

**Review of the Meredith College  
Office of Sponsored Programs**

**February 2-3, 2009**

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**Frances Vinal Farnsworth, Sponsored Research Office, Middlebury College**

**John A. Mecham, Department of Biology and Health Sciences, Meredith College**

**Jennifer Olson, Department of Education, Meredith College**

## INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of a two-day peer review of the Meredith College Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) that took place February 2-3, 2009. Dr. Elizabeth Wolfinger, Dean, School of Natural and Mathematical Sciences (NMS) and Dr. Linda Hatcher, OSP Director, designed the external review in order to satisfy the institutional effectiveness requirement at Meredith College and to provide advice and suggestions for improvements after the initial three years of OSP operation. The external member of the review team was Franci Farnsworth, Coordinator of Sponsored Research at Middlebury College; internal members of the team were Dr. Jennifer Olson, Assistant Professor of Education and Dr. John Mecham, Department Head, Biology and Health Sciences. Dr. Hatcher prepared a thorough self-study report that was provided to the review team in advance of the two-day review, along with links to various supporting materials. The review team met with 17 members of the Meredith community (faculty, department heads, and staff) as well as Dean Wolfinger, OSP Director Hatcher, and Vice President of Academic Programs (VPAP) Allen Page.

Our report is divided into three sections:

- **History and Function of the Office of Sponsored Programs:** We believe that this information helps provide the context for our conclusions and recommendations.
- **Peer Review Overview, Observations and Conclusions:** This is the report of what we learned from analyzing the self-study and the two days of meetings with members of the Meredith community.
- **Specific Recommendations:** We are making 11 specific recommendations that fall into seven broad areas. Most recommendations will require action by the administration or the entire faculty; others could be implemented directly by the Office of Sponsored Programs. These recommendations represent ideas that were developed during the various meetings with members of the Meredith community, specific suggestions that are informed by the external reviewer's knowledge of sponsored programs practices at other small colleges, and strategies that all members of the review team believe will lead to a stronger Office of Sponsored Programs at Meredith College.

## HISTORY AND FUNCTION OF THE OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROGRAMS

The Office of Sponsored Programs was established in 2005, with a part-time Director (20 hours per week). The office has been funded since its inception from the funds allocated to the Academic Administration from "indirect costs" recovered from federal grants. During these first three years, the office has at various times reported to the VPAP, functioned in a void with little institutional oversight, and reported to the Dean NMS as an interim solution when the Associate VPAP position was vacant; throughout this period, the office was located in a small annex occupied by only one other office (and then only part-time, so there was virtually no contact with other members of the community on a regular basis). Although everyone agrees that the logical reporting line for OSP, in light of Meredith's organizational chart, is to the Associate VPAP (along with Faculty Development, Undergraduate Research, and similar "special programs") at the present time OSP continues to report to the Dean, School of Natural and Mathematical Sciences. Last July, OSP moved from its isolated location to an office adjacent to the Dean NMS. Also last

July, in response to advocacy from the Dean NMS and OSP and longstanding recognition of the need, the college hired a part-time Compliance Specialist who is responsible for monitoring grant expenses and overseeing compliance with federal auditing requirements; OSP works closely with the Compliance Specialist in handling reporting and other post-award non-accounting grant administration

It is important to note that OSP is staffed by one part-time professional. OSP has limited access to administrative assistance and there is no job description for that “position”.

The stated mission of OSP is to serve as a “resource for faculty, providing information and assistance in the grant-seeking process.” By “enhancing faculty research, scholarship, and collaboration” OSP contributes to the overall mission and goals of Meredith College because an intellectually engaged faculty will be more effective teachers and mentors for Meredith students.

*OSP provides the following **Pre-award** services:*

- Information dissemination (including maintaining OSP website and managing subscription databases)
- Workshops for faculty on grant-writing and grant-seeking process
- Assistance with grant application and requirement interpretation, including providing a timeline to ensure timely compliance with institutional endorsement
- Assisting with institutional sections of grant proposals and editing
- Managing electronic research administration systems for the college
- Developing, updating, and maintaining documentation for policies and procedures related to grant submission
- Review of grant submissions for compliance with agency and college requirements (and facilitation of routing form process)
- Perform grant searches based on topics of interest

*OSP provides the following **Post-award** services*

- Overseeing compliance with reporting requirements
- Working with Compliance Specialist to ensure timely completion of fiscal reports and oversight of grant spending
- Workshops on budget management
- Assisting Compliance Specialist with development of procedures and policies related to post-award issues

In addition to serving individual faculty members and departments, OSP has facilitated grant submissions from academic units (such as Library Information Services). OSP serves as a resource for the Director of Corporate & Foundation Relations in Institutional Advancement, the Compliance Specialist in Accounting, and the Director of Faculty Development.

## PEER REVIEW OVERVIEW

Over the course of two days, the review team met individually with Linda Hatcher, OSP Director and Liz Wolfinger, Dean, School of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, to whom OSP reports; in a series of group and individual meetings, the team also met with faculty members who had experience applying for and managing grants before and after the establishment of OSP, faculty members who are currently interacting with OSP, department heads (with and without direct involvement with OSP), and staff members who interact with OSP. At the end of the second day, the team met with Dr. Allen Page, VPAP, to get his input and present preliminary findings and had a final meeting with Linda Hatcher and Liz Wolfinger for a Preliminary Summation. We did not talk with anyone who had attended a grant workshop or with faculty members who had not interacted personally with OSP. A complete list of the individuals with whom we talked is at the end of this report.

### Analysis of the Self-Study

The self-study appears to comply with the program review guidelines. It is organized into the required six sections: Mission, Goals, Objectives; Program Description & Analysis; Operations & Resource Management; Evaluation/Assessment; Strengths & Weaknesses; Actions to Improve Programs and Operations. There are extensive appendices. It would have been helpful if the study had included historical background on OSP. We thought that the report could have included more data to support certain assertions (for example, data on faculty use of the external databases, data supporting the statement that faculty prefer applying for internal grants, and feedback from the various workshops offered).

Two sections of the self-study did not seem relevant to OSP or the Director's job description (although they are responsive to questions in the guidelines): 1) Service to Meredith and Wider Community: This activity does not seem connected to the mission of OSP (unless Meredith has an expectation that all offices provide community service). 2) Special opportunities afforded to students: Although the OSP does provide a work-study job opportunity, it does not seem appropriate to review OSP on the basis of opportunities for students. (The report does note that students benefit from the work of OSP through OSP's support of faculty research and scholarship). Although discussions with the Director indicated that she consistently works more than 20 hours a week, the report did not include the data that could have helped build a case for increasing the budget for the Director's time.

### Observations

1) Faculty members who have worked with OSP say that the office is helpful and amazingly responsive. Those who applied for and managed grants prior to the establishment of OSP report that having the office is a vast improvement. Since the establishment of the office, OSP has facilitated 24 grant submissions of which 10 were funded (42%). This is a good success rate, and reflects well on the office. Liz Wolfinger noted the incredible effort and support that OSP provided for the NSF S-STEMS proposal submitted last year (note: this grant has been recommended for funding).

2) Procedures for grant applications and managing grants are well developed. Faculty interested in grants seem aware of OSP and its services. Although the OSP website is hard to find, all emails from the Director include a link. Since the office moved to the Science & Math Building, visibility and access have improved. Although OSP is concerned that faculty

and staff might perceive that it exists only to serve the School of NMS, we found that most people we talked with understood that OSP's mission is college-wide. More visibility on the website and frequent use of the term "faculty grants" would help.

3) There is confusion about the role of OSP at Meredith. Does OSP ever write grant proposals? What assistance does the office provide for fellowships that are paid directly to faculty? What is the OSP role with post award issues and budgets? And who helps OSP set priorities?

4) We heard many different perspectives on the importance of faculty grant-seeking at Meredith. Although Liz Wolfinger and Allen Page both explicitly stated their support for faculty grant-seeking and articulated their understanding of the value that writing grant proposals is a valuable faculty development activity, there are many in the community who fear that increased support for grant-seeking could lead to an expectation that all faculty members should apply for grants.

5) There is a sense that the college prefers grants that "pay full indirects" (i.e., allow recovery of the full amount of indirect costs as determined by the negotiated indirect cost rate) and that the college discourages faculty from considering grants that don't allow indirect cost recovery. This misperception can affect the way that faculty and others interact with OSP

6) There were many positive comments about the emails that OSP sends regarding possible grant opportunities. Although some faculty indicated that long lists of opportunities that haven't been screened for relevance to Meredith are not useful, most faculty members we met with appreciated receiving notices even when they did not have time to follow up or knew the suggestions most probably would not work.

7) The Compliance Specialist position has been well-received by grant project directors and has freed up OSP to concentrate more on pre-award functions. There appears to be a close working relationship between the two offices. As the Compliance Specialist develops more tools to assist project directors with grant budget management, OSP should have even more time to focus on pre-award functions.

8) The Office of Assessment & Institutional Research appears to be an underutilized resource both for developing assessment portions of grant proposals and institutional data as well as developing office goals.

### Conclusions

The Office of Sponsored Programs contributes to the mission of Meredith College by providing support to its faculty in seeking external funding for research and other scholarly activities including curriculum development. As noted in the self-study, "faculty engaged in scholarship or research activities are more likely to engage their students in these activities and as a result, enrich the student's learning experiences". Thus OSP contributes to the education of Meredith's students. Grants bring long term benefits to the college that can't be quantified in dollars. For example: a Fulbright faculty fellowship (a grant paid directly to the faculty member) led to opportunities for student research abroad, visiting foreign faculty at Meredith (who contribute to "global awareness"), a relationship with a foreign institution, faculty collaborative research and potential for grant funding, curriculum development, and "marketing" opportunities.

The Office of Sponsored Programs has established policies and procedures, developed systems for information dissemination, worked with PIs and accounting to ensure timely reporting on grants, and with the move to SMB is now able to provide more assistance to individual science and math faculty while continuing to serve faculty throughout the college. With this foundation, the office is positioned to streamline processes, to improve communication with all constituencies, and to develop strategic goals and criteria for future evaluations.

Administrators of sponsored programs serve dual roles – they are responsible for enforcing college policy and ensuring compliance with sponsor policies but they also have a faculty development role in helping faculty learn about funding sources and how to prepare grant proposals; perhaps a more important faculty development role is encouraging faculty to think about how grants might fit into their research and professional development goals. It is our sense that the first role has been the focus of the Office of Sponsored Programs during its first three years as policies and procedures were articulated and developed; this has led to the perception by some that OSP is just the enforcer of rules. We believe that this image can be changed if the college adopts our recommendations and OSP develops strategic goals that balance these two roles.

We are concerned about how to sustain the Office of Sponsored Programs at its current level when the funding source is not reliable (“indirect costs” depend on receiving grants that allow for this budget item). We believe that this insecurity is not good for sustained viability of OSP or for the image of OSP within the Meredith community (to say nothing of the sense of job insecurity for the director).

At the present time, the Office of Sponsored Programs reports to the Dean NMS. This structure is a good solution for now. It provides continuity and stable support for the OSP and aligns with the current Dean’s background in faculty development and grant-seeking; it also recognizes that the majority of grants and current potential for grants is within the School of Natural & Mathematical Sciences. However, in the long term (certainly when either the Dean or Director leave their positions, if not sooner) this reporting structure should be reviewed.

## **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Office of Sponsored Programs should be retained; faculty, department heads, and deans report positive change in preparing grant proposals, navigating the process and managing awarded grants since the inception of the office and addition of the Compliance Specialist position. We recommend that the director’s position be funded at least 20 hours per week from operating funds, not from an allocation of recovered indirect costs because of the fluctuation in that source given low grant volume and the unpredictability of receiving grants that allow indirect cost recovery. The college’s commitment to this office is aligned with the mission of the college, goals of Vision 2010, and the Faculty Role Model, and it has an impact on student learning. While OSP efforts will necessarily focus on grants submitted through the college, the office should also be a resource for faculty seeking external support regardless of whether grants are paid directly to faculty or through the college. We also recommend that the Director have scheduled access to administrative assistance and that there be a job description for that position.

2. Although the Director of OSP has done an admirable job of obtaining professional development at little or no cost (through opportunities in the Research Triangle area, a networking listserv, and online resources) we recommend that the college provide additional support for the Director to network in person with sponsored programs colleagues working at predominantly undergraduate institutions and to continually update her knowledge about research and curriculum development programs (federal and private) that are appropriate for PUIs. Although the institutions in the Research Triangle area are an excellent resource, those professionals and the programs that they develop may not be sensitive to the realities of faculty research at a predominantly undergraduate institution where teaching is the most important faculty role. According to the Council on Undergraduate Research website, Meredith College is an institutional member of CUR; given the emphasis on undergraduate research at Meredith, and the fact that seeking support for undergraduate research could be a driving force for faculty grant-seeking, this is an excellent resource for faculty and for OSP.
3. We believe that there is a strong case for increasing the hours of the OSP director based on her current workload and the potential increase in faculty grant-seeking. We recommend that OSP develop the data to document this need and begin a strategic planning process to incrementally increase the hours for the director.
4. Clarity about the role and responsibilities of OSP is essential in order develop criteria for evaluating the office and setting short and long term strategic goals. Because OSP is a one-person office, we recommend establishing an advisory group, composed of relevant faculty and staff, for help with setting these goals. We recommend that the administration take the lead in clarifying the distinction between grants that are facilitated and managed by OSP and those that are the domain of Corporate & Foundation Relations; it is possible that the regular meetings of academic administrators, CFR, and OSP should be reinstated.
5. OSP needs to work on improving its communications throughout the campus. In particular we recommend establishing regular meetings between the Director of Faculty Development and Director of Sponsored Programs, transmitting information on the role of OSP to various stake holders, connecting with faculty members early in their careers (perhaps through faculty orientation activities), meeting with department heads in all schools, and continuing to refine and focus grant opportunity notices to specific faculty or departments. Although currently most faculty and staff understand that OSP is a college-wide resource, the OSP director and Dean NMS need to be proactive in spreading the word. While OSP reports to the Dean NMS, responsibility for grants originating in other schools should rest with those deans; we recommend that internal procedures be developed to clarify this responsibility.
6. In order to better support faculty who want to seek funding for research, OSP needs to be prepared to deal with various compliance issues including: human subjects, animal research, research misconduct, ethics training, intellectual property, and property transfer (i.e., when faculty leaving Meredith want to take grant-funded equipment with them). In some cases, it may be necessary to develop institutional policies; in other cases, it may be sufficient simply to understand the issues involved and ramifications. This is a long term, ongoing, process. We recommend that OSP, with input from a grant advisory group, identify the areas of highest priority and develop plans for addressing these issues.

7. The OSP self-study indicated that the biggest “threat and barrier” that impeded progress on the OSP goal of increasing faculty grant submissions, was that faculty did not have time to apply for grants (based on the May 2008 survey). One source of faculty time is the Faculty Development programs for course release and summer stipend funding. We recommend that all publicity for these programs make it clear that working on a grant proposal is an eligible activity. In addition, we recommend that the college establish a new faculty standing committee comprised of faculty members who are each committed to writing a grant proposal. The OSP Director would staff this committee, and committee meetings would serve as a support group for all members in their grant preparation processes. The purpose of this committee is to provide some faculty members with time for working on their grant proposals. Faculty would apply for this committee; Faculty Council would develop criteria for selecting members (which could include the impact of the grant on the college as well as the faculty member’s professional development). Each committee member would be expected to submit a grant proposal. This committee could serve as the OSP advisory group, or the OSP advisory group could provide support for this committee. Ideally this committee would serve as a faculty member’s only standing committee responsibility and thus would provide a good incentive for faculty members who want to write grant proposals.

## **Meredith Faculty and Staff Who Met with Review Team**

Elizabeth Wolfinger, Dean, School of Natural & Mathematical Sciences

Linda Hatcher, Director , Office of Sponsored Programs

Allen Page, Vice President for Academic Programs

### Grant Recipients & Grant Seekers

Jennifer Hontz, Associate Professor of Mathematics

Susan Fisher, Associate Professor of Human Environmental Sciences

Walda Powell, Dept Head, Chemistry, Physics & Geosciences

Francie Cuffney, Director of Undergraduate Research

Erin Lindquist, Assistant Professor of Biology & Health Sciences

Tim Hendrix, Associate Professor of Mathematics & Computer Science

### Staff/Offices that Interact with OSP

Ellen Goode, Faculty Development Director

Alicia Casadonte, Compliance Specialist

Lori Duke, Controller

Cindy Godwin, Director, Corporate & Foundation Relations

### Academic Deans, Department Heads, Program Directors

Pam Steinke, Director of Assessment and Institutional Research

Deborah Tippet, Dept Head, Human Environmental Sciences

Jackie Dietz, Dept Head, Mathematics & Computer Science

Cindy Edwards, Associate VP for Academic Programs, Professor of Psychology

Laura Davidson, Dean of Library Information Services

\*\*John Mecham, Dept Head, Biology and Health Sciences

\*Walda Powell, Dept Head, Chemistry, Physics & Geosciences

Mary Kay Delaney, Dept Head, Education

\* also attended an earlier session

\*\* also a member of review team