OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY  
College of Earth, Ocean & Atmospheric Sciences  

MEMORANDUM  

To: Rich Spinrad, Vice President for Research  
Cc: Rich Holdren, Associate Vice President for Research  
From: Ricardo Letelier, Faculty Senate Research Council Chair  
Date: 25 January 2012  
Re: Sustaining and enhancing OSU’s Research Mission  

Dear Dr. Spinrad,  

On behalf of the Oregon State University Faculty Senate Research Council, I would like to express our interest to contribute to the ongoing evolution of the OSU Research Agenda that you have so well articulated, by helping to identify, prioritize and address the needs of our University in order to sustain and enhance its research mission. Of special concern to us are 1) the maintenance, upgrading and expansion of the research infrastructure and 2) the review of University policies and administrative services in order to enhance their support in the development of competitive proposals and, as importantly, in the supervision and management of our grants. As articulated in the OSU Research Agenda, the development and implementation of a clear plan to support these essential institutional goals will help us maintain a leading-edge research community and increase our success in attracting and retaining outstanding researchers as part of our faculty.

As a result of our responsibilities to review internal proposals that seek resources to support and enhance the OSU research infrastructure, it has become apparent that there is a dire need, not only to identify and prioritize critical and urgent issues affecting the productivity of large segments of the OSU research community (such as our campus chilling systems and access to stable and reliable power sources) but also to develop an infrastructure upgrade roadmap that addresses the maintenance of existing areas of excellence as well as the long-term growth and evolution of our institution. Some of these upgrades may consider the availability of storage areas for field oriented research units and the improvement of laboratory facilities in our old buildings. In this era of increasingly limited research funding, it is imperative that OSU utilize all its available talent and resources to remain competitive as a Tier I research institution; the Research Council can contribute to this effort by engaging our research community in a broad discussion to identify priorities.

Clearly, both the Research Office and the Office of Post Award Administration face new challenges due to the growth of our research enterprise and the concomitant
diversification of research funding sources (research grants, research contracts and foundation partnerships), as well as to our increasing international research presence. We realize that growth and evolution in the nature of our research may also strain other University administrative services that support our research mission. Furthermore, when planning and preparing grants dealing with highly competitive large research programs initiatives, we strongly believe that it is valuable to consider what specific administrative support and expertise should be made available to help increase our possibilities of success. For grants that get awarded to us, we want to be able to rely on having ample, capable administrative support services available to us. We acknowledge the efforts being made on these issues by your office and believe that the Research Council can help articulate these long-term needs from an OSU research community perspective.

Finally, we believe that, in order to maximize success in these activities, especially given the current and likely future resource–limited environment, the research community as a whole needs to be informed and engaged in advising the administration regarding the assignment of priorities in the use of research overhead. As Research Council, we would like to play an active role in helping the administration and our community to devise the mechanisms by which long-term issues regarding the maintenance and enhancement of the research mission at Oregon State University are addressed. To this end, we propose the concept of the Research Council assuming a lead role for the process of facilitating a broad community discussion on the establishment of priorities for utilization of our limited research support funds. Some steps we suggest could be taken include, for example, the creation of an external task force under the auspices of the Research Office to review how our overhead dollars are spent and to provide advice. Alternatively, or in addition, the Research Council could convene a study group with the membership to consist of both research administrators and active faculty investigators, to provide guidance to the VP for Research and Provost on how the expenditure of such funds should be prioritized in order to maximize the research mission of OSU.

Sincerely,

Ricardo M Letelier
OSU Faculty Senate Research Council Chair