Multimillion-Dollar Interdisciplinary International Scholarship: Issues and Recommendations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship provides the University of Minnesota with the potential to better serve communities around the world. This work, undertaken by groups of University researchers and external partners, differs from traditional scholarship by combining research and service. Typically funded by cooperative agreements, these projects are large in size and magnitude, and require researchers from multiple disciplines to coordinate their efforts among a network of domestic and international partners. Assembling proposals for these projects is arduous, and the associated risks and costs necessitate administrative decisions that the University is not structured to facilitate.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, the Office of International Programs and the Office of the Vice President for Research charged a President’s Emerging Leaders team with examining the University’s pursuit of this scholarship and its respective funding opportunities. This report identifies key themes about the application process that promote or obstruct successful responses to requests for proposals and recommends actions and best practices.

REPORT THEMES

1. Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship is typically not traditional research nor is it typically funded by a traditional grant. This difference accounts for varied attitudes for or against conducting this scholarship. Funding agreements for this work often include expectations for deliverables beyond those of a traditional grant.

2. This scholarship includes complexity that exceeds that of typical domestic research. Unique costs and challenges of this scholarship cause the University to assume greater risk than is usually associated with traditional research. This work also brings great potential to improve people’s lives around the world.

3. No University-wide strategic plan exists to guide decision making about this scholarship. Many faculty members believe an articulated plan and support from leadership would be a positive response to their needs.

4. No University-level body or administrator is designated to facilitate decision making about pursuing this scholarship. There exists a lack of clarity about who determines the priorities and where decisions rest regarding how many and what types of these projects the University can or should pursue.

5. Researchers believe they are not encouraged to engage in this scholarship. Many question that this type of scholarship is truly valued or will yield valuable publications. Others believe there are disincentives for engaging in this work.
6. The entrepreneurial research model does not accommodate the pursuit of this scholarship. The scale of this work is so large that one researcher cannot reasonably assume the duties of principal investigator.

7. Researchers seek greater administrative support or infrastructure as they pursue this scholarship. Collegiate and administrative support, dedicated financial resources, and central leadership comprise researchers’ primary requests for additional help with this scholarship.

8. Networking and collaborating with University colleagues are vital, yet challenging, aspects of successfully pursuing this scholarship. Researchers believe that internal collaboration across University units is essential to success and could be improved.

9. Collaboration with external partners is critical to successful proposals and project implementation. Partnerships with external organizations are seen as underused or underdeveloped, but invaluable resources for this scholarship.

REPORT Recommendations

1. Better articulate the benefits of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. More effectively pursuing this scholarship will require a persuasive argument to garner support and engagement of the necessary University leaders and researchers. We recommend that the merits of this global scholarship be scripted into a bold vision statement.

2. Create a University-wide strategic plan to guide the pursuit of proposals. We recommend that a plan outlines geographic areas and key topics in which the University will most likely be successful with this scholarship.

3. Develop a University-level decision-making authority. We recommend that a small team be charged with receiving requests to pursue an opportunity, and have the agility to decide quickly if the interested researchers should pursue that and subsequent opportunities.

4. Create consultative and support teams. We recommend establishing a consultative council consisting of researchers across the University who can give those pursuing a particular opportunity guidance, advice, and encouragement.

5. Establish administrative processes and support for pursuing this scholarship. We recommend that the University consider a central administrative, interdisciplinary, global support team charged with supporting projects through the proposal process and during administration of the award.

6. Establish incentives, awards, or other benefits for tenured and tenure-track faculty to pursue this scholarship. The University should determine the types of employees that might participate in this scholarship and develop tenure-track options to include incentives for this scholarship.

7. Leverage peer institutions’ experiences. We recommend that University leaders continue to explore best practices of peer institutions with this scholarship. §
INTRODUCTION

The call for universities to broaden their definition of scholarship has been a popular point of conversation in higher education for more than twenty years. Ernest Boyer (1990) is perhaps the most recognized proponent, arguing that academia reconsider the products it values and rewards most. Along with teaching and applied research, service is among the types of academic work that many believe should be given increased importance. In Boyer’s view:

The conviction is growing that the vision of service that once so energized the nation’s campuses must be given a new legitimacy. The challenge then is this: Can America’s colleges and universities, with all the richness of their resources, be of greater service to the nation and the world? Can we define scholarship in ways that respond more adequately to the urgent new realities both within the academy and beyond? (Boyer, 1990, p. 3).

Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship is an example of academic work that falls outside the traditional definition of scholarship and blurs the lines between research and service. This report is the product of a 2009-2010 President’s Emerging Leaders team charged with examining this type of academic work. Specifically, the Office of International Programs in partnership with the Office of the Vice President for Research asked us to explore the University of Minnesota’s pursuit of this scholarship and its respective funding opportunities.

Our goal is to identify key components of the application process that either facilitate or obstruct successful responses to requests for proposals and recommend actions and best practices. We present a discussion of this scholarship through a series of six questions that we hope will foster further discussion and decision making among University researchers and senior leaders. The questions framing our discussion are:

Question 1: What defines multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship?
Question 2: Should the University pursue this scholarship, and if so, to what extent?
Question 3: What type of scholar or researcher at the University should best pursue this scholarship?
Question 4: How do current administrative mechanisms support the pursuit of this scholarship?
Question 5: What are other universities doing to accommodate and support the pursuit of this scholarship?
Question 6: How can the University more effectively support the pursuit of this scholarship?

For each question, we provide background and often suggest conclusions or offer our perspectives. We obtained the background information and formulated our opinions about this topic by studying the issue during the 2009-2010 academic year. Our examination included reviewing University documents, interviewing more than thirty administrators and researchers, and surveying colleagues at peer institutions. (See Appendices A and B for a discussion of the methodology and the list of interview questions.)

Our investigation suggested nine themes and seven recommendations that became clear to us as we collected and analyzed the interviews’ information about this scholarship. Throughout this report we explain the following:

**Theme I:** Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship is typically not traditional research nor is it typically funded by a traditional grant.

**Theme II:** This scholarship includes complexity that exceeds that of typical domestic research.

**Theme III:** No University-wide strategic plan exists to guide decision making about this scholarship.

**Theme IV:** No University-level body or administrator is designated to facilitate decision making about pursuing this scholarship.

**Theme V:** Researchers believe they are not encouraged to engage in this scholarship.

**Theme VI:** The entrepreneurial research model does not accommodate the pursuit of this scholarship.

**Theme VII:** Researchers seek greater administrative support or infrastructure as they pursue this scholarship.

**Theme VIII:** Networking and collaborating with University colleagues are vital, yet challenging, aspects of successfully pursuing this scholarship.

**Theme IX:** Collaboration with external partners is critical to successful proposals and project implementation.

Building from these themes, we present seven recommendations that suggest areas for further exploration and action:

**Recommendation 1:** Better articulate the benefits of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship.

**Recommendation 2:** Create a University-wide strategic plan to guide the pursuit of proposals.

**Recommendation 3:** Develop a University-level decision-making authority.
Recommendation 4: Create consultative and support teams.
Recommendation 5: Establish administrative processes and support for pursuing this scholarship.
Recommendation 6: Establish incentives, awards, or other benefits for tenured and tenure-track faculty to pursue this scholarship.
Recommendation 7: Leverage peer institutions’ experiences.

Question 1: What defines multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship?

As we began examining the University’s pursuit of opportunities for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, we struggled with this most basic question, what is it? This lack of clarity was an obstacle to defining or understanding the problem. Our confusion was, at least in part, a result of language commonly used to describe this scholarship. Most with whom we spoke in academia refer to this work as that originating from a research “grant.”

In reality, however, few consider this scholarship traditional research and it is rarely funded by a grant.

*Theme 1: Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship is typically not traditional research nor is it typically funded by a traditional grant.*

This first theme is fundamental in understanding the focus of this report. As one researcher explained, “Much international work is considered to be outreach and human development, not research, so many researchers would deliberately avoid that.” In other words, it does not align with the dominant view that true research generates basic or new knowledge that leads to publication in prestigious, refereed journals. Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship often involves applying the University’s intellectual resources to serve others. It also seems clear that more traditional research outcomes, such as publications in refereed journals, can and do stem from this scholarship, however, often indirectly. Many of these multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international projects serve the University of Minnesota’s mission by helping to build humanitarian and social systems in developing countries and train partner-researchers and subsequent generations to sustain them.

The funding source is another important distinction associated with this scholarship. Instead of traditional research grants that allow scholars to pursue their inquiry with limited interruption and oversight, this scholarship is more often funded through a cooperative agreement. As one researcher described it, “These types of funding sources want deliverables.” Several interviewees argued that this type of research is a new trend that will likely continue to become increasingly prevalent in this century.
To date, there are six examples of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship via grants or cooperative agreements with the University including: The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-financed “Morocco Project” in the 1970-90s; and in the 2000s, the National Center for Food Protection and Defense; the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)-funded International Network for Strategic Initiatives in Global HIV Trials (INSIGHT); the Minnesota Center of Excellence for Influenza Research and Surveillance (also funded by NIAID); the Abu Dhabi-Minnesota Institute for Research Excellence (ADMIRE); and the USAID-financed RESPOND project to help developing countries control animal diseases that pose a threat to humans (see Appendix C for detailed descriptions).

From these examples we observed that these projects tend to be enormous in size and scope, involve numerous international partners, and depend on faculty collaboration across colleges and disciplines at the University.

**Question 2: Should the University pursue this scholarship, and if so, to what extent?**

We believe that University leadership and researchers must consider whether pursuing this scholarship benefits the University or helps it fulfill its mission. Further, they must consider if it makes academic and business sense. As we met with administrators and researchers, it became clear that these are not simple questions. Even those who were passionate about the merits of this scholarship admitted that it has unique costs and challenges.

**Theme II: This scholarship includes complexity that exceeds that of typical domestic research.**

Multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship tends to include more significant complications and burdens for the University than does traditional, independent research. One administrator described this theme:

There’s a whole litany of issues with international grants. Sometimes there are language issues and we have to hire a translator. Other issues of currency... time zones, and definition of terms. Another issue is how or whether to sub out work to overseas subcontractors. We don’t know if local people can be trusted; we don’t know where the money will go. We need to look at whether there is a reliable local institution the money can be channeled through.

Most unusual about this scholarship, however, are effects that result from the enormous size of the projects and the huge amounts of money provided by funding agencies. The scale of these activities causes the University to assume
greater risk and cost not usually associated with traditional research. One administrator stated that the “financial burden, possibly large, is on the University,” while another described concerns about “making sure what is promised in the grant application can be carried out by the University if awarded the grant.” In addition, many administrators described the added challenges of ensuring intellectual property rights and privacy of data when working globally. Other challenges include determining amounts of insurance, funding project administration, handling human subject issues, and adhering to foreign and U.S. laws. One researcher stressed some of the financial challenges with this scholarship:

First, [regarding] the emerging need for additional insurance... the standard practice was to default to the amount necessitated by the tort cap in Minnesota law, and now it’s becoming more common for that to be insufficient as research is conducted farther afield. Second is... the amount of insurance having no bearing on the value of the contract, but rather on the estimated risk of the activities and the difficulty in making a standardized policy about that….Each requires individual consideration.

Despite the costs, complications, and risks, researchers make several strong arguments for why the University must pursue this scholarship. One often-voiced and compelling argument is that this scholarship represents a trend that other areas of research are sure to follow. Sponsored projects, cooperative agreements, and contracts are increasingly replacing grants. One researcher posited, “This trend at NIH [National Institutes of Health] is growing. Plus, the need for international collaboration is growing and adds another layer of complexity.”

Another argued that vital funders of this scholarship can be “a pain, [but] if you want to be a prominent research university, you have to deal with it.” USAID, for example, is a key player, and if the University wants to be a leader on the global research stage, it needs to work effectively with this agency. In other words, many researchers with whom we spoke believe that in order for the University to be among the top research institutions in the world, it needs to actively pursue this scholarship. Further, many advocate that the University’s breadth of disciplines position it to be particularly successful.

Underlying many of the arguments, but rarely articulated by those we interviewed, is the noble purpose of service-based research and its potential for benefiting others. For example, one researcher urged, “We need to impart the understanding that the intention is to have more impact on improving people’s lives around the globe.” In our conversations with researchers and administrators, concerns tended toward more immediate and quantifiable goals of international research, and these issues are presented throughout this report. Implicit in the interviews, however, is that the greater intrinsic value of improving
the global human condition is at the foundation of this Land Grant University’s efforts.

Most administrators and researchers agree that the University should strive for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship as a key component of becoming a top public research institution. Yet many of the people interviewed described a lack of understanding or direction about which opportunities should be pursued, and equally important, which should not. While researchers understand the University has areas of strength and advantage, they feel they lack the guidance to use them effectively. This absence was most often presented as a need for a stated plan that would identify priorities, and for an administrative body with the authority and expertise to guide decision making.

**Theme III: No University strategic plan exists to guide decision making about this scholarship.**

The University of Minnesota has recognized internationalization as an important part of its strategic plan. The 2006 Systemwide Academic Task Force on Forging an International University presented the mission to “effectively leverage, stimulate, and coordinate cutting edge international research and globally informed teaching and public engagement programs” as cornerstones of internationalization efforts. Our discussions with researchers and administrators reinforced the trend toward global scope and collaboration as critical aspects of current research initiatives.

Overall, the researchers we interviewed have a positive view of the value of international research. It “opens the doors to new things, gives you access to people who help you broaden your approach and perspective on your subject matter,” and creates an image that attracts better students, one said.

However, our interviews uncovered a common perception that the University has been slow to develop a plan that supports and informs policy regarding international research. As one administrator said, “If you want to play on the global stage, you need to provide the infrastructure to do it. We have all the pieces, but need to find a way to bridge the pieces together and need to have the will to do this.” This “bridge” requires administrative leadership to articulate a strategic global plan that will narrow the scope and focus on strengths already apparent on our campuses. Many researchers suggested that the University’s comprehensive academic scope may compel us to “try to monitor everything in the world.” Several shared the opinion that the University “should focus on specific topics and specific areas of the world…. What are we really good at? Where do we have the best international relationships? Then, develop prestige as an institution in those areas.”

Faculty indicated that a clear plan and support from leadership would be viewed as a positive response to researchers’ needs rather than an approach of delegating from the top down. Having the endorsement and support of leadership would also confirm that the University values the work that
researchers are pursuing; this is especially true in cases of service. Further, several people spoke of the need for administrative leadership to provide a coordinated approach that would encourage sharing rather than competing for resources across colleges and units.

Theme IV: No University-level body or administrator is designated to facilitate decision making about pursuing this scholarship.

Faculty and other researchers expressed their desire for guidance about whether or not the University would advocate for their proposals for specific awards that fund multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. The call was heard for a “quarterback” to identify priorities and oversee a strategic plan, not only to guide the pursuit of new funding opportunities, but also to help researchers currently holding grants to prioritize their own responsibilities. One interviewee asked, “Who makes the decisions about what the priorities are?” Some faculty expressed frustration about the lack of clarity on who was leading the charge and determining priorities for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international projects, and where decisions rested regarding how many and what types of large grants or contracts the University can and should pursue. Another faculty researcher concluded, “The U needs to have champions with the ability to convince people to take on the work, and enough resources to make things happen.”

Although a new decision-making body could be formed, one of several existing entities in the University might best provide the guidance that faculty and others requested. This council or committee would need to have the ability to respond quickly to researchers’ questions about specific requests for proposals (RFPs).

Question 3: What type of scholar or researcher at the University should best pursue this scholarship?

Numerous researchers with whom we spoke noted that work with multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship does not benefit faculty in the traditional sense of recognition and rewards, including tenure issues. We have not concluded that those who pursue or engage in this scholarship necessarily need be tenured or tenure-track faculty. As an example, University Extension employs nontenure-track faculty to conduct service-based scholarship. Other nontenure-track researchers also may be best-suited to conduct this scholarship abroad. Our interviews have made clear, however, that if we desire accomplished and ambitious tenured or tenure-track faculty to pursue this scholarship, they do not believe that they have institutional incentives to do so.
Theme V: Researchers believe they are not encouraged to engage in this scholarship.

Recognition for this new scholarship as part of the promotion and tenure process was a popular point of discussion with our interviewees. A statement by one researcher expresses the general spirit:

University tenure rules, which are due to be rewritten, are a barrier. People working towards tenure don’t want to help [conduct this scholarship], and their departments don’t want them to help because it’s not recognized and rewarded. It limits who you can bring in.

Several other researchers who perform international service projects presented additional issues that may create disincentives for faculty. Some mentioned the heavy time commitment, which is often carved out of unpaid time during semester breaks; others pointed out the inconveniences of global travel, including isolation from family and other obligations. In addition, faculty whose research aligns with a single discipline often struggle to address the merit of interdisciplinary scholarship of junior faculty.

Beyond issues of tenure, nontenured faculty members sometimes expressed anxiety over the ambiguous nature of the University’s support and whether this type of service project is truly valued or would yield valuable publications.

Question 4: How do current administrative mechanisms support the pursuit of this scholarship?

We conclude that the University’s most prevalent model for facilitating research activity does not support the pursuit of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. The processes in place are designed to serve traditional research, and do so at a high level, but these same processes do not accommodate the pursuit of this scholarship.

Theme VI: The entrepreneurial research model does not accommodate the pursuit of this scholarship.

The University of Minnesota, and others like it, have relied on an entrepreneurial model to initiate and implement research activity. At the core, this model assumes a strong principal investigator; the motivation for starting and the leadership for producing scholarship lie primarily with the researcher. This model gives faculty members the freedom to pursue research in whatever directions their areas of inquiry lead. As a result, researchers have the time and agility to pursue opportunities as they emerge. In this model, administration
supports research proposals at their final stages by providing guidance related to human subjects, federal regulations, legal issues, and risk avoidance. The administration does not have the authority to alter the direction of scholarship in the initial creative phases of the proposals nor is it burdened with having to engage with concepts that never evolve into full proposals.

The entrepreneurial model works and will continue to serve future proposals for traditional research and grants at the University. The size, complexity, and risk associated with proposals for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, however, render the entrepreneurial model inappropriate. For example, several researchers argued that the projects are so large and complex that it is not practical or fair for one principal investigator to assume responsibility.

Other interviewees stated that the entrepreneurial model, which relies heavily on the effort of the researcher, does not provide the increased support necessary for this less traditional scholarship. Although the University may have the assets for this type of research, it does not always have in place the appropriate support to do it well and efficiently. An interviewee concluded, “Central administration is a barrier. They talk about global research, but there is no formal structure to support it.”

**Theme VII: Researchers seek greater administrative support or infrastructure as they pursue this scholarship.**

In general, there is a clear sentiment among interviewees that researchers need more help when pursuing multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. Three aspects of the described need for infrastructure emerged as predominant subthemes in the interviews: collegiate administrative support, financial support, and support of central leadership.

Collegiate administrative support refers to “ground level” support required when applying for or preparing to apply for this type of scholarship’s awards, and during implementation of a funded program. This includes support for grant writing, budgeting, paperwork, and other logistics involved in the application process. “Many proposals ‘die on the vine’ without this,” said one researcher. Putting together an interdisciplinary grant application requires significant amounts of time, coordination, and collaboration across different units. Researchers may not be able to make the time commitment to assemble a proposal because they lack the support to do so. Additionally, a team of individuals may be required to compile an application because no one person has the skill set to complete a project proposal. While some units at the University have resources for grant writing within their individual areas, there are not consistent levels of support when collaboration needs to happen across units.

Several interviewees called for a centralized operation that would provide the support and a specialist or “go to” person who would be able to guide collaborative efforts. “No one is directly responsible for facilitating the
differences between colleges or for managing the collaboration for multidisciplinary grants,” noted one. A number of researchers concluded, in the words of another, that there is a need for “an institution-level individual to serve as a champion [for the process].”

Some interviewees said that the University provides them with financial support in terms of matching funds and seed money. Others, however, indicated a lack of financial backing by the University, making it difficult to pursue large projects. Additionally, the process for receiving funding is counterintuitive in cases where money is required up front in developing countries that do not have financial support for the project. One faculty member, who was echoed by others, explained the issue:

International research is not traditional research. The University’s invoice system does not work with other countries and [the] requirements of international grants. The invoice system can hold up research for months because other countries don’t have the money to buy equipment and wait for reimbursement; this delays research.

There currently is not a central administrative location at the University that provides complete oversight of the multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship application and coordination process. Many interviewees suggested that having centrally located support would help to systematize the project application process. Several mentioned the importance of having a central unit to house this scholarship. Some suggested the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change or said they “would like to see OIP develop a high level of expertise to assist with future proposals” as an “umbrella...[that] could broker relationships with institutions in other countries.”

The Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) Office in OVPR mediates the project process and ensures compliance with award requirements. Because of the complexity of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, some interviewees said that SPA is not structured to handle this type of project. One interviewee suggested that SPA needs to be “more creative and flexible” in regard to international awards and another commented, “SPA is compelled to maximize recoverables, but the game is changing in Washington, D.C., and the University is not responding to that. Agencies like USAID expect cost share. You can do that by reducing the ICR [indirect cost recovery], but SPA fights this.” It can be surmised from the interviews that while SPA may operate effectively when handling traditional domestic grants, the infrastructure support for large international projects is not there. One interviewee stated, “SPA could have a specialist [to facilitate this scholarship] if the volume warranted it, but it doesn’t seem to, at this point.”
Theme VIII: Networking and collaborating with University colleagues are vital, yet challenging, aspects of successfully pursuing this scholarship.

Interdisciplinary networking and collaboration were almost universally identified as essential practices and considerable challenges when pursuing multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. Researchers suggested that internal collaboration across University units and partnerships with organizations external to the University could be improved.

Almost all interviewees confirmed that the largest projects require interdisciplinary collaboration, but a common response to that idea was that the structure of academia does not facilitate interdisciplinary connections well. Faculty members are pressured to work within their own disciplines due to budget structures, which are not conducive to handling a consortium of people from disparate units. Also, resulting research must usually be published in one’s primary or “home” academic field, not an outside publication, to be considered meaningful.

More than one faculty member stressed the importance of teaching students collaboration skills. One researcher emphasized the value of listening, instead of talking to potential partners, and reaching out to others by going to them. However, some expressed that the University already teaches students to draw from many disciplines in meaningful ways when compared to other U.S. institutions. For example, the Master of Development Practice, administered by the Humphrey Institute and Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, spans several academic units while teaching students interdisciplinary and collaboration skills. “Interdisciplinary work is viewed suspiciously at some colleges, but not here,” according to one researcher.

Effectively finding people on campus with whom to collaborate remains problematic. Many people believe the size of the University makes it difficult to collaborate or even meet people. A lack of organized internal communication makes it difficult to identify key people for a team, to know what funding other faculty members are pursuing, or to connect with faculty across disciplines. Overwhelmingly, researchers reported that the ability to assemble a team is based on the existence of informal networks, and is “more of an art than a science.” While some summed up this knowledge gap as a need for knowing “who’s doing what where,” others pointed out that geographic coincidence is too simplistic an approach. “It’s difficult to evaluate a researcher’s true skill level from a bio sketch. It takes time to interview and get to know potential partners to see whether you have a common understanding.” Or as another researcher put it, “Just because somebody’s worked in Uganda doesn’t mean I want to work there with them!”

Several of the administrators and researchers interviewed expressed frustration with the financial and logistical difficulty of working across colleges – inconsistent deadlines, multiple required signatures on forms, reporting line policies, and terms of appointments. In recent applications, financial distribution
of ICR monies has had to be negotiated among deans on a case-by-case basis, costing valuable time. One experienced grant writer reported, “The way the University's budget model functions is a direct barrier to interdisciplinary collaboration,” especially when grants call for cost share. The academic culture of competition, instead of collaboration, often complicates the application process.

An administrator pointed out, “There is no current model for cooperative programs among colleges. The reality is, all projects have to be ‘owned’ by a college, and are not seen as University-wide collaborative projects. They should not reside in one college. There is no institutional or functional home for these projects. One college gets the credit despite the group effort.”

Some encouraging examples of interdisciplinary collaboration do exist on campus. The Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change offers a model where faculty use “collaborative skills and goodwill” to yield broad interdisciplinary research. The newly opened Center for Global Health and Social Responsibility seeks to establish collaboration within and outside the Academic Health Center, and one of their first initiatives is to compile a database to house information about faculty research projects around the world. Suggestions also were made for researchers to use other centers on campus to coordinate collaboration, such as the Institute on the Environment, the Clinical and Translational Science Institute, the Alumni Association, University of Minnesota Foundation, and the China Center. Additionally, some faculty members have organized multidisciplinary informal gatherings, or invited colleagues to symposia with national speakers – which give researchers a reason to attend and to network.

One overlooked group with enormous capacity to connect internationally is University students who participate in learning abroad programs and international alumni who have returned to their home countries. They often are familiar with the culture, language, and laws of two or more countries, and are often academically and professionally accomplished, capable of establishing a strong reputation for the University and themselves. Students and alumni could help develop permanent affiliations and partnerships in regions all over the world. The University could also be more strategic in not only providing our students with international experiences, but also bringing people from other countries here. One well-established example is the MAST program in the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resources Sciences, an exchange visitor program funded by the U.S. Department of State.

**Theme IX: Collaboration with external partners is critical to successful proposals and project implementation.**

Collaboration or partnership with organizations external to the University was commonly cited as an underused but invaluable resource and support for the University’s multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international sponsored projects.
These external organizations generally fell into five groups: Educational institutions and NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) in other countries, U.S. peer institutions, local or U.S. private companies, and U.S. government agencies. Contacts in these other organizations are extremely useful for learning about scholarship funding opportunities.

Some administrators and researchers felt the University should do more to encourage and sponsor international collaboration and partnerships in terms of bringing visitors here, signing Memorandums of Understanding, and sponsoring overseas meetings and conferences to get faculty known and connected with others worldwide. “The importance of face-to-face meetings with our international partners is often underestimated,” according to one faculty member. Establishing personal relationships with colleagues abroad is critical to the ability to collaborate as equal partners, an administrator noted. Creating and sustaining – in advance – solid relationships and personal networks in areas of interest to the University, not just having generic contacts with an institution, can pave the way for providing reliable interactions when operating globally. This ability has great currency among foundations and other agencies that award grants.

Interviewees described how networks of colleagues from U.S. peer institutions are built over time and these become the main source for building project teams, but stated that there is no coordinated way to assemble a team if one does not have an established network. In terms of grant applications, peer institutions in the U.S. may be seen as competitors, but more often, faculty rely on colleagues from other institutions to complement their own expertise and resources to strengthen an application.

A few interviewees also noted the potential of partnering with local private companies that have a strong presence in the global marketplace. Many businesses also have political influence that is helpful for winning large projects and establishing connections. One faculty member noted that while there is tension between the academy and industry, research can result from many private enterprises using their well-established infrastructure.

The practice of partnering with private, so-called “Beltway Bandits” such as DAI (Development Alternatives Incorporated) was also mentioned, with contrasting viewpoints. While they are viewed by some as a necessary evil, “taking all the ICR and doing none of the work,” they also are credited with meeting grant requirements and providing crucial understanding of the funding agencies. According to the researchers involved, partnering with DAI and Tufts University was essential to the University of Minnesota being awarded the $58 million-dollar RESPOND project as part of a $185 million-dollar program. DAI is experienced with USAID and has the framework and financial systems in place to administer scholarship at this level.
Question 5: What are other universities doing to accommodate and support the pursuit of this scholarship?

The limited evidence that we have about the University’s peer institutions suggests that they are likely at similarly early stages in learning how to facilitate opportunities for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. One notable exception is the University of Washington, which enacted strategies in the wake of receiving a $20 million, International Training and Education Center on HIV (I-TECH) award (Fischer, 2009). Similar to the University of Minnesota’s recent experience with the RESPOND project, Washington found that it was unprepared to support the rapid growth and complexity of the project. As it explored other research universities, Washington discovered that none had developed a comprehensive institutional approach to deal with the administrative obstacles associated with this scholarship (Global Support Project: Focus Group Report, 2007).

In recent years, Washington has created an infrastructure to support this scholarship as well as general, or more traditional, international research. The core of Washington’s response was to establish its Global Support Project. Stemming from the project, Washington sought to better support faculty and staff by addressing barriers to international research such as: transferring large sums of money to remote research sites, setting up legal registration in foreign countries, implementing a human subject review process, supporting technology infrastructure in-country, understanding export controls, subcontracting abroad, approving cash advances and purchasing, and obtaining appropriate insurance. Further, the project led to establishing single points of contact, which consist of existing staff in different administrative departments who received training and provide advice and problem solving (see Appendix D).

Several of the University of Minnesota faculty and staff we interviewed argued that other institutions better support the broader, more general international research. While this is largely beyond the scope of this report, it is worth noting that interviewees cited excellent programs at Harvard University, Stanford University, Michigan State University, Duke University, Johns Hopkins University, Tulane University, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Interestingly, however, when pressed for specifics, few could offer any meaningful description of what it is that these institutions do that cause them to be, or at least be perceived as, successful. Descriptions of peer institutions tended to include vague statements such as, “I understand their process to be slick... they run more like a business,” or “private schools are more entrepreneurial,” or “they have excellent leadership and it shows,” or “the University is coming to the international research game later than everyone else.” Among the only statements that provided any understanding of what other institutions do better to support international research were about Duke’s, Harvard’s, and Michigan State’s user-friendly databases and websites that document funding opportunities.
We must note that several interviewees explained that the University has very good support for and success with international projects. For example, one researcher explained that this “University has more enthusiasm for international work than [did] previous employers.” Another offered that the “University has the best budget model I have ever seen anywhere. It’s not perfect, but it works.” Further, many contradicted the praise given by others to peer institutions, specifically naming the same institutions as not very good. Other statements, such as the following, even suggest that the University serves international research better than these institutions: “No other universities are more successful in terms of delivery and track record. We work with lots of other universities – Ohio State, Georgia, UC-Davis, Wisconsin, none are more successful.” From our meetings with faculty and staff we have determined that the interview data about peer institutions’ support for international research are inconclusive.

Question 6: Can the University more effectively support the pursuit of this scholarship?

In light of our analysis of the University’s six experiences with multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, we believe that the University has the potential to more effectively support the pursuit of this scholarship. Following are seven recommendations toward successfully seeking and administering these opportunities.

Recommendation 1: Better articulate the benefits of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship.

Many with whom we met were passionate about multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. However, few had a well-articulated description of this type of work or more importantly, its merits. While deeply involved with their scholarship, many University researchers apparently assume that other people recognize the benefits of the work that researchers see as obvious.

More effective pursuit of this scholarship will require a persuasive argument to garner support and engagement of the necessary University leaders and researchers. We recommend that the merits of this global scholarship be scripted into a bold vision statement. The statement should address what this scholarship entails, why the University should engage in it, and how the University, state, nation, and world will be better because of it.

The few arguments about the merits of this work that we did hear were vague. For example, some interviewees mentioned that this scholarship will help the University’s reputation, assist with being considered a top university, or lead to other opportunities. We believe that these statements are too easily discounted and recommend that the arguments be developed to include
specifics. The statements should describe exactly how this scholarship will benefit the University and whether it will benefit the University to a greater extent than traditional scholarship that holds less risk.

Most importantly, we recommend a communication strategy that explains the profound effects that this scholarship has on people. The vision of the University of Minnesota is to “improve the human condition through the advancement of knowledge.” Yet almost no one described this scholarship, or the reasons for doing it, as bettering lives and easing suffering.

**Recommendation 2: Create a University-wide strategic plan to guide the pursuit of proposals.**

It is clear to us that the scale, complexity, and risk associated with this scholarship is so great that the University can no longer afford to pursue opportunities of this type without a University-level plan. We recommend that a plan outlines geographic areas and key topics in which the University will most likely be successful with this scholarship. The nature, resources required, and costs associated with the application for and later implementation of this scholarship suggest that the University can engage in only a small number of these agreements at any one time. Therefore, the University needs a plan to help select which few should be pursued. Interestingly, our interviewees said they seek this University-level leadership. As one individual stated, “Partnerships and level of funding compared to work needed may not balance out, so we need to know what is worth doing.”

**Recommendation 3: Develop a University-level decision-making authority.**

To execute a plan for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, the University will need an entity with decision-making authority. We recommend that a small team be charged with receiving requests to pursue an opportunity early in the process and have the agility to decide quickly if the interested researchers should pursue any given opportunity. This group would decide how much total liability the University should assume for this scholarship at one time and establish a strategic, coordinated approach for pursuing only a few key topics in specific regions of the world. The existence of an early-stage, decision-making authority could include a representative from the offices of General Counsel and Risk Management to include vital risk assessment and management much earlier in the process.

While this team might take the shape of a new committee, we recommend considering existing bodies to assume all or part of these duties. Existing groups for consideration include the Provost’s Research Council, International Programs Council, the Provost’s Interdisciplinary Team, the Research and Scholarship Advisory Panel, or the Senate Research Committee. How or wherever the team is
formed, we recommend that it levy decisions on a three-tier scale expressed by the street-light colors:

- Red – the researchers should not pursue the opportunity: the costs and risk are too great, the benefits and areas of expertise too few;
- Yellow – the researchers should tentatively proceed: more information is needed but researchers need to continue with application timelines at a pace faster than the team can decide; or
- Green – the researchers should pursue the opportunity: the scholarship is among the University’s strengths, leadership understands and commits to the associated risks, costs are understood, and resources committed.

While there is clear need for greater University involvement early in the planning and decision-making stages, doing so may necessitate a careful balance between increased central support and academic freedom. On one hand, researchers recognize that “the University cannot simply muddle through this complex work” and believe that “our faculty would welcome structure and assistance – not wasting their time pursuing something the University will not support.” On the other hand, the University has a tradition of academic freedom in which it empowers its scholars to choose their areas of inquiry. Because this scholarship is not traditional research, some may see administrative involvement as less of a threat to academic freedom. Regardless, University leadership should take steps toward a decision-making role early in the application process while simultaneously and proactively taking steps to protect academic freedom.

**Recommendation 4: Create consultative and support teams.**

Those who pursue multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship opportunities can have a lonely and frustrating journey. This seems particularly true for scholars new to the University and junior faculty, who may not have an extensive network of established relationships across the University or within their disciplines. Even for senior faculty, the interdisciplinarity of this work makes it unlikely that they will be able to connect easily with or find the support and encouragement they need from the appropriate colleagues. We recommend establishing a consultative council consisting of researchers across the University who can give those pursuing a particular opportunity guidance, advice, and encouragement. This group would not necessarily shoulder any burden or responsibility for any specific opportunity or application, but rather, be a resource where researchers can ask questions or vet ideas.
Recommendation 5: Establish administrative processes and support for pursuing this scholarship.

As multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international projects continue to grow in complexity and scale, it is no longer viable to assume one principal investigator will manage the entire project. We recommend that the University consider a central administrative, interdisciplinary, global support team charged with supporting projects throughout the proposal process and also during administration of the award, allowing researchers to focus on their scholarship.

This proposed global support team would require, as one researcher put it, the “willingness of a core group of people to put in extraordinary hours to meet very short deadlines” with assembled expertise in these areas:

- Identifying and communicating funding opportunities (ideally using contacts in Washington, D.C.);
- Tracking agency deadlines, and collecting required signatures and supporting materials;
- Writing and formatting proposals according to agency guidelines; and
- Coordinating budgets, payroll, and cost share across units.

The Office of International Programs (OIP) was recognized by many researchers and administrators for “providing focus and structure. They are resourceful, recognize opportunities, and they make things happen.” It was suggested by some that OIP facilitate the University’s interdisciplinary, international efforts.

Creating an interdisciplinary vision at the University of Minnesota requires solving the issues of competition and breaking down boundaries between units. Several interviewees commented that AHC appears to operate autonomously from the rest of the University, resulting in uneven levels of resources. The University of Minnesota, like higher education generally, struggles with the larger issue of establishing truly interdisciplinary teams. While the causes and solutions to these issues are beyond the scope of this report, we recommend building on existing efforts, including an institution-wide database to identify potential internal and external collaborators, seminars updating researchers on international collaboration, and active multidisciplinary committees whose representatives network and share information.

Recommendation 6: Establish incentives, awards, or other benefits for tenured and tenure-track faculty to pursue this scholarship.

If the University wants tenured researchers or faculty to participate in obtaining multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship, then there may need to be a different incentive plan in place (both financial and
regarding promotion and tenure). Current attitudes about this scholarship may serve as disincentives; faculty do not feel encouraged to do this type of work because it typically does not result in “points” earned toward tenure. Tenured, senior faculty often seem to assume that all new researchers and faculty want to be on the tenure track and thus discourage them from conducting this scholarship, which does not necessarily lead to publication in accepted, peer-reviewed journals. The University may need to rethink what type(s) of employees might participate in this scholarship, or revise tenure-track options to include incentives for this scholarship.

**Recommendation 7: Leverage peer institution experiences.**

We recommend that University leaders continue to explore the experiences and practices at peer institutions. Examining the lessons learned by the University of Washington over the last two years may be particularly beneficial to the University of Minnesota in shaping its own strategy for multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. In addition, we recommend the continued exploration of peer institutions’ support of and best practices with the broader, more general area of international research, which is beyond the scope of this report.

**CONCLUSION**

The University of Minnesota is encountering unprecedented opportunities to advance knowledge and serve humanity worldwide that fall outside our traditional understanding of research and outreach. This report presents the challenges and requirements for the University to engage in this scholarship. The University is well situated to contribute to the global public good through creating international research networks and building capacity for knowledge production. This scholarship places the University on a stage where others are likely to recognize it as a world leader. Investing in our global reputation advances our international partnerships with institutions that complement our existing strengths. These connections further the University’s power to attract to Minnesota creative researchers and talented students, as well as industry investments and other funding.

These projects bring opportunity along with increased complexity and a calculated risk to the University’s international research portfolio. On one hand, multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship appears more costly and unpredictable than traditional research at a time when the economic climate requires the University to be deliberate in deciding what not to pursue. On the other hand, these projects present the University opportunities to contribute to the betterment of humanity on a scale that few other avenues provide.
It is critical that the researchers whose inspiration and creativity form the backbone of these projects be provided with purposeful objectives and strategic administrative planning. Each 3-year or 5-year project should be analyzed not as a discreet opportunity, but rather as the inception or continuation of a longer-term commitment to specific areas of academic inquiry and/or geographic focus.

With the aim of strengthening Minnesota’s reputation as a University with global reach, we hope that this report will spark a University-wide conversation, reflective analysis, and action that most other research campuses have yet to approach. We recommend that one future project consist of a case study of the recently awarded RESPOND project, documenting a timeline of events and issues. Our hope is that projects such as this report will compel University leaders to develop alternate administrative models and processes for pursuing multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship. The University must pursue a path that will inspire yet safeguard researchers, empower central leaders to determine and exhibit commitment, foster collaboration across disciplines, and create knowledge that leads to significant contributions to the world.
References


Appendix A: Project Methodology

For this project we used a qualitative approach to gather data through semi-structured interviews. Thirty-four interviews were conducted in person with administrators and researchers from departments and units across the University. Initial interviewees were selected from a list provided by the project sponsors of University faculty, researchers, and administrators who are involved in or experts in international scholarship. From this initial group of interviewees we were referred to others thought to be able to contribute unique or corroborating answers to our questions. More than twenty research faculty and administrators from peer institutions also were surveyed via email and follow-up telephone calls. While the quantity of peer institution data yielded is not statistically significant, the information provided useful benchmarks for other institutions’ pursuit of multimillion-dollar, interdisciplinary, international scholarship of the type examined in this report.

The interviews were approximately an hour long and were usually conducted by two team members; one team member conducted the interview while the other took notes. The interviews were transcribed by the note taker and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer. After all the responses were transcribed by the note takers, all five team members reviewed the data to determine emerging themes for coding and sorting the interview responses. The themes were then divided into general categories and reviewed again to delineate dominant themes that best captured the essence of the interviews. This report discusses the themes and recommendations that emerged from the interview data.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been at the University of Minnesota?
2. To what extent do you apply for international grants? What is your role and experience in the application process?
3. To which agencies or organizations do you typically apply for international opportunities?
4. What aspects affect your process and timeline for submitting international grant applications?
5. Can you describe your typical process when applying for large and interdisciplinary international grants?
6. What materials, information, or resources do you typically need to complete your grant application?
7. With whom do you collaborate when submitting grants? How do you find them?
8. What burdens, barriers, obstacles, or concerns, if any, arise for you during the application/proposal process?
9. How does the University support you when applying for international grants that ease the application process or increases your success obtaining grants?
10. What could the University do to support or help you better when applying for international grants that would ameliorate the application process or increase your success obtaining grants?
11. How does the University’s process with and support for obtaining international grants compare with your understanding of other institutions?
12. What is your experience working with the Office of International Programs and the Office of the Vice President for Research? What is your expectation about what OIP and/or OVPR need to do?
13. With whom else do you work? Who does the majority of work when submitting an international grant application?
14. Is there anything else about international grants that you would like to share?
Appendix C: Current and Past Projects at the University of Minnesota

• The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-financed “Morocco Project” assisted in developing a Moroccan college of agriculture, provided its faculty advanced degree training, and conducted research, teaching, and extension during the 1970-90s.

• The National Center for Food Protection and Defense was launched as a Homeland Security Center of Excellence in July 2004. Developed as a primarily North American, multidisciplinary, and action-oriented research consortium, the center addresses the vulnerability of the nation’s food system to an attack through intentional contamination with biological or chemical agents.

• The International Network for Strategic Initiatives in Global HIV Trials (INSIGHT) is a grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) funded in 2006. It represents the world's largest collaboration of HIV/AIDS researchers and the world’s largest clinical trials, involving some 400 sites in 37 countries and nearly 10,000 individual subjects.

• The Minnesota Center of Excellence for Influenza Research and Surveillance was funded by NIAID in 2007 to enhance understanding of the diversity and transmission of influenza viruses in North America, Central America, Asia, and East Africa.

• A 2009 partnership with the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, established the Abu Dhabi-Minnesota Institute for Research Excellence (ADMIRE) to promote joint research projects between the two institutions and to foster the continued development of academic programs of the Petroleum Institute.

• The USAID-financed RESPOND project, one of five cooperative agreements begun in 2009 among a host of collaborators, will help developing countries better respond to emerging animal diseases that pose a threat to human health.
## Appendix D: University of Washington Global Single Points of Contact

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Appendix E: Project Team, Sponsor, and Advisers

Project Team:

- Kristen Gandrow, Executive Office and Administrative Specialist – Law School
- Amy Kampsen, Associate Academic Adviser – Office of Student Services, College of Education and Human Development
- Sandy Massel, Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Development – College of Biological Sciences, Office of the Dean
- Joseph Shultz, Assistant to the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Office of the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost
- Deanne Silvera, Associate Counselor – International Student and Scholar Services, Office of International Programs

Project Sponsor:

- Meredith M. McQuaid, Associate Vice President and Dean for International Programs

Project Advisers:

- Peggy Sundermeyer, Executive Director, Collaborative Research Services, Office of the Vice President for Research
- Molly Portz, Chief of Staff, Office of International Programs
- Katey Pelican, Assistant Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine