

PAWPRINT FOR INVESTMENT

Rationale:

In order to achieve the goals of our current College strategic plan, we must attend to several key points in investing new state funding available to us. First, we must continue to move toward managing the College as a system, with strong connections across the functions, disciplines, and geography encompassed by College programs. Second, we must find new mechanisms to be agile in decision-making, with a focus on addressing strategic issues through excellence. Third, we must look to the future in all we do; it is our responsibility to anticipate the needs of the Commonwealth, nation, and world and do all that we can to prepare for that future. With this in mind, the following document serves as a “Pawprint for Investment” of new state funding in research and extension.

Investment Goals:

- Acknowledge PA needs through research – extension (faculty, staff and educators) co-funded positions in priority clusters
- Generate flexibility in permanent budget to permit strategic investment in emerging issues
- Invest in key infrastructure that cannot easily be supported by extramural funding sources
- Leverage graduate student education through creation of competitive pool of stipends and investment in tuition grants-in-aid
- Leverage extension educator expertise through a central pool of funds to match local resources

Research – Extension Faculty

Background:

A perception exists that the College has abandoned faculty expertise at the applied research – extension interface in favor of fundamental researchers who can bring in significant extramural funding. The hiring of research faculty with small, but non-zero teaching appointments also pressures our course portfolio, as many of the management courses are not assigned to faculty with a fundamental research focus. A strategic investment in 3 – 4 faculty (50% research, 50% extension) in each of 2 – 3 topic clusters would show good faith to the legislators and stakeholders by addressing pressing near-term issues. Experience shows that research/extension faculty are quite proficient at bringing in substantial grant support, and, once faculty obtain tenure, many are quite interested in adding some resident education responsibilities to their functional portfolio.

Proposal:

Invest \$300,000 in state research appropriation and \$300,000 in state extension appropriation to create 9 new faculty lines. Develop, through a participatory process, a list of key topical clusters that would 1) leverage existing identified teams and permit them to create a world-class applied research and extension education program and/or 2) identify emerging opportunities where a cluster investment would provide College expertise to a critical topic area that is not now being addressed. Clusters should be topic-focused but interdisciplinary, utilize joint or courtesy appointments where appropriate, have

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sponsorship of the cluster by multiple academic units, leverage other University funding sources wherever appropriate, and exhibit clear coordination with field educator activity and expertise. We should consider stakeholder involvement in priority setting (e.g., the executive team of the Ag Council).

Budget Flexibility

Background:

With the majority of our appropriated funds invested in personnel, our College is not agile when new opportunities arise. Of particular concern given the now-annual pressure on federal research and extension appropriations is our lack of flexibility should the federal formula change, either to a competitive pool of funds or through reduction in available funds. An investment of state appropriations to buy out federal funds now invested in research and extension salaries would create a pool of federal Hatch and Smith-Lever dollars that would enable us to shift our funding pattern from “invisible” support of faculty and educator salaries to visible program support. The benefits of such a pool of funding include the opportunity to change the focus of our investment through time as priorities shift, a reduction in our annual concerns about the federal budget and proposed changes to appropriated research and extension lines, and the creation of an expectation of excellence in College-supported research and extension through a competitive, peer-reviewed process. This competitive funding process, with defined application time points and priorities, would replace the ad hoc requests from units for program support over the next two to three years. The proposed mechanism would provide equal access to programs, an ability to be more strategic in decisions about temporary commitments, and a clear sunset on those temporary allocations to selected projects and programs.

Proposal:

Use \$2.5 million of state appropriated research and extension funds to buy out Hatch and Smith-Lever supported research and extension time from faculty and educators. The \$2.5 million pool would be put into a competitive process, administered annually, for 3-year research (Hatch), extension (Smith-Lever), and integrated (Hatch & Smith-Lever) projects. We would use our strategic plan as a guide for investment directions, with opportunities to recognize emerging issues. We would implement an external peer-review process that would include external stakeholders to guide investments in multidisciplinary research and extension. A portion of the funding could be allocated to inter-college proposals. Funds would likely be used primarily for postdoctoral, technical, extension assistant or associate, and student support and the operational expenses for these projects. In order to create an annual Hatch/Smith-Lever competition, we would phase this process in over a 3 year period. Direct benefits of this approach include targeted research and extension programming on topics of college priority rather than of faculty interest alone and creation of a culture of internal competition for research and extension funds. Should Hatch and Smith-Lever funds ever move to a national competitive mechanism, our current investment strategy would be a significant barrier to success on the part of our staff. The proposed approach to using Pennsylvania appropriated funds would create a culture of application, review, and reward (providing tangible program support) that could carry over to success with whatever mechanism the federal government proposes.

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Infrastructure Support:

Background:

Key operational infrastructure in the College is under pressure due to deferred maintenance. Many of the items necessary to conduct meaningful applied research are relatively difficult to fund on grants. A pool of funding available annually to repair or replace key farm/research station operational facilities and equipment would reduce pressure on faculty to forego investment in graduate education or soft-money technical support in order to support key equipment purchases. We also harbor concerns about investment in IT equipment and training, especially for distance education, and would include such items in our definition of infrastructure.

Proposal:

Create an annual investment pool of \$300,000 to address prioritized infrastructure needs in the College. Such items as greenhouse repair/replacement, irrigation, new farm equipment, IT access, and modifications to our educational capacity at off-campus centers represent standing and anticipated needs that would be addressed by this fund. This fund should still be leveraged by departmental investment and by OPP major maintenance funds where appropriate.

Graduate Support

Background:

The implementation of the 2001 College straw plan saw a significant reduction of the hard money graduate assistantship pool. Our current strategic plan calls for an increase in graduate student numbers (widely shared views agree that the College could easily accommodate 600 graduate students rather than the 500 we currently support). Part of the rationale behind the reduction in graduate stipends was a failure of many departments to use their appropriated resources as a leveraging tool to encourage faculty to seek extramural support for students. A program that provides competitive matching for extramural initiatives and new graduate training concepts would accomplish the dual goals of supporting more graduate students within the College and forcing greater extramural funding for graduate students.

Proposal:

Invest \$300,000 in graduate student assistantships. These GAs would not be assigned to departments on a permanent basis, but would be awarded through a competitive RFP process that rewards creativity in graduate education and success in seeking/locating extramural funding. An annual competition would award approximately \$100,000 in funding to 1 or 2 proposals (this amount will fund about 6 students, depending upon grade). Awards would support Ph.D. education, and the funds would be committed for 3 years, with the graduate program agreeing to cover any additional support that the student may require. A 3-year implementation would leave \$200,000 in year 1 and \$100,000 in year 2 uncommitted. This money would be used to purchase additional tuition GIAs from the university for College control. These GIAs are invaluable leveraging tools to encourage

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faculty to seek extramural funds. The former process that provided tuition rebates to faculty supporting Ph.D. students on grants was very popular. This is a mechanism for reinstating such a mentality, and it also addresses the many funding sources that do not support tuition. We have been actively reallocating tuition GIAs within the College, and the availability of additional GIAs (a \$300,000 investment would purchase 50 – 60 semesters of GIA) would provide flexibility for leveraging, addressing certain existing imbalances in GIA allocation, and innovation.

Field Extension Educator Positions

Background:

Extension has seen significant reductions in the number of county/regional extension educators, leaving many areas short in human resources to serve the needs of our clientele. As state and federal support has declined, we have moved to a system that leverages state and federal dollars against local dollars to create additional positions to offset these losses.

Proposal:

Invest \$300,000 to leverage against local funding to create extension educator positions would increase our capacity to deliver core or key extension programs. These funds would also provide a mechanism to allow the organization to have more agility when new issues arise. These dollars would be allocated on three-year MOU agreements with local governments and other agencies.

Implementation Summary

Our substantial temporary commitment list precludes immediate complete implementation of this plan in 2006-07. We anticipate an approximately 3-year time frame for full implementation. We recommend an investment in one faculty cluster in year 1, with the second cluster to follow in summer 2007. As finances permit, we will transition faculty time to state appropriations and accumulate a pool of funds for flex investment in research, extension, and integrated projects. We will begin purchasing tuition GIAs in 2007 and, if funds are available, will release an RFA for the first cycle of graduate assistantships to be available in Fall, 2007 (decision timed to coincide with the 2007-08 recruiting season). Leveraged investment in extension educator positions will begin in 2006-07. Infrastructure investment will be phased in as funds are available.