

Research Faculty Policy Considerations

Introduction

Research faculty can be a critical asset to advance the mission of Boise State University to become a *Metropolitan Research University of Distinction*. Mature research universities have found the need for research faculty, even when significant numbers of Tenure-track faculty are given reduced teaching loads to specialize in research. The faculty handbook of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology states, for example, “The purpose of the campus research appointment structure is to create professional sponsored research staff categories with employee benefits and privileges *in order to encourage long-term research careers at MIT* (emphasis added). The concept of long-term professional careers, independent of classroom teaching..., is not a new one for the American research university. This mode of research, with professionals working in departments, laboratories, and centers, is an important mechanism for universities to maintain research viability, enter new fields, and bring researchers to the campus.”

Boise State University will need to develop a similar vibrant research culture to become a Metropolitan Research University of Distinction. By developing loyalty in the Research Faculty, Boise State University can both develop and maintain a strong, well-funded research agenda and achieve important educational objectives like providing Boise State University students with state-of-the-art training. Recognition of the vital role of the Research Faculty to Boise State University will hasten the transition to a research culture at Boise State University, help young Tenure-track faculty establish research programs, provide educational opportunities and funding for students, increase the national and international reputation of Boise State University, make the university more attractive for students, and help show Idaho that its investment in Boise State University is important.

Specifically, a strong active Research Faculty at Boise State University will:

- increase the academic visibility of Boise State University through scholarship activities such as peer-reviewed publications, participation in national meetings, and serving on national committees;
- enhance the educational mission of the University through new research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, expand access for students to research-grade scientific equipment, increase funding for graduate research assistantships, provide additional teaching expertise, and expand student mentoring and advising;
- increase the overall budget of the University through extramural funding;
- enhance the research infrastructure through the purchase and maintenance of laboratory and field equipment and facilities;

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- help to establish Boise State University as a Metropolitan Research University of Distinction.

Because of the importance of Research Faculty to the mission of the University, Boise State University has an incentive to make Research Faculty positions desirable and highly regarded within the University community. To make the position of Research Faculty desirable and successful, the University should provide:

- a clear definition of the role of Research Faculty at Boise State University in the educational, service, and research arenas as well as a supportive Research Faculty policy. These can be modeled from existing policies at other universities (e.g. University of Idaho, University of California, MIT, etc.);
- multi-year contracts to the Research Faculty. These contracts do not necessarily guarantee full salary, but represent a long-term commitment to the Research Faculty. Furthermore, they signal to the University community that Research Faculty are not temporary employees (a common misconception at BSU), but have an interest in developing and maintaining programs to ensure the future productivity of the University. This long-term perspective will help the Departments and the University plan future directions and needs;
- a mechanism of compensation for the Research Faculty to provide service to the University. Such service will allow representation of the Research Faculty on University policy-making bodies, especially in policy areas relating to the Research Faculty. The current research policy, “Research Faculty Policies and Procedures, BSU 5250-B”, requires members of the Research Faculty to serve on the Promotion Committee for Research Faculty. Service compensation will also allow the Research Faculty to provide input to curriculum development, student recruitment and retention, and public outreach;
- assistance with developing funding opportunities, especially long-term funding commitments, especially for the junior level or newly hired Research Faculty. The Research Faculty devote most of their time to state-of-the-art research. Finding extramural funding becomes a necessary task to maintain an active, highly regarded research program. For Research Faculty early in their careers, developing the necessary skills and connections are critical for successfully obtaining extramural funding. The University, through active help identifying research opportunities, increasing the success of grants, and providing for program and professional development, will benefit from the success of the Research Faculty through increased visibility and reputation. Some potential areas where the University could assist Research Faculty to be successful are making Research Faculty eligible for University seed funding, providing peer mentoring opportunities, sabbaticals, and travel money.
- a clear mechanism to reward research faculty when they have consistently achieved above their metrics. No reward system at Boise State University exists now, so no incentive, except altruism, exists to attain university objectives.

- a voice to set research objectives for the University. Arguably, research faculty have the keenest insight into the implications and/or cost of a change in research objectives. That expertise should be sought out.

Issues affecting Research Faculty

Long-term contracts

A long-term contract does not require a financial commitment from the University. Multi-year contracts provide stability for Research Faculty. Such contracts can help counter job uncertainty and provide a more comfortable working environment for the Research Faculty. These contracts would help the Department and the University plan for their future directions and needs by relying on the expertise and research directions of the Research Faculty. An important aspect of the commitment implied by multi-year contracts is the legitimacy such contracts bestow to the Research Faculty position within the University community. This commitment signals to the Tenure-track Faculty and the Middle Administration that the University considers Research Faculty long-term employees. Furthermore, such contracts provide a degree of academic freedom, an important asset for creative research. One possible model is a 'rolling' 6-year contract—a six-year contract that could be renewed every 3 years.

Funding commitment from the University

The University should provide a funding mechanism for tasks not directly related to research. An important commitment of the Research Faculty will be to provide service to the University. The current Boise State University Research Faculty Policies and Procedures, Boise State University 5250-B, requires Research Faculty to participate on committees, for example, for promotion in rank. Another important aspect of service for the Research Faculty is to provide representation of their interests to the Tenure-track faculty and the Administration. Research Faculty also mentor and advise undergraduate and graduate students. Other areas that are more directly related to research, but are not funded by research grants are proposal writing and program development. Providing some amount of funding for these tasks places the compensation mechanism on the appropriate entity, the University.

Teaching courses to expand the offerings of the University and to take advantage of the expertise of the Research Faculty is an area that the University should fund. The Research Faculty should be compensated at a comparable rate to the Tenure-track Faculty for teaching courses.

Professional development

Opportunities for professional development are as critical to the Research Faculty as

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to the Tenure-track Faculty. Our accomplishments should be promoted similarly to the accomplishments of the Tenure-track Faculty. Certainly, any promotion will benefit the reputation of the University. Another important development activity is peer mentoring. The University strives to improve the quality of teaching within the University. Boise State University should also actively develop a peer mentoring program for all Faculty to improve their success at all the aspects of their jobs, not just teaching excellence. Such a peer mentoring program will increase the collegiality of the faculty, improve funding success, and provide a healthy, productive work-place.

The Research Faculty should be able to apply for and receive inter-University funding opportunities such as seed grants and travel grants. These grants improve the ability of the Research Faculty to compete for extramural funding and to promote the University within the larger academic community. Sabbaticals and visiting scholar programs (where the Boise State University faculty visit other institutions) provide opportunities to the Research Faculty to increase collaboration with other institutions and researchers, to generate new ideas by working closely with colleagues from other institutions, and to promote the University on a national and international level.

Start-up and matching funds

Another issue for Research Faculty are the non-compensation dollar issues of matching funds and start-up money. Money must be available for the Research Faculty to be competitive at grantsmanship for matching funds. Cost share requirements are a difficult, yet vital issue for all Boise State University faculty. Start-up money should be provided to the Research Faculty, again as a way to enable them to compete for funding at the national and international level.

Incentives for the Research Faculty

Pay structure for Research Faculty

Salary structure for the Research Faculty should not be tied to the salary structure of the Tenure-track Faculty. Instead, the University should have a higher average salary scale for the Research Faculty to compensate for the risk. Boise State University benefits from a higher salary scale for the Research Faculty. Boise State University will receive more dollars from an increase in F & A costs on grants that support the Research Faculty. The higher pay rate will enable better recruitment and retention of Research Faculty, especially the more well-established and valuable researchers. In addition, the higher compensation rate will help offset the lack of security for the Research Faculty in the highly competitive academic research environment.

Incentive structure for Research Faculty

Incentives should be used to provide motivation for high performance from the Research Faculty. These incentives are primarily monetary, either through salary adjustments or increased opportunities for program development.

Salary raises should be tied to the performance evaluations of the researcher. Thus, higher performing, more valuable Research Faculty are better compensated and more likely to remain. Clear goals for performance must be set and openly agreed upon.

Performance evaluation and compensation

An important aspect of the monetary compensation policy is a measure of performance. We are suggesting a merit-based method for compensation. This model is based more on a business-type model, such as used at the Desert Research Institute, than the Tenure-track model. Each Research Faculty should discuss their goals for the coming year with their supervisor or unit chair/director. Their success will be measured against these stated and agreed upon goals. An example of the categories of goals that could be used for performance evaluation are:

- Research
 - Professional recognition
 - Publications
 - Ability to secure funding
- Education
 - Student mentoring, advising, and funding
 - Teaching and curriculum development
- Service
 - University and national professional organizations

The goals should be ranked in terms of importance, for example, critical goal, important goal, or minor goal. A performance ranking provides feedback to the Research Faculty to improve their performance and success. These incentives can motivate the Research Faculty to perform well, and ultimately, will help increase the University's reputation and financial well-being.

Pending Issues

- A clear line of reporting needs to be established similar to the Tenure-track reporting structure.
- A policy for accruing vacation, holiday, and sick leave must be developed.
- Policies for other researchers, such as Post-Doctoral and Research Associate positions.

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This report attempts to describe important issues to the Research Faculty, but we recognize that other issues not addressed in this document may become important in the future.

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