President Gottfredson's response to RIGE Review Committee Report
Sent on 02/24/2014

Sent on behalf of President Michael Gottfredson and Provost Scott Coltrane

Colleagues,

Last spring, a special committee appointed by the University Senate, in conjunction with the president, was formed to produce a report on the performance of the Office of Research, Innovation, and Graduate Education (RIGE) at the University of Oregon. We requested the report to assess and articulate the challenges we face as a research institution within the context of a deep economic recession and a fundamentally changed federal grant environment, and to identify areas of concern and achievement.

With the full cooperation and assistance of the RIGE leadership and support staff, the committee gathered information from UO faculty and researchers, UO administrators, and various institutional data sources. The report portrays a shifting and complex set of research support activities at the university and provides a wide range of perspectives and experiences from a variety of stakeholder groups. The report urges us to provide a coherent set of strategic priorities about future research investments and oversight at the UO.

We appreciate that the report endorses the overall approach and efforts of Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School Kimberly Espy and the RIGE staff. When Dr. Espy arrived on campus in 2011, she faced an array of challenges affecting research office operations and our research mission. The report and the appendices cite the notable accomplishments of the office since 2011, and endorse RIGE's current direction. The report also identifies areas of discontent and opportunities for improvement in research oversight. We recognize the value in highlighting these concerns and we are committed to addressing them to strengthen research at the UO. In this regard, the report provides us with a valuable framework to consider as we move forward.

It is apparent that we must develop clear protocols for establishing and funding research priorities at the UO. These conversations are underway, and the provost will formalize a comprehensive research advisory group with the goal of improving research activity oversight on campus. This process will complement the identification of strategic priorities through academic planning sessions and other goal setting at the school and college level that are already underway.

Among the challenges the report identifies are the economic recession, new federal regulations, leadership turnover, few strategic directives, and management issues at the Office of Research Services and Administration (ORSA; now known as Sponsored Project Services) and the Office of Human Subjects. The report notes several additional financial challenges, including a decline in total sponsored-projects
awards as the federal stimulus program ended, a decline in federal Facilities and Administration (F&A) reimbursements, a lack of dedicated funding in the research office for new faculty start-up packages, and substantial ongoing financial commitments that predate Vice President Espy’s arrival at the UO. Some UO research institutes were operating in deficit and had other management issues, which led to the university making organizational adjustments to ensure adequate internal oversight.

The committee has provided a coherent articulation of the issues involved, and we appreciate the efforts of the committee and its chair, Bruce Blonigen, very much. We view this report as an important first step in ongoing conversations focused on the UO research mission, with the goal of enhancing our status as a premier public research university. We encourage you to review the entire document and its appendices, which are available on the provost’s website.

Michael Gottfredson, President
Scott Coltrane, Provost