SFU Receives $4.96 Million for Indirect Costs of Research

The success of researchers at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in competing for federal grants over the last three years will provide a return to the University of $4.96 million in 2003-04.

In its 2003 budget, the Government of Canada announced a new, permanent program to support the indirect costs associated with the conduct of academic research in institutions that receive awards from the three federal granting agencies. The term “indirect costs” refers to the central and departmental administrative and other costs that institutions incur to support research, costs that are not attributable to specific research projects. The method used to calculate the indirect costs allocations uses data from the federal granting agencies that reflect all the research grants received by each institution’s researchers in the most recent three-year rolling period. This year, the amount of SFU’s allocation represents 29.3% of the average direct costs of research at SFU supported by the three federal granting agencies from 1999 to 2002.

What will SFU do with the money? In accordance with the program guidelines, the funds will be used to enhance centrally provided and departmental research infrastructure as well as services including the SFU library, animal care, academic computer networks, grants facilitation (see other articles in this issue) and knowledge transfer activities. According to SFU Vice-President, Research, Dr. Bruce Clayman, “These funds are essential for SFU researchers to maximize their potential productivity and the impact of their research. The permanent nature of the federal program allows us to plan productively for the optimal deployment of these resources for the future.”

Patrons of Scholarship in Education

Scholarship has always depended on patrons. In the Renaissance, patrons were members of the aristocracy; in the 21st century, the University is patron to its community of scholars, taking steps to ensure that researchers have the resources they need to pursue their ideas. This is the view of Dr. Phil Winne, Coordinator for Research and Development in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU), who commends SFU’s foresight in establishing an internal system of support that includes Faculty-based Grants Facilitators. “Our consistently high rankings in the Maclean’s surveys are evidence of how successful we are in research,” says Dr. Winne, “and that reflects not only the quality of the faculty we have at SFU but also in no small measure the support available for preparing research funding applications.” He credits the “very wise way” in which SFU’s Vice-President, Research, Dr. Bruce Clayman, has provided funds to the Faculty for this purpose from University sources and from the federal allocation for indirect cost recovery.

The People

Dr. Winne’s involvement in grants facilitation at SFU began in 1990, when he was asked to take on a mentoring role in helping colleagues to identify potential sources of funding, write grant applications, understand regulations, develop budgets, and structure environments for mentoring students fortunate enough to win awards. “For me it’s been as much a learning experience as a service role,” he says. “We have a very considerable breadth of scholarship in the Faculty of Education. As a somewhat narrowly focused educational psychologist, I’ve learned a great deal about the liberal studies in my field.” The experience has been of benefit in more ways than one: Dr. Winne and his research team have just been awarded a $3M grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)...
With the change in national leadership, it is important to assess the attitude and approach of the “new regime” toward the support of university research and to see how they project on our activities at Simon Fraser University. The formal transition in leadership is now underway and there are important clues to Mr. Martin’s views in the speech that he gave to the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal in September, 2003. See www.paulmartintimes.ca.

In his speech, Mr. Martin recognizes the critical role of basic research, but it is somewhat worrying to see his emphasis on deficiencies in commercialization in Canada as compared with the US. The message that Mr. Martin delivered is only part of the story, however. In studies that I published earlier this year, based on the AUTM surveys (see www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/vpreports.htm), and mentioned in my previous article in Research Links (Autumn 2003), two critical factors are lack of receptor capacity in Canadian industry (compared with the US) and differences in institutional culture among Canadian universities with respect to commercialization of intellectual property. Lack of receptors leads to a much higher rate of creation of spin-off companies in Canada (where SFU is the North American leader). Unfortunately, spin-offs tend to be slower to produce financial returns due to the time required for start-up and difficulties in attracting needed capital; this is part of the reason for the lower licensing revenues in Canada cited by Mr. Martin. He recognized these limitations later in his speech and proposes some solutions. With respect to differences in institutional culture, it is positive that Mr. Martin cites WestLink, the consortium of western Canadian technology transfer offices (of which SFU is a charter member), as a “very promising effort” that “deserves real encouragement.”

There are other positive signs in Mr. Martin’s speech, but it is clear that his information base is incomplete and perhaps biased by the view looking west from Ottawa into Ontario, where performance in knowledge transfer lags behind that in the West. I shall continue my efforts to improve understanding of the essential role and positive effects of basic and applied university research, and will continue to convey the results to the decision-makers in Ottawa and Victoria.

through its program for Initiatives on the New Economy (INE), one of only seven such awards in Canada. The overall objective of his research is to help people learn better, through development of software tools to enhance learning skills and support life-long learning.

Mr. Gerald Walton has now joined the Faculty of Education as Grants Facilitator, on a part-time basis for the present while he finishes his own doctoral work in Education. “The requirement for my comprehensive exam [at Queen’s] was to pretend to be a faculty member and prepare a faculty-level SSHRC Standard Grant proposal,” he explains. “I had just completed the exam and come home to BC when I was interviewed for this position, so I was able to draw from that experience.”

The Service  Grants Facilitators are always on the lookout for programs to support research. They suggest funding opportunities, do some “supportive ghost-writing” as well as editorial work, and make sure that the administrative aspects are taken care of—forms filled in completely, regulations followed properly, numbers added up correctly and signatures in the right places. “The role is a service one,” says Mr. Walton. “The type and amount of help that people want is quite individual, and the ways in which I can be of service vary depending on who needs what, from editing to photocopying to helping navigate Web-based application forms.” Dr. Winne notes also that a central unit with people who have experience managing applications can be a great help in special circumstances, through the personal connections built up over time with agency representatives in Ottawa. “It’s not a question of special treatment,” he’s quick to add, “but simply a matter of knowing whom to call and how to get through—things that a person unfamiliar with the system wouldn’t necessarily know.”

The service adds value in other ways as well: because proposals come to a central location, there are opportunities to make linkages among people who might not have thought to find partnership in one another’s research activities, and to facilitate knowledge exchanges that result in stronger applications.

The Future  “SFU is currently competing at the highest level for SSHRC grants and other research funding, capturing, for example, three of the seven national INE grants,” notes Dean of Education Dr. Paul Shaker. “This type of success is allowing the Faculty of Education to pursue the vision of numerous professors whose projects have great promise for promoting learning in a variety of contexts.” Now that Mr. Walton has joined the team, he and Dr. Winne are looking forward to expanding their activities in ways that will help faculty members become even more cognizant of opportunities for supporting their scholarly efforts and their graduate students. SSHRC has been the primary source for research support in Education; the agenda now is to broaden the base of support. “Given that we are already a reasonably successful...
Academic Entrepreneurs in Arts

The largest Faculty at Simon Fraser University (SFU), with the encouragement and financial support of Vice-President, Research, Dr. Bruce Clayman, has doubled its Grants Facilitation program through the addition of a second full-time professional: **Ms. Pearl Hunt** has joined Dr. Olena Hankivsky to assist researchers in the Faculty of Arts in preparing the best possible research grant proposals. “This is a very exciting place to be in the University,” says Dr. Hankivsky, a political scientist who has been the recipient of and co-investigator on a number of research grants. “We are like entrepreneurs in an academic setting.” Adds Ms. Hunt, whose own work is in the performing arts, “When people ask me what I do, I compare being a Grants Facilitator to the role of a dramaturge who puts together several elements of a play, working with both the producer and the writer.” In the following paragraphs Dr. Hankivsky and Ms. Hunt talk about their work together.

**Building Networks**  “The main reason for expanding the program is to be able to respond better to the needs of researchers in the Faculty of Arts. A specific goal over the next year will be to develop researcher profiles, so that on an annual basis we can provide individual reports with information on available grants, new programs, and other researchers working in similar areas, both here at SFU and at other institutions nationally and internationally. We want to start building networks and having people plan longer-term programs of research, because this is what granting agencies want to see – that when you apply for a project, it’s part of a really coherent program of research, and that you have a clear sense of where you’ve been and where you’re planning to go.

“Development work is critical for researchers to connect with others to create networks. Too often people scramble to bring groups together; more proposal development funds are needed to ensure the authenticity of the process and to develop effective interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships. These networks live beyond the life of any one grant. If you get a good set of people together, the returns to the University can be tremendous.

**Special Challenges**  “One of the challenges in our job is to get people planning far enough ahead. A grant proposal can’t be written in two days. It takes a very long time, and typically it takes from three to ten drafts to get it to the point where it’s ready to submit.

“Two other aspects of this job are especially challenging. One is that in our capacity here we can work to ensure that the best application is going forward, but at the end of the day the peer review process is still unpredictable; it really depends on the composition of the group in any given year in any given committee, no matter what the agency. The other part that we cannot control is whether or not researchers are keeping up on their research records. A good proposal needs to be supported by a strong research record. The feedback we’re getting, especially in the last year, is that much more attention is being focused on applicants’ research records, with reviewers looking up publications and doing citation checks.

**Workshops and Internal Reviews**  “We give writing workshops in the Faculty of Arts that are open to everyone, and we get people coming from other areas such as Education, Communications, Business and the School of Interactive Arts and Technology. We go through the technical issues, but the focus is on what makes a good grant and what is effective writing. We emphasize that there’s a difference between good academic writing and good grant writing.

“We’ve also started an internal peer review process. We ask researchers to bring their draft proposals to a workshop where we set them up in groups and they do an internal peer review exercise. They get feedback from their peers, from us, and from the faculty mentors, so by the time their applications go forward we can be reasonably sure that we’ve done everything we can. The workshops are very informal, and we problem-solve together; it’s a great way to get people more motivated and focused. It’s never too early to start!”

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Faculty with respect to our research activities,” says Dr. Winne, “I’m going to set an ambitious goal and say that we hope to at least double the number of awards or number of dollars we bring in, not only so that our faculty can provide more information to their fields of endeavour, but also so that we can provide an environment for our graduate students to learn the craft of scholarship.”

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"Our Grants Facilitators have already proven that they can add significant value to the conceptualization and execution of grant proposals. Their services are a vital component in ensuring that we continue to raise our research profile and productivity.”

Dean of Arts Dr. John Pierce
and critical issues of intellectual, social, economic and cultural significance through the effective coordination and integration of diverse research activities and research results.

**Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC)**

www.nserc.gc.ca/professors_e.asp?nav=profnav&lbi=b1

Program: Strategic Project Grants (SPG)

Application Deadline: April 15, 2004

NSERC has reviewed its current program structure and is consolidating some programs, including the New Directions target area of the SPG program. The New Directions target area has been integrated with a new program entitled Special Research Opportunity (SRO) program. As a result, NSERC will no longer be accepting applications to the New Directions target area of the SPG program (starting in fiscal year 2004-05).

Targeted areas of the SPG program include biosciences; environment and sustainable development; information and communications technologies; value-added products and processes.

**Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**

www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/program_descriptions/conferences_e.asp

Program: Aid to Occasional Research Conferences and International Congresses in Canada

Postmarked Deadline: May 3, 2004

The purpose of this program is to encourage and facilitate the communication of research, within and between disciplines, among Canadian researchers, international experts and foreign researchers through occasional regional and national conferences and workshops, as well as through congresses of international scholarly associations held in Canada.

**The Canada Council**

http://www.canadacouncil.ca/prizes/killam/default.asp

Program: Killam Research Fellowships

Electronic Application: Submission to ORS May 12, 2004; Ottawa deadline May 17, 2004

The purpose of this program is to provide release time to senior scholars in any discipline, who are at the height of their academic career, in order that they may pursue independent research.

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