Background

The University of Washington Global Support Project is an institution-wide initiative sponsored by Financial Management and the Provost's Office. It is designed to optimize the administrative processes that support global research and education. This project will work closely with the Office of Global Affairs and relevant departments from 2006-2008 to create sustainable infrastructure to grow the UW’s ability to support global activity.

In order to clarify priority areas, the Project held a series of focus groups including faculty and administrators. Focus group participants were selected by asking key informants (members of the Global Support Project team and others) to identify faculty and staff that they knew were involved in international activities. Potential participants received two invitations.

We held five focus groups from October –December 2006. In total, twenty-nine people participated, representing the following units around campus:

- College of Engineering
- Department of Anthropology
- Department of Communication
- Department of Epidemiology - International AIDS Research and Training Program,
- Department of Health Services
- Department of Health Services – Health Alliance International
- Epidemiology
- Family and Child Nursing, School of Nursing
- Global Business Center, UW Business School
- Human Subjects Division
- Information School
- International Educational Outreach, UW Extension Office
- Jackson School of International Studies
- Law, Societies & Justice/Jackson School
- Office of Sponsored Programs
- School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences
- School of Dentistry
- School of Law
- School of Social Work
- Schools of Medicine and Health Services – I-TECH
- The Evans School

Each focus group lasted 1 ½ hours and followed the below format:
1) Introduction to the Global Support Project
2) Participant introductions
3) Brainstorming by participants of administrative processes used to do/support global work
4) Identification of aspects of the international administrative processes that work well or need improvement
5) What could the UW do to make processes work optimally?
6) What areas should the Global Support Project prioritize?
Each participant was also asked to complete a survey detailing their experience and satisfaction with specific UW processes that support global work.

**Summary of Findings**

**Administrative processes used by participants**

- Acquiring space overseas
- Animal care protocols
- Export controls
- Faculty recognition processes
- Finances, including field advances and money transfers
- Grants and contracts
- Hosting foreign visitors, including stipends and taxes
- HR
- Human subject review (at UW and in foreign countries)
- Insurance/safety/emergency response
- IT and communications
- Legal
- Purchasing/personal services contracts/inventory
- Shipping
- Students
- Travel office
- Visas

**Priorities areas of improvement identified by groups**

**Human subjects review process:** Several focus group participants expressed concerns about the speed of the human subjects review process, saying that, while reviewers offered a helpful perspective, the timeline delayed faculty work and discouraged students from primary data collection. Specific suggestions follow:

- Increase expertise when reviewing studies involving people from indigenous groups, non-English speaking groups, where the primary language is not written, the subject cannot read, or there are sociopolitical concerns about signing documents. Specifically, provide multiple ways to indicate consent, beyond a standard signed consent form.
- Tailor process to nonmedical studies.
- Improve expertise on international review requirements, both when an in-country IRB does and does not exist.
- Improve speed of review and response to problems that arise, especially when dealing with multiple IRBs.
- In an ideal world, there could be a separate unit in the Human Subjects office focused exclusively on international research and really understands international work.
OSP and Grant and Contract Accounting: Several focus group participants praised the expertise of the Office of Sponsored Programs but expressed concern with the speed of pre- and post-award processes, which compromises relationships with sponsors and project partners. They suggested the following improvements:

- Improve speed of issuing subcontracts and completing final accounting.
- More staffing for subcontracts. Need dedicated international expertise and someone who could help evaluate new funding sources in terms of their requirements.
- For postaward processes, more knowledge of international rules and customs and how to meet U.S. and foreign requirements simultaneously.
- Backup funding for guaranteeing advances on subcontracts to facilitate faster project startup.
- Increase connections between pre- and post-award.
- Departments have financial reporting responsibilities beyond those to sponsors that require a shadow system – it would be good to automate this.
- Technical assistance for special requirements of foreign sponsors and sponsored projects that don’t include a research component.
- Intellectual Property language required by the UW was perceived to exceed that at other universities and increase negotiation time.

Legal information by country: Participants expressed a need for help with country-specific legal information ranging from registration to do business to visa and customs information. They indicated interest in assistance beyond a website. It was noted the AG office does work well. Some participants indicated that, in an ideal world, it would be great to have an internal office that handled visas and worked with consulates and other resources to answer questions such as how much in advance you have to apply for a visa, documentation needed. In some countries, it can be challenging to balance doing business according to the law, when, customarily, other business operate somewhat differently.

Getting money overseas: Diversify how to get funds in the field. Reimbursement in cash economies through the field advance process is difficult and reimbursement in general is complicated with multiple receipts or lack of receipts. A streamlined and better documented process would be helpful. That said, people were satisfied in general with the field advance office. Other finance related issues include:

- Clarification around when and how to open a foreign bank account.
- Doing business in a manner compliant with U.S. regulations in economies where bribes are common. Perhaps the UW could develop a code of conduct.
- Guidance or assistance obtaining cash in foreign currency in advance.
- Recommendations on exchanging currency abroad.
- Nonuse of international auditing standards causes problems with some international sponsors.

Visiting faculty: Facilitate visiting international faculty visits and exchange. The following specific suggestions were offered:
• Need assistance on logistics such as visas (including for pass-through countries), payments, taxes, social security numbers, and access to UW facilities.
• Housing is difficult for foreign scholars and short term visitors. In an ideal world, the UW could have a guest house, as some universities do.
• Payments are especially tricky the first few days when a visitor arrives and at the end of their stay, when it can be difficult to transfer payments to foreign banks.
• There was some concern and confusion about the intellectual property statement that visiting scholars sign.
• It was noted that Nursing seems to do a good job hosting foreign visitors.

General coordination: A common these at the focus groups was the suggestion of some sort of “one stop shop” to help the UW community understand what is involved in international work and the existing resources, including who to talk to when unusual or emergency situations arise. Ideas for the format of this resource included checklists, a website, trainings for departments, a master database of who is doing what in what country, peer advisors, and a central office. In several focus groups, participants noted there were pros and cons to more centralization. Regardless of format, resources need to be communicated consistently across the university. One participant expressed frustration that “rules and policies seem to change all the time.” Communication between administrative process partners should be stronger and UW’s administrative offers should emphasize the need for cultural competency related to international business. Several participants praised the International Programs and Exchanges office as a good resource and a possible model for additional resources. It was noted that each country and situation is unique and this needs to be factored into developing a strategy for general coordination.

Other themes mentioned
• **Travel:** The Travel Office works well with regular communication and follow-up. In an ideal world, the UW would contract with a travel agency with expertise in foreign travel (foreign hotels, nonstandard carriers, etc.).
• **Safety:** Participants wanted more information on existing insurance and did not know about emergency evacuation insurance. They felt limited support from the UW for personal security and wanted technical guidance and products such as medical insurance and, in an ideal world, insurance for dependents. Some participants expressed that they did not want too much centralization of decision-making about risky activities. The responsiveness of the Risk Management Office was noted.
• **Human Resources:** Special considerations of work overseas (for example, supervising more contract employees) need more attention. One participant noted the e-mail reminder about foreign workers for reporting requirements is helpful.
• **Tax:** Dispersing funds to non-resident foreign employees in a manner that avoids having their taxes withheld is challenging; recovery of taxes is difficult. Nonresident alien tax information is not working and inconsistent.
• **Export controls:** Participants wanted more guidance (someone to work with them) on a range of export control issues, from basic information on which
countries are subject to sanctions to complicated situations, for example items purchased in a foreign country and shipped elsewhere, or equipment that is left behind. They are concerned that licenses take months to obtain.

- **IT and telecommunications**: Participants requested more guidance for use of personal laptops and noted uneven success with teleconferences. Two participants noted a need for more guidance about software licensure, in terms of export controls and planning for/finding alternatives to fees. Some noted that C&C has been helpful and has the potential to help with solutions. Participants advocated exploring low cost and reliable telecommunication services that can be used at the UW and beyond, e.g., Skype.

- **Purchasing/personal services contracts/inventory**: A few concerns arose related to this, including that short-term payments are problematic. They noted a dedicated office would be helpful.

- **Space, animal care, shipping**: A few participants noted these administrative activities as part of international work, but with little elaboration.

- **Curricular and faculty reward issues**: Participants noted that arranging international activities (e.g., student explorations and new research collaborations) is burdensome for faculty. Extra work should be rewarded. It would be helpful to have more administrative resources to handle the logistical challenges that PIs tend to take on for overseas work. Participants also noted that faculty exchanges are helpful and should be encouraged and procedures for doing so made widely available. Students need information on when study abroad activities turn into research activities and the implications of that in terms of visa status and applicability of human subjects review. Criteria for waiving the out-of-state tuition rate when a student is working from their home country on a UW degree need to be clarified. These issues are outside of the scope of the Global Support Project but will be relayed to the Office of Global Affairs.

- **UW’s planning and coordination of international activities**: Several subthemes arose related to UW’s general capacity and strategic direction for international activities:
  - Some participants expressed a lack of familiarity with existence and purpose of Office of Global Affairs.
  - International activities are often inter-disciplinary, leading to questions of allocating resources and decisionmaking amongst participating units – standard structure or agreement would help.
  - Different UW people often work in same area and don’t know it.
  - It costs more money to support global activities and if the UW wants to participate it needs to devote resources to stay on top of what’s going on and communicate it. Early outreach activities are particularly difficult and expensive and could be helped by fundraising and by providing skilled administrative staff to assist.
  - We need a global strategic plan that outlines how we will brand ourselves, ensure quality, and what it will take to get there.
  - Some participants expressed that UW’s rules seem different from other universities (especially because it is public) and that this will pose
challenges going forward. A few participants mentioned creating NGOs might help allow for different ways of doing business.

- Some participants noted that central services are needed to support international activities (for example by funding start-up grants and oversight), but initial outreach and trust-building will rely on substantial individual efforts.
- There needs to be a mechanism whereby people with a strong interest in this area can be heard and weigh in on the overall direction(s). Such a group should include foreign perspectives.

- Models: Harvard, Duke, University of Michigan were mentioned as good models.

**Emerging issues (asked 10/31 and 11/14 and 11/21)**

When asked about new issues participants say likely to emerge, we heard:

- Continued disconnects (people not knowing of other work in same area and “recreating the wheel” in terms of logistics).
- Continued complexity of export controls, coupled with work in new countries.
- Increasing volume and complexity of human subjects review.
- Global environment is changing quickly; solutions must be flexible.
- Growth of e-technologies and related legal issues (e.g., e-mailing data) coupled with continued lack of connectivity in some areas.
- Expanded use of videoconferencing, which UW does support.
- Need for a central equipment pool for specialized support.

**Observations from project staff**

Familiarity and satisfaction with existing resources varies by department. Departments with limited international activities may not be aware of some of the well-resourced support functions. On the other hand, departments with extensive international activities may be stretching the limits of the UW’s support infrastructure. Improvements need to factor in both ends of the spectrum: reducing variability while expanding the efficiency of the overall infrastructure.
Survey results

We asked focus group participants to complete a survey indicating their experience and satisfaction with administrative processes that support UW’s global activities. The following table summarizes the responses:

Number of respondents who were satisfied, dissatisfied or unaware of selected UW administrative processes to support global work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Know how to get help, but not satisfied</th>
<th>Don’t know how to get help</th>
<th>N/A, don’t use UW process or did not answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arranging to send cash overseas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign bank accounts: logistics and tax</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel arrangements</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special grants and contracts issues, including human subjects</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health/safety assurance including evacuation insurance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding if export controls apply and what to do about them if so</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring staff outside of the U.S.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing legal authority from another country to operate there</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results highlight the need to expand the information available about sending cash overseas, foreign bank accounts, health/safety assurance overseas, understanding if export controls apply and hiring staff overseas, and legal consultation.

Recommended actions

Based on the information gather from the focus groups, the Global Support Project recommends the following actions:

- **Clarify and publicize existing resources**: Many requested support resources do exist, but need to be publicized better. Specific resources include the AG office for legal advice, Office of Sponsored Programs for export controls advice, C&C for IT issues, certain HR contacts for HR issues, certain Purchasing contacts for Purchasing issues, and the International Scholars Office for hosting foreign
visitors. The planned Global Support Portal will help users locate existing resources and should be launched, maintained, and evaluated.

- **Identify and publicize a point person in key units:** in conjunction with clarifying existing resources, publicize the contact mechanism/person for international questions for each of the processes identified as part of international work and delineate responsibilities.

- **Improve processes:**
  - Consult with OSP, Grant and Contract Accounting, the Human Subjects Division, Travel, Risk Management, Human Resources, Financial Management and C&C on possible improvements to meet the needs of international activities identified in this report and otherwise (without compromising domestic activities).
  - Work with the International Scholars Office on increasing and communicating resources for hosting foreign visitors.
  - Encourage building expertise in all administrative units with international business cultures.
  - Explore options for increasing resources to help with visas, customs, etc. Include online information in web portal.
  - Share lessons learned (for example, best practices for doing business in certain countries) between administrative units.

- **Identify optimal long-term coordination:** Work with the Office of Global Affairs and relevant administrative units to implement a long-term coordination plan for global activities that will outlast the Global Support Project’s project period. This plan must include a mechanism for ongoing stakeholder input and evaluation.