide learning challenges for many of us.

There has been so much activity in the use of the Internet for research administration that a part-time staff member with training in Web software was hired to assist both faculty researchers and ORS staff in this area.

RL: What is “Grant Track” and how will it help ORS with its delivery of services to researchers?

ORS has had computerized databases of research funding since 1976. From such databases we are able to provide annual statistical reports of funding sources and distribution. In the latter half of the 1990’s we decided to build a networked database which would follow or “track” an application for research funding from the time it is logged into the database, to its becoming a financial record in the University’s accounts, and finally ending when that account is closed. A single database, which we call “Grant Track”, is used by both ORS and Financial Services to record information concerning research funding applied for and awarded.

At SFU, all grants from industry and all contracts from any source must be reviewed and approved by Financial Services before the University accepts them. “Grant Track” is used to facilitate the internal review process by tracking or electronically registering in one place the flow of documents and discussion between ORS and Financial Services prior to setting up a project account. “Grant Track” allows for better data processing by facilitating the communication process and expanding the record keeping role from a flat statistical list to a system which indicates the changing status of each record and its various attributes.
“Grant Track” allows ORS to provide statistical reports in a more timely way than we have in the past. For example, our annual statistical tables of dollars received will be published throughout the year, not just at year-end. We will list newly received awards on the Web for information purposes. ORS is currently planning for this sort of real-time funding reporting activity.

R.L: How do you view the role of the Grants Facilitators in conjunction with the mandate of ORS?

The creation and funding of the Grants Facilitator positions has proved to be an enormously positive step in the delivery of a vital aspect of pre-award functions not carried out in the Office of Research Services. ORS views the Grants Facilitators’ role as raising the likelihood of success of each application that goes out the door. New faculty members as well as those currently on staff who have access to the services of a Grant Facilitator will come to rely on their knowledge of where and how to obtain research funding and on their assistance with application preparation. As more Grants Facilitators come on staff, ORS will serve as the pivotal information provider for those who assist various constituencies with common funding agency forms and guidelines. By integrating their role with ours, we can provide unified support to faculty members whose careers depend on successfully obtaining funding for their research. [R]

1999/00 was a record-breaking year for the University/Industry Liaison Office (UILO) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in the area of spin-off company activities. Nine new companies were incorporated, which is the highest number of new companies created in a fiscal year. The total number of SFU spin-off companies is 54, of which 39 are currently active.

The UILO negotiated five new equity acquisitions on behalf of SFU. SFU holds an equity position in four of these companies, and in one case, University of British Columbia funds are granted to the SFU spin-off company. The UILO's role in these negotiations is vital and has been instrumental in the start-up of 54 spin-off companies. The advances they have achieved have had a positive impact on our economy and contributed to the growth of high-tech in BC.” [R]

UILO funding announced

In June, on behalf of Technology Minister Graeme Bowbrick, Mr. Pietro Calendino, MLA for Burnaby North (centre) announced funding of $150,000 for the University/Industry Liaison Office (UILO) at Simon Fraser University (SFU). The funds are granted to the UILO by the Information, Science and Technology Agency, Government of British Columbia.

The announcement was made at SFU’s Crime Prevention Analysis Lab, operated by Criminology professors Paul and Patricia Brantingham. One of their former students, Mr. Terry Whin-Yates (right), is the President of CPAL Inc., the SFU spin-off company formed to commercialize technologies developed in the Lab.

“SFU’s UILO is a stepping stone in the start-up process of some nationally-recognized BC high-tech companies,” said Calendino.

“These companies are helping to expand the sector and put BC on the high-tech map.”

Accepting the funding on behalf of SFU, President Jack P. Blaney (left) noted that, “Over the past ten years the SFU UILO has been instrumental in the start-up of 54 spin-off companies. The advances they have achieved have had a positive impact on our economy and contributed to the growth of high-tech in BC.” [T]

Summary of 1999/00 Achievements

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<th>University/Industry Liaison Office</th>
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<tr>
<td>AGREEMENTS COMPLETED</td>
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<td>• 5 technologies licensed, bringing the total number of licenses in force to 38</td>
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<td>• 3 new technology assignment and revenue sharing agreements</td>
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<td>SPIN-OFF COMPANIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 9 new companies formed</td>
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<td>• 5 new equity acquisitions</td>
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<tr>
<td>TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT</td>
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<td>• 36 new invention disclosures (more than twice the number of disclosures made in the previous fiscal year)</td>
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<td>• 8 parent applications filed</td>
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<td>• 4 new patents issued, bringing the total of issued patents in good standing to 34</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 5 new market studies undertaken; 3 completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROYALTY REVENUES</td>
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<td>• $256,113 from royalties and license fee receipts</td>
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Photo: Greg Ehlers, SFU IMC
President's Research Grants funding for new faculty members

Prior to June, 2000, President’s Research Grants (PRG) were awarded under several categories of priority. Due to a large number of new appointments and limitations on funds available to meet the requirements of Category 1 - New Faculty, the PRG Terms of Reference have been revised to retain only this Category of award.

These awards will continue to provide funds to help new faculty members initiate their research program and to enhance the likelihood of attracting external funds. A grant will be made to a faculty member only once and is not renewable.

Newly appointed faculty members are invited to submit an application to the Fund at any time prior to the end of their first semester of appointment. Those faculty members who were appointed after September 1, 1997 and who have not yet held a President’s Research Grant, are asked to apply before the end of the 2000 calendar year. Any questions about this regulation should be directed to the Research Grants Officer.

A positive evaluation from the Chair or Director is an essential component of the award process and applications that fail to obtain this recommendation will not be considered. One original application and the evaluation form should be forwarded to the Research Grants Officer. Award letters will be provided as soon as possible following submission of a complete application. Should the research require human, animal care or biosafety approval, such approvals must be in place before the award is released.

Award values will depend on the amount required for the research as described and justified by the applicant. The range of awards is established annually based on funds available and estimated demand. The current maximum award value is $10,000.

Application forms and guidelines are available on the Web at www.sfu.ca/ors/Forms.html.

Meet our new Contracts Officer

The Office of Research Services is pleased to announce the appointment of David Hass to the position of Contracts Officer. David brings to his role at SFU a blend of legal and administrative aptitudes, developed in the course of earning degrees in law (LL.B, UVic, 1992) and business (MBA, UBC, 2000), and practicing for a few years as a litigation lawyer.

David sees one of his main challenges as achieving a balance between two duties that sometimes conflict: expeditiously facilitating professors’ research activities, and carefully structuring contractual relations with research sponsors to minimize risk to the University.

Contact David at local 5717 or email hass@sfu.ca