

# ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**Report No. 2022.02/4000.01**  
**Grant and Contract Activity Report**

### ***Introduction***

External sources of funding make substantial contributions to the advancement of faculty scholarly activities, student experiential learning, and University outreach. The work made possible by such funding supports the core values of Illinois State University, most directly the values of Learning and Scholarship, Civic Engagement, and Collaboration. Furthermore, the research, creative activities, and educational outreach made possible by such external support are integral parts of the University's Strategic Directions, Objectives, and Actions outlined in *Educate•Connect•Elevate*. Support comes through a variety of channels (e.g., grants, contracts, agency dollars, foundation support) and for a number of functions (e.g., research, instruction, public service). This report captures grants and contracts directed through Illinois State University's restricted accounts.

### ***Summary***

FY21 was another anomalous year in trends for grants and contracts across higher education. With so many federal relief dollars through several rounds of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF) from the U.S. Department of Education, traditional trends and metrics have required many an asterisk and footnote in summary reports such as this one. These award dollars were not always competitive and not appropriately described as research or sponsored project dollars but provided a critical influx of funds to operations and students. With nearly \$17M in student aid funds and an additional ~\$25M of HEERF dollars, Illinois State University received over \$90M in external support in FY21, which far surpasses the previous record of newly awarded grants (\$37.0M) from FY20, which has also been impacted by significant CARES Act relief (\$16.1 million) as part of the federal COVID-19 pandemic response. Behind those relief dollars, the overall trend in awards has been fairly flat over the past five years, with a slight uptick in FY21 for most colleges after a dip in FY20.

The Colleges receiving the most external funding in FY21 were the College of Education (\$8.25 million), the College of Arts and Sciences (\$5.3 million), and the Mennonite College of Nursing (\$2.2 million).

Several of our largest sources of funds in FY21 were issued non-competitively, most significantly the HEERF funds from the U.S. Department of Education. Proposals are a key indicator of future support, more typically, though. Funding success rates have been declining nationally for several federal agencies, and some foundations have even lower success rates. Proposal submissions have increased in several areas of the University, both academic and non-academic, in an effort to lead to future awards. Several large proposals submitted in FY21 have already been awarded in FY22, including large awards from the Illinois State Board of Education and awards from the National Endowments for both the Arts (NEA) and Humanities (NEH).

A final critical component of external awards is actual expenditures. Spending rates on research awards were down nationally in FY20 and rebounded some in FY21, and ISU was no exception to that trend. The tremendous

outpouring of spending through HEERF (nearly \$42M) disguises the spending within non-administrative units in the aggregate total of expenditures. Four academic units spent over \$1M in external funds in FY21 with Education Administration & Foundations (\$6.9M) and Biological Sciences (\$2.7M) leading the way. Expenditures also lead to recovery of Facilities and Administration costs (F&A, aka indirect costs) and are the measure of record in surveys such as the Higher Education Research & Development (HERD) survey conducted by the National Science Foundation. ISU moved up significantly in our spending compared to peer Illinois 4-year schools in the FY20 data just recently released.

Additionally, in FY21:

- A total of over \$1.6 million in F&A costs were recovered through University grants and contracts. These funds provide additional services in support of research, scholarship, and creative activities, plus they support initiatives designed to increase external funding. Despite high expenditures in FY21, many of the awards have limited allowed/collected F&A costs including 0% applied to HEERF/CARES funding and a cap of 8% at most imposed on most Illinois State Board of Education awards (including pass-through funds from the U.S. Department of Education).
- One agency awarded over \$70 million in total funding, namely the U.S. Department of Education (\$71.9M), with both relief funds and sponsored project work with ISU’s College of Education. Additional significant funds were newly awarded from the Illinois State Board of Education (\$3.7M), Illinois Board of Higher Education (\$2.2M) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (\$2.2M).
- The three academic units receiving the highest amount of newly awarded external funding in FY21 were the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations (\$6.9 million), the School of Biological Sciences (\$3.8 million), and the Mennonite College of Nursing (\$2.2 million).

### **Data Summary**

The following table details sponsored project funding for new awards with the past four fiscal years included for comparison. Dollars are in thousands and are rounded for simplicity. The numbers of awards/submissions for each item are included in parentheses.

	<b>FY21</b>	<b>FY20</b>	<b>FY19</b>	<b>FY18</b>	<b>FY17</b>
Total Awards	\$90,039 (189)	\$37,002 (141)	\$28,536 (145)	\$23,689 (209)*	\$19,122 (209)*
Federal Awards	78,298 (53)	28,453 (33)	17,755(53)	12,915 (35)	10,920 (50)
Federal Flow-Through	6,700 (47)	4,598 (14)	6,930 (31)	5,785 (36)	2,854 (26)
State Awards	3,143 (34)	2,196 (19)	2,252 (21)	2,375 (26)	2,038 (15)
Other	1,869 (55)	1,447 (30)	1,599(38)	3,163 (112)*	3,311 (118)*
Submissions	\$71,277 (228)	\$120,053 (196)	\$44,857 (171)	44,021 (257)*	68,102 (265)*
Total Expenditures	58,111	29,993	24,232	21,804	18,076
Total Indirect Costs Recovered	\$1,667	\$1,749	\$1,973	\$1,745	\$1,277

\*Prior to FY19, graduate practicum agreements were included in the grant totals. Although they are contracts that support ISU students and our mission, they were removed from being defined as “awards”. We typically place 50-70 student per year in such practica.

### **Current Initiatives**

The Office of Research and Graduate Studies strives to provide resources and administrative support for faculty, staff, and students involved in research and other grant-supported activities. Each of these initiatives is aligned with *Educate•Connect•Elevate*. and the Strategic Plan for Research, Scholarship, and Creative Expression. Efforts are largely aimed at providing support for faculty and students to engage in their scholarship and reduce barriers.

- **Increased Administrative Support for Research.** Improved processes and software interfaces are being implemented to allow easier finding of grant opportunities and collaborations. A new software package implemented in FY21 utilizes a sophisticated algorithm system which identifies funding opportunities that researchers find more relevant to their research. It will integrate with our current proposal submission software system to simplify the proposal submission process for both researchers and the research staff. Additional modules of the software to assist with compliance and financial management of grants and grant

proposals are currently being implemented with the support of Technology Solutions and are scheduled to be in place before the end of FY22.

- **Support for Research Infrastructure.** Support several initiatives, but the Office of Research and Graduate Studies continues to provide matching support for, inter alia, major research instrumentation. Departments/Schools and Colleges also provide such support. It is one example of how the University reinvests recovered F&A in supporting future research and scholarship.
- **Increased Attention to Technology Transfer.** Improved efforts on intellectual property disclosures and technology transfer as well as corporate partnerships and sponsored projects. In FY21, there were two new disclosures and three new patent filings and two provisional patents. This will likely only increase as the University leads out community efforts as part of the Illinois Innovation Network.

**Additional Ongoing Activities:**

- **Expanding the Office of Student Research.** The Office of Student Research (OSR), formally launched in the fall semester of 2019, organizes and coordinates efforts to promote, support, and publicize student research and innovation. With two years under its belt, the Office will continue to work with faculty and students to create research opportunities for current and prospective students, as opportunities to engage with faculty on in-depth research projects, which are known to enhance learning and improve student retention. The OSR is also working to support student research opportunities -- nearly \$100k in research fellowships for undergraduates were awarded for FY21 (including summer 2021) and graduate student awards have been added for FY22. The latest round of those competitions is currently underway. OSR also sponsored an *Image of Research* competition for undergraduate and graduate students and equipped a Virtual Reality/Extended Reality lab in Julian Hall.
- **Increased Funding for University Research Grants.** The Office of Research and Graduate Studies continues to provide funding for research that will lead to new external grant applications. In the round of University Research Grants that were submitted in FY21 the Office added nearly \$50k from its share of recovered F&A costs, bringing the total funding for University Research Grants to \$390k and nearly \$90k were added in FY22 for a total of ~\$435k. These added funds are earmarked for research that will strengthen grant applications submitted to external agencies, which should lead to improved funding rates and additional external support for faculty, student, and staff research efforts. Data show that since 2019, the URG program has helped support work to bolster at least \$42M in proposals to federal agencies alone.
- **Interdisciplinary Efforts and Writing.** The Office of Research and Graduate continues to sponsor *Fourth Fridays* and *Summer Writing Camp* to provide spaces for faculty to collaborate and work on their scholarship. Over 120 faculty from 25 departments/schools in six colleges have participated and self-report that the program has led to nearly 200 scholarly outputs (papers, articles, book chapters, etc.) and, germane to this report, over 20 external grant proposals prepared and submitted.