The Sometimes Bumpy Road to Research Funding

While at times the road to research funding appears clear and smooth, researchers are advised to proceed with caution as there are numerous hazards that might not be immediately apparent. Many funding programs that may be thought of as providing grants have sometimes onerous and problematic terms and conditions in the research contracts that govern the funding.

In general, there appears to be a trend by funding sponsors toward attaching more terms and conditions to their research funding, in some cases with more complex reporting requirements, restrictive intellectual property and publication provisions. In addition, we are seeing more agreements which provide funding in arrears of work based upon receipt of reports, and on which the sponsor attempts to shift a greater level of risk and liability onto the University, as well as other contentious terms and conditions that change the structure of the funding arrangement further from a grant and more and more toward a research contract, though the labelling of the funding programs as “grants” may remain unchanged. A few recent examples serve to illustrate this:

• A noteworthy feature of the standard Project Agreement for the E-content program of CANARIE (Canada’s advanced Internet development organization) has a termination provision that, under certain circumstances, in the event of early termination, would require SFU to repay CANARIE 1.33 times the amount of the contribution the University has received, regardless of how much has been legitimately spent on the research prior to termination, as “liquidated damages.” Thus a case of a research proposal seeking matching funding from a quasi-government agency becomes a case requiring an internal risk assessment by a prospective internal financial guarantor.

• Imperial Oil, long-time provider of straightforward research grants to Canadian researchers, recently made some changes to the intellectual property provisions of its new Research Awards program, through which it is now seeking a royalty-free right to use any intellectual property arising from the research for commercial purposes, even where its contribution might have been only a small portion of the research funding for the work that led to the development of that intellectual property.

• The most recent funding agreement from the Institute for Robotics and Intelligent Systems (IRIS) Network was different from its predecessors in that payments that had been made in advance are now to be made in arrears. This requires the University to provide the funding to the researcher before it is received, making an arrangement that had in the past been “grant-like” into one that is more “contract-like”, at additional financial risk and administrative burden to the University that normally give rise to imposition of overhead charges.

• Some research sponsors, such as Forestry Innovation Investment (FII) in BC as well as CANARIE, impose complex reporting requirements on recipients. Reporting on matching contributions and time allocated can require labour-intensive, meticulous record keeping. This requirement, in addition to completion of work in accordance with the precise expectations of the sponsor, can make running such a project much more time consuming than a typical SSHRC or NSERC grant. Therefore, building into the budget the appropriate amounts for overhead and project management costs are important considerations at the proposal stage.

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Like most other universities, Simon Fraser University (SFU) is in a period of intensive faculty renewal. In 2003 to date, SFU has appointed over 50 new faculty members. Last year we appointed almost as many, and next year we expect to appoint a similar number.

One key role of the office of the Vice-President, Research is to assist newly appointed faculty members to get their research careers off to a quick and successful start. To that end, I write to each new appointee at the time the SFU Board of Governors approves his or her appointment, advising of the opportunities for research support and the assistance available in the Office of Research Services and the University/Industry Liaison Office. This letter refers to a Web site where details of these programs may be obtained: www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/welcome.html.

In September of each year, we participate actively in the orientation program coordinated by the Office of the Vice-President, Academic. The Directors of Research Services, University/Industry Liaison, Animal Care, Research Ethics and the Major Projects Office join me in putting a personal face on our availability to help, and in outlining the services and opportunities that we provide.

New faculty members are all eligible to receive a start-up research grant of up to $10,000 called the President’s Research Grant. This grant may be used to purchase equipment and/or supplies, engage research assistants, and/or fund research travel. It is also intended to fund preliminary research to help prepare new faculty members to apply to external granting agencies.

We frequently publicize news about granting programs and other research-related useful information via three specific, public email lists. These mailing lists are focused on subject areas as delineated by the national granting agencies and are called nserc-list, sshrc-list, and cihr-list. To enroll, go to www.sfu.ca/orls/listservers.html. Everyone with an interest in research should subscribe to one or more of these lists, depending on his or her areas of interest.

One other enhancement of our support of research is the Research Expertise Database. It may be found at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/red/ and will be helpful to scholars looking for collaborators and to graduate students wishing to identify potential supervisors. New and present faculty members should check their entries there for currency and accuracy.

I’ll conclude with a sincere “Welcome to SFU” to our new faculty members.
The mission of the University/Industry Liaison Office (UILO) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) is to facilitate the creation of university-industry research and development partnerships, and to commercialize the results of university-based research that will provide an economic return to the University, the Province of British Columbia, and Canada, while appropriately rewarding the researcher.

In addition to the achievements highlighted in the table below, the UILO assisted SFU researchers with the development of 40 applications for applied research funding in 2002/03. A total of 31 research grants and contracts with industry worth over $4.5 million were negotiated on behalf of SFU researchers. The UILO received 28 applications in two internal Prototype Development Fund Competitions, from which 15 awards were made to researchers for amounts ranging from $5,000 to $12,000.

The UILO has established a permanent presence at the TIME (Technology, Innovation, Management, and Entrepreneurship) Centre located at SFU’s Harbour Centre campus. The TIME Centre’s mission is to support research, teaching, and innovation in technology and management by creating long-term partnerships between SFU and technology-based businesses. The TIME Centre hosts VANTEC, the Angel Technology Network of the Vancouver Enterprise Forum, which introduces early stage investors and mentors to promising technology ventures in BC. Also based at the TIME Centre is New Ventures BC, an entrepreneurship competition founded by the SFU Faculty of Business Administration and the UILO together with industry partners. The competition encourages students and researchers to produce new ventures by supporting the development of entrepreneurs with technology product and service ideas. Intellectual property management and technology transfer services have also been established at the new SFU Surrey campus.

The UILO receives ongoing support for its staff and programs from SFU. Partial operating support for the UILO was provided by the Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise, Government of British Columbia. In addition, 2002/03 was the first year of a new three-year award from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council’s (NSERC) Intellectual Property Management (IPM) program to support technology transfer activities at SFU.

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**UILO Technology Managers**

Researchers, students and staff are encouraged to consult the UILO Technology Managers listed below:

- **Information Technologies**: Teri Lydiard, 604-291-5844, lydiard@sfu.ca
- **Life Sciences**: Ziba Afshar, 604-291-3014, zafshar@sfu.ca
- **Medical Devices & Natural Resource Technologies**: Matt Ferguson, 604-291-3966, matt_ferguson@sfu.ca
- **Surrey campus and eLearning**: Justine Bizzocchi, 604-268-7508, justine@sfu.ca

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Fall Grants Competitions Deadlines

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) have posted Fall application deadlines for their major granting programs. The granting agencies’ procedures differ with regard to method of submission, application forms, and deadline dates. In all cases, however, all applications require the completion of the SFU Funding Application Signature Sheet (found on the Web at [www.sfu.ca/ors/forms/sig_sheet.html](http://www.sfu.ca/ors/forms/sig_sheet.html)) and the approval of the SFU Research Grants Officer prior to submission to the agency.

The electronic submission process (currently used only by NSERC) requires SFU applicants to ensure that the Research Grants Officer has received a signed copy of their application and a completed SFU Funding Application Signature Sheet no later than four working days prior to the agency deadline in order to allow time for review of the application and completion of the University’s role in the electronic submission process.

To get paper applications safely to Ottawa, applicants may take advantage of mailing services organized in their own department, or they may utilize a mass mailing offered by the Office of Research Services (ORS). In order to take advantage of the ORS mass mailing service, fully approved and signed copies of each application need to be packaged in a separate sealed, addressed envelope (one envelope per applicant). These envelopes must be placed in a box located in 2100 Strand Hall prior to the deadline dates shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Deadline</th>
<th>CIHR</th>
<th>SSHRC</th>
<th>NSERC</th>
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<td>Not Applicable (N/A)</td>
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<td>Courier Deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>SFU Drop-off box (for those who wish to take advantage of this optional mailing service)</td>
<td>September 9, 2003</td>
<td>October 9, 2003</td>
<td>October 24, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of copies and mailing address</td>
<td>The original and 8 copies Canadian Institutes of Health Research 410 Laurier Avenue West 9th Floor Address Locator 4209A Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0W9</td>
<td>The original and 3 copies Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council 350 Albert Street P.O. Box 1610 Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6G4</td>
<td>Electronic submission (further instructions to be provided in September) OR The original and 7 copies National Sciences and Engineering Research Council 350 Albert Street Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1H5</td>
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