

Examining Core Elements of International Research Collaborations: A Washington Workshop

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In the December 2008/January 2009 volume of the *NCURA Magazine*, we authored an article on the efforts of the *I-Group* – a formal working group on International Research Collaborations convened by the Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable (GUIRR) at the National Academies – to sponsor a workshop on international research collaborations. The purpose of the workshop was to (1) bring subject matter experts – from universities, industry, government, and professional organizations in the USA and other nations – together from specialized areas of international research collaborations; (2) publish a record of proceedings and a meaningful primer (book) for distribution to interested persons in the various sectors; (3) develop web-based resources on international collaborations; and (4) convene future conferences and workshops in the areas of international research collaborations. We are delighted to now report that this workshop took place at the National Academies Keck Center on July 26-27th, 2010, and brought together subject matter experts and invited participants from academia, the private sector, U.S. and other Governments, and a number of professional organizations around meaningful discussions and solutions.

The workshop opened around the theme of *Creating an environment for Productive International Collaboration*, and, in particular, how the role of “transboundary collaborations” in advancing knowledge and offering economic opportunities worldwide is growing, thanks to factors such as access to the Internet; globalization; and greater mobility of information, ideas, and people.

Though international research collaborations also are growing (as measured, for example, by multinational co-authorship on publications and shared funding for international research projects), there are bottlenecks and frictions that can pose impediments to meaningful and successful international collaborations. This workshop’s

first track broadly looked at trends and issues that pertain to fostering productive international collaboration from the point of view of governments, universities, and industry.

Quite often cross-cultural nuances and culture-centric perspectives – grounded in one’s experience or merely assumed – cloud conversations between faculty researchers and research administrators when they are negotiating the shared development of meaningful international research agreements. Given this reality, the second workshop session featured a number of experts on cross-cultural communications, understanding, and collaborations. As one speaker – an anthropologist – aptly noted: Culture is a shared understanding of how things work. If we are to work effectively together, it is important that we understand, appreciate, and respect one another’s perspective.

The workshop’s ethics panel took its place between the culture panel and the research integrity panel in the sense that ethics are informed by culture and govern behavioral choices in the conduct of research. Thus, this panel explored issues related to the ethics of safeguarding privacy, security, and confidentiality; bioethical issues related to human subjects research; and other activities with bioethical implications, all from both a domestic U.S. and a global perspective.

The research integrity panel expanded the ethics discussion by focusing on standards and practices that promote responsible data collection and appropriate authorship byline decisions. This panel explored issues related to current Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training for data integrity and authorship and considered the impact that different international educational standards can have on data integrity. The

panel concluded with a discussion by an international team who described their experiences in negotiating authorship agreements and in building capacity to assure data integrity.

Risk management is a continuous process designed to proactively identify and mitigate risks to help promote the achievement of the organization’s objectives, strategy, and mission. Risk management also drives accountability and integrity of the organization’s work and helps ensure that individuals within the organization see it as their responsibility to reduce risk as part of their daily jobs. This panel explored specific issues relating to risk management in the international setting.

Intellectual Property (IP) is a central issue in international research collaborations. What is the balance between the facilitation of research and the protection of IP? The members of this IP track discussed and outlined the major issues, challenges, and successes of IP on the international level, including such topics as background intellectual property (BIP); the connection between IP and export control; the management of IP at the university, industry, and governmental levels; and emerging issues in the coming years (such as managing IP given the increasing transportation of large data sets and research across national borders). The IP team paid particular attention to practices and models of IP used in individual countries, for inclusion in project deliverables.

Export control regulation presents special challenges when working with international collaborators and when conducting research overseas. Researchers who are used to open academic environments are often surprised to learn that certain areas of collaboration, especially in science and engineering, may be more difficult with certain international partners. In addition, trade embargoes and sanctions—reflecting foreign policy concerns of different nations—can affect a researcher’s ability to travel to certain countries



and transport certain research equipment. The export control panel discussed the various issues raised by these regulations, their effect on international research collaborations, and compliance strategies used by various institutions to meet these challenges.

Conducting research with foreign partners can take a wide variety of forms. Sometimes this involves conducting research in the U.S. with foreign partners; other times it may involve field research, setting up limited business operations, or even establishment of a new campus overseas. This final workshop panel discussed the legal issues related to these various scenarios. The speakers looked at registration and memoranda of understanding with foreign governments and governmental approvals. They also addressed legal agreements and documents used to facilitate particular business activities, such as payment of taxes, real estate issues, and employment requirements. The panel covered the various methods used by institutions to incorporate legal review into ongoing operations. Furthermore, this panel discussed the research funding

opportunities and challenges presented by the European Union's *7th Framework Programme*.

Over the next several months, I-Group will be quite busy preparing its workshop summary report for publication, developing a web-based resource on international research collaborations, and convening a future workshop/conference. One thing for sure, we will keep you updated, and, in the meantime, you can explore the July workshop's proceedings at http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/guirr/PGA_058064.

An overview of this particular project – its genesis and development – is posted at http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/guirr/PGA_058027. ■

Any opinions present within this article are solely those of the authors, and do not represent the positions of I-Group, GUIRR, or the National Academies.



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