

Windows of Opportunity

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The “New Normal” in Sponsored Programs

IN THIS ISSUE

The “New Normal” in Sponsored Programs	1
New Certified Research Administrator at MSU	2
Featured Awards	3
Awardee Profile: Dr. Stefanie Brachfeld	4
The Omni-Circular: A Game Changer	5
Research at MSU: Perspective from CSAM’s Dean	6
To Submit or Not To Submit in a Changing Landscape	8

ORSP is happy to welcome Geetha Sampathkumar, Sponsored Programs Administrator, to MSU!

Welcome to ORSP’s first “themed” newsletter! Perhaps appropriately with the change of seasons, this fall’s newsletter will focus on “change” in the research and sponsored programs environment. While it may sound trite, the sheer volume of change happening in and around research and sponsored programs is frankly unprecedented.

While demand for research funding has long exceeded supply, the gap between applications submitted and awards received continues to widen. As a result, universities are looking to broaden their research portfolios and increase proposal competitiveness. Universities are increasingly looking at non-federal sponsors, to include foundations, corporations, and associations. As a result of the shrinking federal funding pie, universities are in some cases more willing to agree to terms with private sponsors that they would not have envisioned even a few short years ago in order to fill the gap. There is also increased emphasis on international research opportunities. And, in recent years, “crowdfunding” has played an increasing role in the funding of short-term, small dol-

lar projects of particular interest to individual micro-donors, on sites such as Microrzyza and Petri Dish.

Universities are responding in numerous ways. In 2010, The National Organization of Research Development Professionals ([NORDP](#)), was formed to “serve research

development professionals and their institutions by providing a formal organization to support professional development, enhance institutional research competitiveness, and catalyze new research and institutional collaboration.”

A multitude of new programs are also being created (e.g., a “Summer Proposal Boot-Camp”) to stimulate proposal growth and competitiveness, and outside professional experts in grant writing are consulted to deliver professional workshops on grant writing and to work with universities on their major submissions. (Last year, ORSP hosted two grant writing workshops delivered by outside experts, both of which are available on [ORSP’s website](#).)

On the regulatory front, the principles that governed universities’ administration of

Ted Russo
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Continued on next page

their grants and contracts for decades—OMB A-21, A-110, and A-133—will be replaced by the “[Omni-Circular](#)” in an effort to increase efficiencies and reduce administrative burden associated with applying for and managing federal grants and contracts. The Omni-Circular will consolidate guidelines spanning non-profits, state and local governments, hospitals, and university sectors, into one unified document. This will undoubtedly impact university business processes, the extent of which remains to be seen as the implementing guidelines from most federal agencies have not yet been posted. Some of these changes will be most welcome—for example, in some instances, PI’s will now be able to directly charge administrative costs to their grants. Others will necessitate administrative changes in business processes at both the pre and post award stages—such as monitoring our many subaward and subcontracts with other organizations. The end result of the increasingly complex legal and regulatory environment is that the field of research administration has become increasingly specialized.

Here at MSU, while all of this change is taking place, ORSP is pleased to report a strong FY 15 start. Over

\$4.6M in grants and contracts have been received in the first 3 months of the fiscal year. We’re very excited about the future of the research and sponsored programs at MSU, particularly as the new Center for Environmental Life Sciences (CELS) and School of Business approach completion. In addition, OneMontclair and the implementation of PeopleSoft Finance promises to create efficiencies for faculty and staff in managing their grant portfolios. Also new this year, ORSP has introduced [Pivot](#), the gold standard for searching for and identifying funding opportunities and potential collaborators. ORSP’s Sam Wolverton has already held several well-attended training sessions on how to use Pivot.

As always, ORSP will keep you informed of these changes and their impact at MSU, and is happy to answer any questions you might have regarding these upcoming changes.

Sources:

- The Omni-Circular, “Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards.”
- Howard, D. & Laird, F., “The new normal in funding University Science.” *Issues in Science and Technology*, Fall, 2013.

New Certified Research Administrator at MSU



Congratulations to our ORSP Director, Ted Russo, on his successful certification as a Certified Research Administrator (CRA)! Ted is MSU’s first ORSP Director with CRA certification, and joins Marina Aloyets, ORSP’s Assistant Director, among the ranks of over two thousand active certificants nationwide. Ted actively encourages ORSP staff to pursue professional development, including this certification in the field of research administration and regular attendance at professional conferences.

CRA is an increasingly sought after designation in the field of research administration that demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of research and sponsored programs in areas such as project development and administration, legal and compliance issues, and financial and general management. Receiving this certification is a demonstration of one’s expertise and broad depth of knowledge in the field. ORSP’s staff congratulates Ted on passing this extensive four-hour exam!

Featured Awards



Jason Dickinson (Robert D. McCormick Center for Child Advocacy and Policy, CHSS) received a \$700,000 award from the NJ Department of Children and Families for “NJ Child Welfare Training Partnership” which will provide all mandatory and elective training deliveries to approximately 1,900 Division of Youth and Family

Services staff members from seven counties—Essex, Union, Bergen, Passaic, Hudson, Morris, and Sussex. In addition, Montclair State University will be providing services to other Department of Children & Families employees and community resources partners.



Bryan Murdock (Service-Learning and Community Engagement, Academic Affairs) was awarded \$525,635 by the US Department of Education for the first year of a \$2.5 million grant for “City of Orange Proposal to the U.S. Department of Education: University Assisted Full Service Community

Schools Program.” This program will allow MSU to work closely with the Orange Public School District to convert two low-performing Title I schools into University-Assisted Full-Service Community Schools.



The US Department of Education also awarded \$937,381 to **Jennifer Robinson** (Center of Pedagogy, CEHS) and **Susan Wray** (Early Childhood, Elementary and Literacy Education, CEHS, not pictured) for the first year of a \$6.2 million project called “The Newark-

Montclair State University Teaching Residency Program (NMUTR).” This program, in partnership with the Newark Public Schools (NPS), seeks to improve student achievement by applying rigorous research-based teacher preparation to the concrete needs of the NPS. NMUTR is designed to recruit effective individuals, including minorities and individuals from other occupations, into the teaching force; improve the quality of both new and prospective teachers; increase teacher retention rates; and ultimately improve student achievement.



Teresa Rodriguez (Art Galleries, CART) received \$12,828 from the NJ State Council for the Arts for “General Programming Support - FY 15.” This grant will help support the George Segal Gallery’s mission to propagate culture and art through exhibitions and educational and scholarly programs, focusing on contemporary art.



David Rotella (Chemistry and Biochemistry, CSAM) received \$422,754—the first year of an anticipated \$2.5 million contract from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency—for “Development of Medical Countermeasures for Botulinum Neurotoxin Intoxication Focused on Therapeutics and Neuroregenerative Medicines.”

The aim of this research is to discover small molecule drug candidates for treatment of botulinum toxin exposure.

Awardee Profile: Dr. Stefanie Brachfeld

In 2004, the National Science Foundation awarded Dr. Stefanie Brachfeld (Earth and Environmental Science, CSAM) with a prestigious [Faculty Early Career Development \(CAREER\)](#) grant for her project “Tracing Antarctic Sediment Transport Pathways and Antarctic Ice Sheet Stability Using Iron-titanium Oxide Magnetic and Chemical Fingerprints.” CAREERs are given to junior faculty who exemplify the role of teacher-scholars through outstanding research, excellent education, and the integration of education and research within the context of their organization’s mission. Here, Dr. Brachfeld explains her project and shares her insights into the proposal submission and award process.

What were the major aspects of your awarded project?

My CAREER award focused on the behavior and stability of the Antarctic Ice Sheet (AIS). The goal was to investigate how the AIS collapsed in the past in order to understand how it might respond to the current warming climate. The project developed a set of mineralogic and geochemical “fingerprints” of the sediment (termed ice rafted debris) that ice erodes from each sector of Antarctica. Icebergs carry the ice rafted debris out into the ocean. When we see the mineralogic and geochemical fingerprints in marine sediment cores collected offshore, then we can identify which sector of the AIS collapsed and generated the icebergs.

What were your first thoughts after having received the news that you were awarded?

I was excited and couldn't wait to get started, and a little nervous, too, once I realized that now I had to deliver! I was especially pleased at being able to re-

cruit and support several undergraduate and graduate students to work on the project.

What are some of the challenges involved in a project like yours? How did you tackle them?

A major challenge was finding sufficient time to do the work and meet with my students. My suggestion to new grant recipients is to be protective of your time. Set aside specific blocks of time for working on your re-

search projects and meeting with your students, and guard that time well.

How would you advise colleagues interested in submitting a grant application?

Start preparing your application early. Ask your colleagues to read rough drafts, and have one or two readers who are not in your specific discipline. The NSF mail reviewers might be specialists in your field, but the NSF panelists are not. NSF panels are composed of individuals who cover the full range of disciplines funded by each particular program. Only one panelist

might be a specialist in your area. The program manager might not be a specialist in your area. Write your proposal so that a non-specialist can understand your work and appreciate its importance and larger context.

What, if anything, do you believe MSU can do to make grant submission and management more appealing and less intimidating?

I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences with grant submission and management in my twelve years at MSU. Everyone at ORSP is fantastic and great at demystifying the grant application and management process.



The Omni-Circular: A Game Changer

Catherine Bruno
Post-Award
Officer, ORSP

Any of you that watch sports know that the governing powers that be change, on occasion, some of the rules of the game. In the research

administration arena, there are some major changes coming down the road—December 26th, to be exact—that will change the way all involved (i.e., principal investigators, grant administrators, central offices) with federal grants will do business. There's a new player on the field: the [Omni-Circular](#).

The federal Office of Management and Budget is combining eight of its circulars into one all-encompassing Omni-Circular. In the past, depending on what type of institution you were, different circulars applied. As mentioned in the opening article, institutions of higher education followed A-21, A-110, and A-133. State/local governments, non-profits, and Indian tribes each had their own set of circulars to follow. Now, under the Omni-Circular, all institutions will need to follow the same rules when it comes to cost principles, administrative rules, and audit requirements.

As printed in the Federal Register, the document is over one hundred pages. Instead of providing an exhaustive list of changes, below you'll find the "hot topics" that affect PI's. For example:

- **Merit review of proposals:** Agencies must design a merit review process for each opportunity and describe the process (i.e., criteria) in the funding announcement.
- **Cost-sharing or matching:** Voluntarily committing to cost-share or match, even though cost-sharing is not mandatory, is now not expected. Agencies cannot suggest an institution cost-share to "help" get a better score. Cost-sharing cannot be included in the merit review if mandatory and if it's not specifically described in the funding announcement.
- **Disengagement of the PI:** Under the old regulations, PI's would need to get prior approval for an absence,

or time away from the project. However, in today's technological world, a PI can be working on the grant remotely even though absent from campus. The new regulations allow for absence but engagement.

- **Purchases over \$3,000:** For purchases on federal grants over \$3,000, quotes will need to be obtained irrespective of the institution's procurement policies. Luckily, this regulation does not become effective until FY 17, so the national research administration community is gathering metrics to share with the government what impact this new regulation will have on institutions of higher education.
- **Salaries of administrative and clerical staff:** As long as the position is integral to the grant, the individual(s) can be specifically identified, the position was explicitly in the budget and budget narrative, and the position is not charged in indirects, then these salaries can be directly charged.
- **Computing devices:** These can be budgeted for even though they are not solely dedicated to the grant. However, the necessity of the device to the grant needs to be documented.
- **Closeout of an award:** All reports are required to be submitted no later than ninety days after the grant end date. This requirement has not changed; however, there will be little lenience for late reports.

Those are just some of the game-changing items we can look forward to. Currently, each federal granting agency is reviewing the Omni-Circular and deciding how it will implement it into its granting policies and procedures, so there is more to come. Stay tuned!

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Research at MSU: Perspective from CSAM's Dean

Marina Aloyets
Assistant Director,
ORSP

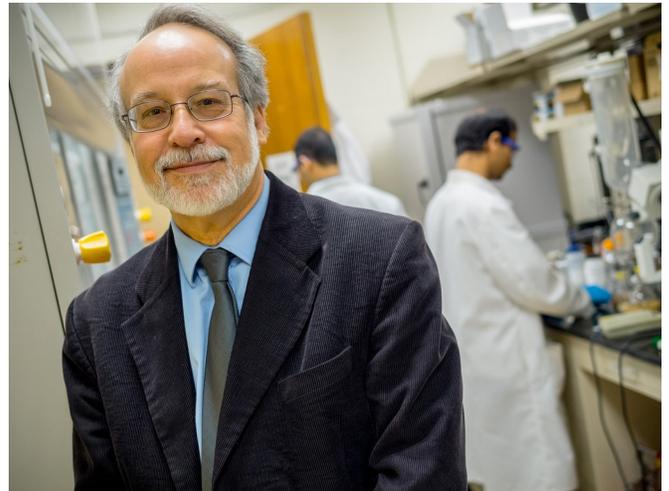
Look around campus and it is evident that things are changing at Montclair State. Whether it is the sound of construction—giving rise to two new buildings—or the growing number of students, change is in the air. In my world of research administration, these observations naturally give rise to the question of what, if anything, has been brewing in terms of research at MSU? To answer this question, I sought out the perspective of Dean Robert Prezant, who is leading faculty in one of the largest research portfolios on campus.

First, can you explain broadly what role you think research plays at MSU? Historically, the University has primarily been an undergraduate institution with a teaching focus, but over the past five years I have witnessed a growth of interest in research, graduate programs with research focus, and students and faculty focusing on the importance of research experiences.

Over the past fifteen or so years, research has become balanced in importance with our ongoing excellence in teaching. There has been a growing recognition that research for our students can be a critical component of their education. Also, research creates one of the most important venues for asking questions, the precursor to any learning.

The ongoing growth of research at MSU has given our home institution a greater place at the academic table, with a growing number of partnerships and collaborations at the national and international levels. Research offers our students and faculty avenues of discovery that are recognized not just within the Academy, but by the community, industry, and government. All of this makes MSU a more important resource for helping solve nagging issues of the recent past and critical issues of today and tomorrow. And of utmost im-

portance, our growing quantity and quality of research continues to attract some of the best faculty and graduate students, thus allowing us to grow the circle of discovery and help us garner an even more positive reputation.



What areas of research do you see as important in CSAM?

There are many diverse arenas of research in CSAM, all of which are important. There are, however, areas that are the focus of a larger number of faculty and student research and thus offer important areas for reputational growth and grant access.

The new Center for Environmental and Life Sciences (CELS) reflects two of those areas: environmental sciences and pharmaceutical/medicinal science. As home to the Sokol Institute for Pharmaceutical Life Sciences and the entire Department of Environmental Studies—plus our PhD in Environmental Management, Passaic River Institute, and PSEG Institute for Sustainability Studies—CELS represents some of our most highly funded (via grants and contracts) programs, which in turn represents some of the most widely recognized areas of study.

Millions of dollars in grant awards and contractual agreements allow groups of faculty and students to pursue studies in drug discovery, counter measures to neurotoxins, control of parasitic diseases, environmental remediation, control of nonindigenous organisms, biodiversity, etc. The Center for Quantitative Obesity Research is not just detailing methods to help control a national epidemic, but runs a clinic to actually "walk the walk." And programs in Mathematics Education, including our EdD in Math Education, and our programs moving STEM education forward—such as our Bristol-Myers Squibb Science Teaching and Learning Center (home of PRISM)—help create cutting edge methodologies to enhance approaches to math and science learning.

From studies on the impact of dust from the World Trade Towers to the uncontrolled expansion of jellyfish in Barnegat Bay to epidemiological models, behavior and population ecology of large cats (e.g., jaguars) of Panama, genetics of maize, gravity waves, new software development, human-computer interactions, remote sensing, condensed matter physics, fluid mechanics, polar ice-sheet melt, and on and on, the research of faculty and students in CSAM continues to move disciplines forward while growing a home for opportunities in discovery.

Lastly, how do you envision growing research in CSAM?

Grants and research contracts in CSAM are many fold above where they were fifteen years ago. This is simply a reflection of adding more and more research active and astute faculty members to our already strong cadre. Growing research in the STEM disciplines is a reflection of

having the strongest faculty, individuals, and groups who will be well supported by grants and other awards, thus allowing them to bring on more and ever-improving students—undergraduate, masters, and doctoral.

The only limiting factors are time and space. Space will partly be resolved with CELS and hopefully not long thereafter by important renovations in Richardson and Mallory Halls. Time is particularly challenging as our faculty become more and more busy juggling their teaching, research, and service. However, opportunities to grow research in the College are reflected in grant awards that allow faculty additional time to pursue said research and



mentor students who are also served by the grant awards. A growing number of courses across the College offer research opportunities for our undergraduate students plus industry-funded awards (e.g., our Merck, Roche, and Celgene funded Science Honors Innovation Program) offer strong programs for students to get deeply involved in discovery.

All of these mesh into an environment that helps blur lines between motivating an inquisitive student body in classrooms and laboratories, opportunities to answer those questions though research proper, and a growing number of funded opportunities to support research.

I thank Dean Prezant for his time and providing his perspective on the status and growth of research in CSAM. During these changing times, this conversation is especially important to understanding the trajectory of research at MSU.

For More Information on Funding Sources, Submittal Strategies, Awards Management, and Much More,

Please Visit ORSP Online at <http://www.montclair.edu/orsp>

To Submit or Not To Submit in a Changing Landscape

Dana Natale
Research
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In this time of scarcity and heightened competition in extramural funding, many in the research administration and research development fields believe a critical aspect of grant award success is being able to determine when it's *not* worth going for a particular opportunity. I agree such determinations are critical, but they are very difficult to accomplish. A growing number of research administrators and research development specialists have started to use the Return on Investment (ROI) metric in examining the value of potential grant applications. Generally, the ROI metric weighs cost (financial, human capital, time, missed opportunities, burden) versus feasibility of success and impact if successful. If the cost far outweighs the feasibility of success and impact if successful, the initiative would likely be considered a bad investment. And, in a time of scarcity, pursuing bad investments is assumed to be wasteful.

I fear that ROI examinations, when applied to extramural funding, yield dangerously short-sighted results. For instance, a proposal submission that is a longshot can stimulate synergy, collaborative relationships, and/or relationships leading to successful future grant submissions. Such outcomes are invaluable, and are missing from ROI examination. A proposal that an ROI examination would find to be a waste of resources may indeed lead to a grant submission that is not competitive, but it will likely become the basis of a successful future submission.

To be comprehensive and efficacious in examining the value of potential grant applications, the ROI metric must comprise the potential project/proposal development impact along with the feasibility of success and impact if successful. Potential project/proposal development im-

act—that elusive, hard to define, and even harder to measure variable—must be included in the examination. Measuring potential project/proposal development impact may, in fact, be impossible in real-time, as the valuable activities and outcomes of the early stages of developing a grant project cannot be monetized by a formula:

- getting words and ideas down on paper;
- clarification of relative strengths and weaknesses of an idea;
- enthusiasm for creative and realistic thinking and planning;
- education about what to do and where to find resources;
- inter-campus discussion and activities around a common theme; and
- individuals developing relationships that eventually lead to successful collaborations.

In these days of funding competition, if your proposal is not well thought out and polished, or if your project does not meet all of the stated criteria, you are unlikely to get funded; however, that does not always mean submitting is without value. Everything that can be done to increase the chances of success and reduce the chances of surprise rejection must be done. I believe grant administrators are responsible for initiating the “reality check” discussion with all prospective proposal submitters. Additionally, principal investigators should always email, call, and/or visit program officers about whether their idea seems fundable, well in advance of the submission deadline. After that, key stakeholders must *appraise* a complex set of tangible and intangible variables to determine the value of the application. Unfortunately, shortcuts, although tempting, ultimately jeopardize innovation.



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