

3-2006

Proposal to Realign Internal EMU Funding for Research

Faculty Senate

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The Challenge

After 10 years of steady growth in sponsored projects, EMU has experienced two straight years (FY2003-05) of declines. Internal funding is EMU's principal means of leveraging external support for faculty research and creative activity. Sponsored projects relieve the General Fund in many ways. They provide funding for equipment, graduate assistants and doctoral fellows, salary savings and indirect cost recovery that help to secure additional external awards. But two years of budget cuts have severely curtailed our ability to support research, which is a critical part of EMU's mission. We must find ways to use our limited resources for research support in a more cost-efficient manner.

EMU's current internal award lineup – Sabbatical Leave, Faculty Research Fellowship (FRF), and Spring-Summer Research Awards (the three "major" awards), along with the New Faculty Research Award and the Graduate School Research Support Fund (GSRSF) – has served the University well for many years. Nevertheless, the program has some limitations. For the three major awards, for example, applicants must apply a year in advance and survive three tiers of (non-peer) review. FRF awards a fixed package of 100% release time for one semester or spread over two semesters, even though faculty often need more or less time to complete their projects. Sabbaticals come with no SSM support. GSRSF and FRF awards have a \$2,000 (SSM) limit – insufficient for many projects. Spring-Summer awards require projects of exactly four months duration; and – at 20% of base salary – are expensive compared to release-time awards during the academic year.

The proposal below addresses some, but not all, of these shortcomings. The principal purpose of the proposed changes is to increase the cost-effectiveness of Eastern Michigan's internal funding program for research and its responsiveness to faculty needs. We welcome your criticism and suggestions for further improvement.

Proposal

1. The following award programs would remain unchanged: Sabbatical Leave Award, New Faculty Research Award, and graduate-student research and conference travel awards.

2. Consolidate all available funding sources for internal awards (excluding the above but including FRF, Spring-Summer, and GSRSF awards) into a single fund ("Faculty Research Fellowships," org. #116350). All awards from this fund would be called "Faculty Research Fellowships (FRF)."
3. Several types of FRF would be available. Applicants could apply, for example, for (a) release time during the academic year (in the applicant's choice of 25%, 50%, 75%, or 100% segments); (b) SSM support (see suggested guidelines attached); (c) a combination of release time and SSM; or (d) spring and/or summer salary support. Release time and spring/summer salary support would need to be justified by – and be awarded in relation to – the timeline and scope of work. Spring/summer awards for a maximum of 20% of base (no teaching) or 10% of base (teach one course) would be available but extremely competitive.

Release-time awards are available for the academic (contractual) year only; proposals should be submitted well in advance of the semester in which the release time would be taken (departments, schools, and colleges may determine their own internal deadlines), to give the department head time to reassign duties.

Applicants would normally be eligible for no more than one FRF in any two-year period.

Positive EOY fund balances in the FRF account would need to be carried forward, as some awards may span two fiscal years.

4. The URSLC would meet as needed throughout the academic year to review all proposals submitted in a given award cycle. Suggested deadlines (for submission to GSR): Nov. 15 and March 15. (Deadlines remain as before for New Faculty Awards – Nov. 15 – and sabbatical-leave awards – Dec. 10.)

Proposals for cash-only awards (formerly Graduate School Research Support Fund awards) submitted during May-August would continue to be reviewed and awarded on a monthly basis by the AVP for Graduate Studies and Research.

All proposals would require department-head signoff. Proposals for released time would also require the dean's signature approval.¹ Local deadlines and

¹ All recommendations and rankings must be based exclusively on the merits of the proposal itself. All other considerations, such as departmental staffing needs or contractual eligibility for leave, are to be treated administratively and separately from the proposal evaluation process.

review procedures would be determined by the departments, schools, and colleges.

5. All proposals would be submitted in one hard copy (with approval page) and an electronic copy (email Word attachment).

Advantages of the Proposal

1. Periodic vs. annual funding cycle
2. Possible reduction of committee work at department/school/college levels
3. Greater applicant choice in scope of work (quarter, half, three-quarters, or full release from teaching; spring, summer, or spring-summer; bridging semesters and years)
4. Maximum SSM award increased from \$2,000 (FRF, GSRSF) to \$3,000
5. Greater variety of allowable expenses
6. Shorter proposals (FRF and SP-SU reduced from 10 to 5 pages)
7. SSM available to support sabbatical projects

Disadvantages of the Proposal

1. Additional workload for university-level review committee
2. Spending out the fund balance by the end of the fiscal year will be a challenge (chance of exhausting funds early on marginal projects, at the expense of better projects submitted late in the year, or parsing out awards early and ending the year with an uncommitted balance).
3. Number of Spring-Summer awards will need to be severely curtailed
4. Still no peer review (except to some extent at the department/school level)