

## Frequently Asked Questions

### COR Faculty Research Grant (FRG) and Special Research Grant (SRG) Programs

Updated for the 2008-09 Academic Year

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#### 1. What is the source of funds for the FRG and SRG programs?

A primary source of funding for the FRG and SRG programs is Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) from externally-funded grants. There are different formulae for determining the amount of UCSC-generated ICR that flows from the UC Office of the President (UCOP) to UCSC and, eventually, to the COR for use by the FRG and SRG programs (in addition to the Scholarly Meeting Travel program), as summarized in the UCSC Budget Handbook (<http://planning.ucsc.edu/budget/Reports/BudgetHandbook.pdf>). Here is a brief summary.

ICR is generated by the campus as part of many kinds of grants and contracts. The campus receives 100% of federal indirect cost recovery generated by projects related to buildings financed by Garamendi funds from the State. These funds are used for repayment of loans that fund construction of buildings used substantially for research purposes. The amount of Garamendi payment varies campus-by-campus, and year-by-year, but it is typically  $\leq 5-10\%$  of ICR.

Of the remaining ICR funds, 6% stays with the UCOP (to fund a variety of programs, centers, and initiatives), and the remaining 94% is divided into three categories: off-the-top funds (20%

of 94%), general fund support (44% of 94%), and opportunity funds (36% of 94%). From the opportunity funds, 5% comes to the UCSC COR to support the FRG and SRG programs and the Scholarly Meeting Travel program. Thus these programs are supported by ~1.7% of the ICR that is generated by the UCSC campus, after repayment of Garamendi loans. Please see the UCSC Budget Handbook (URL above) and related documents to learn more about how ICR is distributed within UC overall and UCSC in particular.

In addition to ICR, there has been in the past a series of one-time allocations of other opportunity funds to be used for the FRG and SRG programs.

2. How does the amount of funding available at UCSC compare to that available at other UC campuses?

COR does not track this on a routine basis, in part because funding that supports research on UCSC and other campuses comes from many sources, through many pathways, and varies over time, making intercampus comparisons difficult. However, the 2002-03 COR, under the leadership of Steve Thorsett, concluded that the UCSC FRG program was underfunded on a per-FTE basis relative to all but one of our sister UC campuses (as of 1999-2000, the last year for which data was available when the 2002-03 COR completed its review). In part as a response to this situation, then-EVC John Simpson allocated additional one-time funding to COR for the FRG and SRG programs.

3. Why are FRG and SRG funding requests capped as they are?

COR would like the FRG and SRG programs to have maximum impact throughout the UCSC campus. But because FRG and SRG funding is limited, and the support level cannot be predicted with confidence, COR is careful in allocation of scarce resources. The COR never knows exactly how much funding will be available in advance of a given year, since this is based (in part) in ICR for that year, and funds that support COR are also in demand by other worthy programs at a campus level, including those that promote or accomplish important research. The SRG program, which provides larger grant amounts, has become an important source of funding for many UCSC faculty and programs.

4. What are the chances of having my FRG or SRG request approved?

COR does not have a target funding rate for FRGs or SRGs. Most applications for FRG support are approved, at least in part, and the recent funding rate for SRGs has been 30-60%. COR has had difficulty in the past reviewing applications that are incomplete or do not address fundamental questions, so applicants are encouraged to read the instructions for each program carefully; COR will not hesitate to reject a FRG or SRG application that is incomplete, substantially identical to one submitted previously, or otherwise does not demonstrate the potential for resulting in high-quality research.

5. Since the chances for approval of an FRG request are so high, why require applications at all? FRG funding is not an entitlement. Given the long and circuitous path traveled by ICR funds that eventually are made available for the FRG program, and the great difficulty that numerous campus faculty and researchers have had in securing those funds, COR takes its responsibility seriously in making sure that FRG funds are used to support the highest-quality research. Also, if COR were to allocate FRG funding evenly to all regular FTE on campus, this would result in a

very small allocation per FTE, greatly reducing the positive impact of the FRG program. Similar arguments apply to the SRG program. COR is willing (even anxious) to fund all FRG requests that are complete and well-justified.

6. SRGs: Do I have to develop a project for \$15,000 or can I request a lesser amount? Will a smaller project prejudice my consideration?

The SRG program is intended for projects anywhere within the \$2,000-\$15,000 range (\$20,000 maximum for collaborative projects). No, proposals are not evaluated on the amount of the budget.

7. FRGs: How do I handle applying for a multiple-year FRG for the same project? (follow the new one above?)

COR will support ongoing projects if the nature of the project demands it and progress is documented (e.g. a five-year book project with clear annual milestones). It will be necessary to submit a new application each year, in which the progress made during the previous year is clearly described and the case for continuing funding is clearly made.

8. How are awards typically distributed among UCSC divisions?

COR does not have a division- or department-based quota for allocation of FRG or SRG funds, but we do look at the distribution of applications and funded proposals to evaluate whether awards are well-distributed across the campus. COR wants to make sure that all eligible faculty are aware of the FRG and SRG opportunities and calls, and encourages applications in support of all kinds of excellent, innovative research and creative activity. Support of outstanding research and creative projects throughout the UCSC community is fundamental to the COR mandate.

9. Why are FRG and SRG funds not focused on faculty within divisions and disciplines that have a harder time securing external funding?

All UCSC faculty struggle, at one time or another, to secure adequate funding in support of research projects and other creative activities. Although some divisions and disciplines are often considered to be better funded than others, there are many kinds of research and research projects that are difficult to fund within all divisions and disciplines represented at UCSC. Some FRG and SRG awards will be used to leverage external funding, helping to bring new funds to COR for future FRG and SRG grants, and other projects will bring in no outside support, but are highly worthy of support nevertheless. In evaluating SRG proposals, COR focuses mainly on the quality and innovative nature of the research, the potential for the research to have an impact, the influence that the research may have on the campus and UC overall, and other factors described in the FRG and SRG calls, without regard to spreading awards "evenly" across divisions or disciplines. As a practical matter, recent SRG awards have been well distributed among divisions and departments at UCSC, supporting a remarkable variety of research projects.

10. Can I request funds to cover Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) costs?

COR has struggled with the issue of graduate student funding for years. The amount of COR funding available for the FRG and SRG programs is limited. A single quarter of GSR support is much more than can be supported with a FRG award, and approaches the limit for SRG awards in many cases. [NB: GSR costs comprise monthly salary, benefits, health insurance, fees, and tuition (for nonresidents).] In addition, there are other sources of campus funding that are

intended to support graduate student research, and this goal is beyond the COR mandate. If COR were to begin to provide GSR funding for graduate research, this would take pressure off of other sources that are supposed to support graduate research. This is the same reason that COR does not provide "matching support" for major research grants - there are other campus sources for this. Also, COR funds are intended to support *faculty* research, not *graduate* research. COR does not wish to be in the position of comparing SRG proposals involving mainly faculty research to others involving mainly graduate research.

For these reasons, COR has chosen to focus limited funding on the highest-quality, most innovative research possible, and the committee feels that this is best accomplished in most cases by having regular faculty focus their time and energy on the research endeavor. However, FRG and SRG funds *can* be used to help pay graduate and undergraduate research assistants who work on faculty projects on a limited basis, provided that this is essential to the proposed work and that the budget for this line item is well justified. In many cases, this funding will help to make available other funding (from non-COR sources) that can be directed towards GSR support. Faculty who request student support should be careful to justify these requests.

#### 11. Are COR members allowed to apply for FRG and SRG support?

Although there has never been a formal prohibition against COR members applying for SRG support, COR members have agreed informally to not apply while serving on COR. COR members are eligible to apply for FRG support while serving on the committee, but must leave the room when their FRG applications are discussed.

#### 12. Who reviews the FRG and SRG proposals? Are they qualified to evaluate the quality of my research proposal?

All FRG and SRG proposals are reviewed by current COR members. There is neither time nor administrative support to solicit external reviews. In principle, the membership of COR spans the breadth of disciplines represented on the UCSC campus. Although every effort is made to have at least one COR member review each proposal with some knowledge about the topic for which research funds are solicited, this is not always possible. But even in the best case, it is common for other COR members charged with reviewing a particular FRG or SRG proposal to lack expertise in the field. For this reason, it is particularly important that applicants explain the significance of their research, describe what is to be done to achieve project goals, and justify their budget request in detail, in clear and jargon-free language, understandable to an interested non-expert.

#### 13. Will I see reviews of my proposal?

Traditionally COR has not provided formal reviews for either FRGs or SRGs, but we understand the desire for applicants whose applications were denied (or funded in part) to understand why these decisions were made. COR will not provide reviews for FRG applications, the majority of which are funded in full. Please read the review criteria listed in the call and contact the COR chair for more information if you wonder about your FRG decision.

COR will try to provide additional information to unsuccessful (or partly successful) SRG applicants. COR discussions of proposals are confidential, but we will take notes during the adjudication process and provide as much information as possible to applicants who request it.

One important consideration is that COR evaluates SRG proposals from across the campus, and there cannot be a head-to-head comparison of (for example) one proposal to create and stage a performance of a new orchestral work and another to develop a technique to sequence DNA. Instead, COR considers each proposal on its own merits, looks at the annual budget available for SRG projects, and also considers the differing needs and basis for evaluating excellence within disciplines.