

Department of Biological Sciences Comments on the Division of Research Space Allocation Policy October, 2019

The comments are summarized from verbal comments at a Department meeting and email responses from “request for comments” from the Department Chair.

1. Several comments focused on the origin of the draft from a University that is very unlike FAU in the scope of their funded research (10-20 fold higher), from a different state, at a different point in their maturity as a research institution, differences in number of campuses, different faculty and student makeup. The original policy from MSU is 12 years old and does not take into account new literature on differences of funding levels between male and female scientists which shows the disadvantages of female scientists. The general consensus was that this was not an appropriate starting point for setting up a policy at FAU.
2. The next most prevalent comment was that it seemingly ignores the emphasis that FAU has put on encouraging undergraduate research. Many Biology labs sponsor multiple undergraduates (many over 10 at a time) who need space to work.
3. The correlation between amount of funded research and space needs is not necessarily true and differs among disciplines. The university has an obligation to its faculty to give them the tools for success in all of its assigned duties, teaching, research and service. Eliminating the ability for a non-externally funded researcher to do research is not in the best interests of either party.
4. The table 1 Research Space Allocation Matrix is especially problematic as it takes away from the flexibility of space allocation and puts hard values on square footage based on only a few factors that may or may not match up with the need for space for a particular project. It doesn't include undergraduates, visiting faculty, technicians, commitments to the funding agency etc.
5. The amount of research space available and the number and types of research faculty are very different in different locations (Jupiter vs Davie vs Boca vs Sea Tech vs HBOI). The policy needs to be general enough to allow for these differences and yet still provide overall guidance. Again it needs to be FAU specific.
6. It is difficult to find on the web site how many FAU researchers actually bring in external funds or how much is actually brought in. By looking at reports to the Board and Board of Governors, it appears that the research expenditures reported include Henderson School, the FAU Foundation and that the “percentage of external sources” in the reported research expenditures was at a low of 53% in 2016-17 and is proposed by FAU to rise to 62% in 2019-2020 and 63% in 2020-2021. That puts the amount of external funding in the 30-35M range. It seems wrong to set a university- wide policy based on a small number of faculty and grants.
7. The general consensus was that this policy did not fit FAU in its current state or its immediate future. The need to allow research space to Pillar hires outside of departments can be handled differently and the shared goal to encourage faculty to get external funding will not be driven by this policy.

Some Specific Excerpts:

“My thought on the proposal is rather than fight it directly for being unrealistic and potentially disenfranchising, to focus energies on getting it modified so it is aligned with the FAU research realities of most FAU faculty.”

“This document seems quite inappropriate and counterproductive for FAU for many reasons.

(1) It is extensively copied from Michigan State University. Besides the problematic nature of such extensive copying (if our students do such we call it plagiarism!), the Michigan State plan ignore who we are, our strengths, and what we can become. We are not similar to Michigan State in age, research support, affiliate labs, state support, teaching assignments, student body, and many more aspects.

(2) We have a strong commitment to teaching undergraduates and graduates. This plan seems to not understand such. Our several undergraduate research initiatives require space usage that often is unfunded or under-funded. This plan has the strong potential to eviscerate our undergraduate (and graduate) research that is not costly, yet is sound and valuable to the institution and society.

(3) Research funding via the gifts to the FAU Foundation is not accommodated by this plan.

(4) Fundamentally this plan is foreign to FAU in its foundations, development, and mission.”

“Overall it is a fairly good policy with enough flexibility to be useful, not too detailed but with enough statements about productivity, funding and students to serve as a general guideline for space allocation and review.”

“I don’t particularly like table 1 Research Space Allocation Matrix as it takes away from the flexibility of space allocation and puts hard values on square footage. How “loose” are these numbers? If my grant is for \$187K is that a score of 1 or 2? How exactly is the Annual FTE of Students (are undergrads counted?) calculated? If I am reading this correctly then having a single full time MS student (score of 3) if you are a TT faculty member gets you 1000sqf wet lab. If they have 2 students (score of 6) do they get 2000 sqf? Does the student need to be supported on external funds to count? Does a graduate student without external funding count the same as one with external funding? When hard formulas are used it gets messy really quick and faculty can use hard numbers with the same validity as administrators.”

“How does this policy work across campuses? I see how within an individual college and buildings under the control of a single college or pillar, but for mixed spaces (ie, brain, bio, biomed) or biology faculty on different campuses, it would be difficult for an apples to apples approach. Hard formulas don’t fit well. The amount of research space available and the number and types of research faculty are very different in different locations (Jupiter vs Davie vs Boca vs Sea Tech vs HBOI). Is HBOI included? The policy needs to be general enough to allow for these different and yet still provide overall guidance.”

“Knowing that it was copied from Michigan State is concerning on many levels. It tells us that there was no thought about what kind of university FAU is and what kind of research is done here. MSU does over 650 million in sponsored research every year and is the home of national labs. Michigan funds universities differently than Florida does, has a very different campus, and the student body is very different demographically. It is not a good match for FAU either as a peer or aspirational match. Using their guidelines will not match up with helping FAU improve its research profile.”