

UH PI Responses
to UHARI E-Mail Solicitation of Comments
on Proposed BoR Policy Revision Regarding RCUH Service Orders

Note: Comments received as of 2/2/04 are included below.
All have been edited to preserve anonymity

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What IS the motivation behind this change? On the surface it would appear that the only result of the change will be to make execution of research at the University more difficult. What are the benefits?

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That little clause will mean a huge problem for many of us. Most of the people we hire are on for the duration of multi-year projects. So it appears this would require us to go through the state hiring process. Suppose we have a two year project with funding to hire someone for the whole two years. Going through the state procedure, we would certainly not be able to get yone in place for many months. This would severely impact on the timing of activities and outcomes of the research. This would cause a lot of hardship for many PIs including me.

Let me know what we can do to prevent this change.

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1) 5.19-c: Why should a service order for a CIP not proceed by the most efficient route? For example, we're service ordering the contract to build a new UH/IfA/Maui Advanced Technology Center building (8.6M\$) through RCUH because we have ample evidence that any process which would have allowed the state (and DAGS) to administer the project would result in significantly greater expense. Our immediate experience with a similar building constructed in Hilo is a monument to the problems of a state run building contract. Despite formal acceptance by DAGS, we continue (2 years later) to deal with the "issues" left to fix from that mismanaged project. What lessons have been learned from the POST building?

2) If RCUH CIP restrictions are enacted then we must have language to grandfather ongoing projects.

3) The remaining text in "c" is agreeable except for the clause "purchases in excess of 100,000..." which dangles.

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The proposed revision is not acceptable in its present form. The service limits (one year) continue to be impractical and irrelevant to a genuine research operation, and appear generated solely by union interests rather than by concerns for civil service integrity.

There is also no reason to uniquely exempt SOEST and the ocean folks, or the supercomputer folks, from requirements incumbent on the rest of us. Everybody needs security, and skilled labor is in shortage everywhere.

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As you may imagine, I am very concerned about any limitation in service for employees hired through RCUH. If RCUH is to function as the administrator of extramural grants, we cannot put artificial limits on employment. We can either make it a pain in the ass for PIs to justify employment through RCUH; make them hire through the university, thus getting their personnel hired after the grant has run out; or simply make it impossible to hire anyone at all. Why not leave things alone - or is the BoR concerned that UH PIs are bringing in too much money?

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I am opposed to the limits

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Implementation of a one-year employment limitation would be a total and immediate disaster for the Pacific ... Center. The only hard money position in the Center is me and that is because I teach 4 to 6 classes per year. Out of our 9 current RCUH employees (not including student help), 5 have worked here for more than 1 year. We have tried to convert some of the positions to UH positions but gave up after many months of continually being stone-walled. These people are essential to several million dollar + contracts.

What do we need to do to stop this lunacy?

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This is a very important issue.

Seems like the new language is inclusive of the old as well as providing some additional specific exceptions.

Hence seems OK to me.

Am I missing something?

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I have a part time (nominal 1/2 time) RCUH technician and field support person whose work can vary from no time to full time effort depending upon how, what, where, when he is needed.

It appears that your proposed wording would provide for his continued RCUH position and I support the language.

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This still won't work. What about admin staff hired on soft money research projects? They then become unionized and can't be let go? Who pays for them if the funding ceases? There goes the RTRF. Also can you imagine having RCUH admin staff grandfathered in with UH newcomers?

I would have admin staff for soft money projects be RCUH employees unless G funds are available to pay for the staff. Otherwise we are talking Bush-league economics.

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I don't quite know how to respond to the proposed change in procedures on service ordering grants without going on a major rant. What's driving this - a rhetorical question - since I assume the presence of a union representative (who has what??? experience in managing contracts and grants) on the committee developing the policy pretty well tells me all I need to know. Nonetheless, this raises all the old questions - what impact will such a change have on my ability to manage my grants; how much will this increase my workload/decrease my efficiency - and therefore make my efforts less competitive with other Universities; etc. As well as a few new ones: why is this being done while RCUH has no Executive Director and how will this change in policy - in mid-search - impact the quality or quantity of applicants for the position of RCUH ED. And why is it being done with an acting VP-Research. No offense meant to Jim Gaines at all - but the administration makes a big deal out of strategic planning but feels entirely free to establish policy that has the potential to tremendously impact the research enterprise without having input from someone who should be considering the long-term positioning of research within the University community as well as positioning it in the national and international research environment.

To distill it down:

On a policy and planning basis, this whole endeavor is contrary to anything remotely rational. The University should have a permanent VP-Research and have concluded a national search for an ED for RCUH. Those two, together with the UH research community, should come up with 1) a clearly defined function for RCUH and 2) they then should define the relationship between UH and RCUH that eliminates duplication of effort (as now exists) and is supportive of a maximally efficient research enterprise.

From the perspective of a researcher bringing grant funds to UH, the only policy that is acceptable to me is one that enables me to make most efficient and effective use of my grant funds to accomplish my research objectives. Imposing a policy on me that hampers my ability to appoint the most qualified technical support staff that I can find, does not meet that objective. Likewise, a policy that interferes with my ability to subcontract for the best qualified services at the most efficient cost, similarly compromises my research success.

To distill it down a little more: if the State is serious about the University research enterprise contributing to the State's economic engine, they shouldn't pour sand into the works...

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If the UH administration really does not want a RCUH, they should just eliminate it altogether and convert all existing positions and projects to UH. Concerning a new rule for less than one year appointment of personnel, what about all the folks that have been on the payroll for many years? This "shrink, maim and kill" approach is ridiculous.

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The expense limit of \$100,000 for CIP and R&M seems much to low. It has probably been set at the \$100,000 level for several years. Since the UH has not evolved from a DAGS mentality can you consider moving the limit up to \$250,000, or \$500,000 or \$1 million. Most major or significant CIP or R&M cost should be above these levels. The UH has not moved ahead in personnel matters, the RCUH employees need some employment protection. A one year limitation does not provide this. RCUH should be able assure new hires and existing employees continuation of employment, if they do well and the project continues. The theme of 5.19-b should be rewritten to emphasis the facilitation of contracts and grants in face of inadequacies in the UH system.

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Roger--if I understand the proposed amendment, it continues the earlier proposal to limit RCUH hires to one year. If so, this is an absurdity, unless it means you may hire for one year and then renew for a second, third year etc. But the language doesn't really say that.

In any event, it is absurd for the administration to believe that you can carry out a multi-year project with only one-year hires. Consider administrative help, technical help, researchers, post-docs, etc. all of whom have to learn about and carry out the project's tasks and goals. And then after a year they leave and you have to begin all over again?

Totally unworkable, and unbelievable that such a system would be suggested and endorsed!

Am I missing something?

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The proposed resolution looks OK to me. I have a technician who has been working as an RCUH employee for 11 years. It would be ridiculous to now have him become a UH employee and change retirement systems mid-stream. Apparently he would not have to under this revised wording.

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I am concerned about the limitation to one year for RCUH employees on research grants/contracts. This limitation seems quite severe and unnecessary for getting research done at a quality university.

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(1) It is extremely wasteful in terms of time/effort to be forced by the UH to send all extramural research funds to RCUH ... only to have to be forced to return the funds to UH in 1 year's time and go through the entire rehire process, assuming the position lasts for more than 1 year. Researchers bring in the extramural funds and should have greater input in how to most efficiently function within a university and State system. Else, the tail wags the dog ... and the resulting system that we currently have. For every minute researchers spend on these types of non-research issues, the less time they have to do good-quality research and bring in more extramural funds.

(2) No regard is being given to the employees most affected. All employees who go from being an RCUH employee, to formally losing their job, to reapplying to the UH position (with no guarantee of rehire), to being hired in the new UH position ... loses his/her accumulated benefits (i.e., accumulated sick leave, accumulated vacation). This is quite unfair to the employee ... not to mention the undue anxiety that this causes for the employee.

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Roger, clearly the original wording is unacceptable and the revised wording an improvement. UH researchers, in particular those receiving large grants with specialized skill requirements for staff, need flexibility in being able to provide competitive pay and employment conditions.

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The proposed new 1-year policy for RCUH employees stinks in my opinion. HMRG has a number of "grandfathered" employees who won't be affected, but it's going to seriously hurt our chances to hire new folks in the future. It takes well over a year to train an engineer/data processor in the ways of how we do our jobs, so I'd have to hire all new personnel through UH. Of course, if they ever want to get any retirement benefits out of working for our group, they have to commit to being here for ten years in order to be vested. That's bad for them, and if they happen to turn out to be a bad employee, it's probably also bad for me. In my experience, it's a whole lot easier to terminate RCUH employees than UH employees.

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Thanks for taking up the issue, we certainly need RCUH employees for more than one year to conduct our research studies. I support the proposed provision in that it provides several reasons for continued support through RCUH. Without RCUH employment, it would be impossible to find employees with certain kinds of skills because UH does not allow us to pay a salary that is competitive with the market. Programmers, biostatisticians and similar people are classified so low there, especially when they are just starting, that they would never work for us. The other feature offered by RCUH is the ability to reward staff by giving them a salary increase and to be flexible in rewriting job descriptions and increasing the salary if necessary. I know these are difficult arguments to use in the discussion, but I want UHARI to know how important it is for competitive research projects to hire through RCUH.

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I'm afraid I don't understand the implications of the proposed changes.

In our center, we have roughly one dozen soft money-supported project staff, most of whom are hired to coordinate multi-year grants or contracts. Every one is hired through RCUH. In the past (before I came to UH) , we had two project coordinators, both on 5-year projects, who were hired

as UH non tenure track faculty. I don't know why that decision was made, but ever since, all our staff have been hired through RCUH. I assume because it's a lot easier.

Here are my questions:

Which employees fall under the one-year limit? Since most multi-year grants are subject to renewal each year, would their staff be considered short-term or longer-term workers? We do not renew our employees every year, (as one does, say, with graduate RAs) but the understanding is that employment is contingent on continued funds.

What type of UH employee would grant-funded workers be? Faculty, APT, HGEA, or something else? I'm guessing most would be APT, but what if there is a grant-funded secretary? Would they be APT because they support a project, or HGEA because of the clerical nature of their work?

What are the constraints and regulations of the UH hiring system, and does it depend on the employee classification? In my experience, the RCUH personnel system has not been that difficult to deal with. What would change if we had to hire personnel as state employees? If they are APTs and the advertising requirements and hiree selection process are similar to what RCUH does now, that's not bad. But if we have to wait for BOR approval to hire, or if we have to advertise nationally, or if we have to (God forbid) go through the civil service system and hire on seniority rather than suitability, these would all be very major problems. Since grants typically start with no lead time (in my field, we usually are notified of an award one week prior to the project start date), it crucial that hiring procedures allow for quick turn-around in terms of position creation, advertising, interviewing and approval of hiring. Even with the "easy" processes at RCUH, we expect that realistically, you can't get a new person on board in less than 2 months. Which puts you back quite a bit on an 18-month project. In my experience, UH and RCUH offer very similar employee benefits (in fact, RCUH has much better retirement). Would changing cost the grants more in terms of required employee benefits?

Is the feasibility clause an out for PIs who want to avoid making UH hires? Doesn't the nature of grant work (lack of permanency, need for specialized staff, no advance notice of job availability) make any hire within the state personnel system unfeasible?

Are these changes intended to apply to everybody hired on soft money, or just high-level staff. E.g, is UH simply trying to get all the post-docs and PhD level co-investigators listed as faculty, but the don't care about the bottle washers, telephone interviewers, or student office helpers?

Many projects require part-time staff. Is this allowed under the UH system?

Also, we typically move staff from grant to grant, as projects come to a close or workloads change. Would this be allowed in the UH personnel system?

Finally, what is the motive for a change? Does this make less work for one part of the system, or create an illusion of greater productivity for the UH system?

Obviously, my concern is whether these changes would make things harder on PIs by slowing the hiring process, limiting freedom to hire the best candidate, or adding significantly to the costs of benefits or personnel paperwork.

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We regularly hire grad students, post-doctoral and even higher research personnel to do biomedical research through RCUH. We do this to provide these young investigators a better package in terms of disability and pension plans. Most of them does not, and should not, have 10-11 years commitment to UH to qualify for the pension plan. In this way the TIAA-CREFT plan allows them to build a pension account.

The second reason is the rapid and efficient process in hiring. I am not sure from the language below that we will be able to continue to hire these young researchers - naturally not for one, but several years. If this is the case we anticipate tremendous disruption in our programs.

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Thanks for looking out for this potentially significant shift in policy. As far as my short-term personal interests are concerned, it seems the the "grandfather clause" 15-29c(c) would 'protect' my current RCUH employees for the time being. But, in the larger picture, I have several multi-year RCUH employees supported on "soft money". A couple of these grants are fairly sure to be regularly renewed - hence the 'long-term' nature of these people's employment. I guess my basic approach to this turn of events is "If it ain't broke don't fix it" - the current system seems to work very well for employing specialists on soft money - even if they may be multi-year employees. I am leary of the University's motives for change and I would like to know what they are. Absent such an explanation, I would like to resist major change as much as possible.

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I am very concerned about the RCUH proposal for limited hires of one-year through RCUH services. Our projects require the sustainability of hires in order to be effective and efficient in carrying out project goals. With such a limitation, we would not be able to secure the quality of people that we need and the additional time required to acquire personnel would grow. This seems to be an unreasonable solution.

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Having read the proposed changes - I wonder if you could clarify for me whether this revision as it is currently written is also intended to include grass roots community individuals who are involved w/ our NIH grants that deal w/ health disparities. many of the recent proposals that we have been funded on specifically stated that we needed to work in true partnership w/ grassroots community members. These are folks w/ special community skills ("cultural expert") but by western standards would never make muster as a "UH" employee.

My question is: would this revision allow me to hire these folks on a 5 year granat? And if not how can we revise the changes to include

them. In the last 2 years, many health disparities RFAs have had specific requirements to "fund" community "experts" - more than just consultants so this issue will continue to come up.

I would appreciate your response to this series of concerns.

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I have issues with both the employment and contracting provisions of the new policy. At XXXX, we contract with the State DOE for amounts over \$100k to execute some of the tutoring or professional development components of the grant. I also have several RCUH employees on the project, and wouldn't want to have to convert them to G-funds now with only 2 years left on the project.

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the issue of a 1-year limitation on the hiring of personnel has a direct and deleterious impact on the XX Research Center (RCUH employees, etc.)! it doesn't look like the proposed change really helps us.

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