Professor Allan Silverman, Chair  
Central Service Subcommittee  
The Ohio State University  
203 Bricker Hall, 190 North Oval Mall  
Columbus, OH 43210-1358

Dear Allan:

Attached is the Report of the External Review Panel for the Office of Research Program Review. The Panel wishes to express its appreciation to you, to Toycee and to staff in the Office of Research for the hospitality extended to us and for your efforts to choreograph this important review process. Also attached is a copy of the schedule for the Panel. Although you have this information, we felt it was important to attach it to the Report so that it was clear with whom we had conversations.

That brings us to the more substantive part of our comment. There was apparently somewhat of a mismatch between the expectations of the Panel and those of the CSS. When we were originally invited to serve on the Panel the discussion was couched in terms of reviewing the research program at OSU (or at least that is what some of us thought we heard). But the thrust of the 26 questions forwarded to us by the CSS a week before the visit emphasized operational aspects of the Office of Research almost exclusively. However important such questions are, they depend much more on institutional culture and history than on general management practices. Hence, it is difficult for an external group to learn enough in a day or so to make compelling arguments about structure. Indeed, if that is the primary objective, then probably a different kind of committee with a very specific mandate would have served you better.

It was in this somewhat ambiguous context that I raised the question in the opening session with the CSS about whether the larger issue of the research enterprise as a whole was an appropriate part of the Panel’s task. The answer from you and from the OR leadership was a definite “yes”. To that end we listened to those who met with us and asked questions to tease out such broader issues. Indeed, many of those who met with us were clearly more
focused on the research enterprise overall than on organizational details. As some thoughtful member said, “the quality of execution is far more important than the particular organizational vehicle”. Consequently, our report addresses both topics: a response to the 26 questions, and some comments on issues regarding the research enterprise at OSU more generally that strike us, the outside observers, as important to the success of the OSU research enterprise. Our comments are offered toward that end in a constructive and sympathetic spirit. The result may be that we ended up doing an inadequate job on both counts, but that is the limitation of such outside “experts”.

If the Review process had been more focused on the research enterprise more generally then we would have expected to learn more about the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center as well as the Engineering Experiment Station which are presumably two of the major research entities at OSU. More participation by and visibility from the College of Engineering and the School of Medicine would also have been beneficial.

Finally, I wish to commend the members of the Panel for their dedicated efforts both during the visit and since. They have been a diligent, thoughtful and congenial team. You made excellent choices and each member brought complementary skills to this review. I thank them for their contributions.

We hope this Report is helpful to you and the OSU leadership as you seek to strengthen the research enterprise. We recognize that we have only a partial understanding of the challenges and solutions to the problems at OSU, but maybe even our imperfect observations can serve to stimulate the creative construction of solutions that are fit for purpose at your institution. We wish you all the best in that effort.

Sincerely,

Alvin L. Kwiram, Pro tem Chair
on behalf of the External Review Panel

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