

## **I. Executive Summary**

### **NMSU Research Environment Survey: Analysis of Quantitative Survey Responses**

The NMSU Research Environment Study seeks to understand the current climate for conducting professional research at New Mexico State University. This study has been performed by the NMSU SCORE Program Office (Support of Continuous Research Excellence), funded by the National Institutes of Health (Grant #GM S06-008136). Over the past three years, the SCORE Program staff has worked with faculty and staff researchers across NMSU colleges to characterize their working experience and to define aspects of the research environment that help or hinder their scholarly work.

This report contains an analysis of quantitative data gathered from an NMSU Research Environment Survey, a formal, web-based survey of researchers on the main campus of NMSU. The survey instrument was designed by the NIH-SCORE Program evaluation staff at NMSU, in collaboration with research evaluation experts at the Department of Energy and the Center for Innovation at the University of Maryland. Responses from the on-line survey were collected by an impartial non-NMSU entity (from October 19 to December 15, 2006), and returned without identifiers to the SCORE Program staff for analysis. A copy of the survey instrument is included at the end of the Appendix of this report.

Of the total survey respondents (n=266), 70% were tenure-track faculty and 19% were professional research staff. Most survey participants have long experience at NMSU (54% with nine years or more), and most (74%) receive extra-mural, competitive grant funding. Of the total number of NMSU researchers with external grant support, approximately 80% are represented in the Research Environment Survey results: this includes nearly all of the funded researchers from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Physical Science Laboratory, about 85% of those from the College of Agriculture and Home Economics and about 65% from the College of Engineering.

In this report, quantitative survey responses were analyzed for the group as a whole, then for each college or unit in which a sufficient sample size was obtained, and finally in a cross-college comparison. The remaining set of survey responses, consisting of open-ended written comments and suggestions, will be analyzed using qualitative evaluation methods, and will be presented in a separate, forthcoming report.

The **major themes** emerging from the quantitative survey responses are listed below:

- 1) The research environment at NMSU was favorably rated (i.e., rated good or excellent) by 20% of respondents, and only 16% considered the research environment to be improving.
- 2) There was a low incidence of favorable ratings for NMSU's clarity of research vision (9%), for planning and investment in future research (6%) and for the upper administration's commitment to research (16%).
- 3) Few respondents (10%) believe that their work is being recognized or rewarded on its merit by the upper administration. This problem seldom occurs at the departmental level, but does to an intermediate extent at the college administrative level.
- 4) There is a substantial lack of confidence in the demonstrated integrity of the upper administration (20% favorable rating). This lack of trust is less problematic at the college administrative level and is not a major issue with departmental administrators, who received favorable ratings from 68% of respondents.
- 5) Most respondents express frustration with the university's research support systems such as Purchasing, Accounting and Hiring procedures, but not with others, such as Environmental Health and Safety. The overall efficiency of university research support processes was rated favorably by only 9% of respondents.
- 6) The majority of survey respondents do not affirm the concept of cross-college research clusters.
- 7) Most respondents feel there is freedom to decide to pursue new ideas, but insufficient resources available at NMSU for such pursuits.

While differences among colleges were occasionally observed, the major survey results were characterized by striking cross-college consensus. We conclude that there is an urgent need for change at numerous levels of research management, so as to improve the working environment for NMSU scholars and to re-invigorate the potential of NMSU as an effective research institution. Preliminary approaches are suggested in this report, with future plans for a thorough listing of recommendations, once qualitative analysis of the written survey responses is completed. It is hoped that the present report will serve as a starting point to engender discussion, to instigate critically needed improvements in the NMSU research environment and to serve as a baseline against which to compare future assessments.