

September 1, 2004

To: Members of the Faculty
From: Nicholas S. Zeppos, Provost & Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Subject: Policy on Requests for Support to Organize/Host Conferences

Conferences are an important and time-honored part of academic research and scholarship. In many fields, conferences held in locations throughout the world are organized by professional societies or other organizations and financed by membership dues, registration fees, various kinds of grants, or a combination of such sources. Each year, several faculty bring to my attention, to the attention of others in my office, or to the attention of the deans, requests for university funds to help organize and/or host conferences. In the past, we have lacked a policy on requesting support for organizing and hosting conferences. It is the purpose of this memo to set forth such a policy to make things clearer for all concerned.

Beginning immediately, all requests for institutional funds to organize and host conferences, or for similar conference-related support, should be submitted via the usual administrative channel: through the department chair or program director to the dean of the school or college in question. In the case of conferences that span the interests of more than one school or college, requests may be submitted to more than one dean. This does not rule out seeking partial support directly from a center, an institute or a similar unit that might have an interest in a particular conference.

It is important to understand that this decision is more about process than it is about which resources to use. Neither the Provost's Office nor the Chancellor's Office has a central pool of funds for conference support. A centralized approach would require taxing the schools and colleges to create a pool of funds and establishing a competitive process for distributing those funds. For the last few years, my office has provided some level of conference support using funds earmarked for the Research Scholar Grant (RSG) Program, a program intended for use only "by faculty working in areas in which the opportunities for extramural funding are limited," typically the Humanities and certain of the Social Sciences. This comes at a price, however, because RSG funds that are used for conference support cannot be used to support research, to provide partial leave support, or for other elements of the RSG program. After discussing this matter with several of the deans, and after conferring with the provosts of a number of peer institutions to find out how they handle requests for conference support, I have determined that the best decisions will be made if this matter is handled at the dean's level rather than centrally through my office.

I feel confident that this new policy will enable us to make the most effective use of the University's resources as we invest in the work of our faculty.