

**Research Policy**  
**Arab Open University**  
**Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

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## Objectives:

As the University is slowly moving from being teaching to a teaching-cum-research university, the need arises to formulate a research policy that defines research priorities and responsibilities, research management system, incentive schemes, and research conduct, and articulates these with the imperatives of advancing the University's research capacity and performance.

AOU research incentive scheme is presented in detail in 'AOU Research Grant Policy', and elucidation of ethical and professional research conduct is to be found in 'AOU Code of Research Ethics'.

## 1. Research Types and Proprieties

Research is broadly defined as any form of disciplined enquiry that aims to contribute to the advancement of human knowledge. Four types of research may be identified: pure basic research; strategic basic research, applied research, and experimental development research.

The purpose of basic and experimental research "is to generate new theoretical or experimental knowledge, and the process includes thinking in a disciplined manner about why some natural or human phenomena occur. The primary motivation is to increase knowledge for the sake of understanding" (1). Applied research "is original investigation undertaken to acquire new knowledge but directed towards a specific, practical aim or objective" (2).

Considering the present stage of research development at the university and the endeavour to substantially contribute to economic and social development of the community (comprising civil society, private sector and public sector), AOU focuses on applied research, and University internal grants are to prioritise this type. However, this does not lead to total exclusion of other types of research.

The University needs to identify some strategic (applied) research areas within and across colleges. Strategic areas include those areas that represent present research strength, are capable of attracting enough researchers from across the branches to form the critical mass needed, have the potential to generate external interest for the purposes of collaboration and/or funding, and that stand as highly relevant to community development issues.

## 2. Responsibilities of the Academic Staff and the University

All full-time members of academic staff are required to conduct research. An integral component of the University's mission is to contribute to furthering human knowledge through high-quality research relevant to AOU's mission and strategies. The University's research standing is the sum total of research conducted by its academic members of staff, other members of staff, and students. Among these categories, academic members of staff contribute most, and the research they undertake, from another side, advances their knowledge, which in turn enhances student learning experiences.

Conducting research that yields publishable outcome is a requirement stated in the contract of the University with full-time academic members of staff, and is a significant consideration when the contract is renewed. While members of staff may take interest and action in advancing their own personal and career development, the University, from its side, is committed, and provides support to staff development. In relation to the research aspect of staff development, and to the development of the research enterprise in general, the University:

- establishes and fosters required management structures and appropriate infrastructure to support research activity and lifelong learning,
- formulates research development plans in line with University mission and strategies, and creates enabling an environment for their implementation,

- provides grants and other incentives to encourage innovative research,
- develops and sustains an ethical and safe research environment, and
- improves recruitment of, and retains staff with high potential to excel in research.

### 3. Research Development and Management

Research management process and research developed involves many aspects that complement each other:

- The principal researcher ( The Principle Investigator (PI))
- The dean, the research development committee for in the faculty, and the central research committee.

#### 3.1. The Principle Researcher

The responsibility of conducting the research and providing the direct supervisor with a report about the research progress is the responsibility of the principal researcher. Moreover, the principal researcher publishing the results. Besides, the principal researcher must, as the first responsible for conducting the research, implements two tasks: academic and administrative responsibility (i.e., project management).

On the administrative side, the principal researcher must implement the following:

- (1) Identifying funding opportunities (if the search required that).
- (2) Preparing the funding proposal in consultation with the designated authorities in the university, and ensuring the compliance with ethical standards and the safety aspects and other regulations and laws that are enforced by the university and the sponsor/financier.

- (3) Managing the financial aspects in accordance with the agreed-upon laws and presenting the required financial reports.
- (4) Reporting about the research progress and proposing any modifications or changes to the research terms agreed, and obtaining the necessary approval if the modifications have any impact on the contract.
- (5) Overseeing all the administrative aspects of the project and bear the responsibilities arising from them.

In the academic side, the responsibilities of the principal researcher include the following:

- (1) Determining the work scope
- (2) Selecting the team members
- (3) Supervising all the stages and the aspects of the work, and make sure that it is progressing according to plan and that is committed to research ethics in force in the Arab Open University, and that is implementing according to the highest quality standards.
- (4) Reporting according to the demands of the financier according to the highest quality standards, as well as to publishing the results as stated in the contract.
- (5) Making the necessary arrangements with the designated authorities in the university regarding intellectual property, if necessary.

In principle, only full-time faculty members who are hired for the allocated time that exceeds the time required to complete the research can act as the principal researcher. In the event of any exceptions to this, convincing justifications must be provided and lift to the rector to take the appropriate. It should be noted that some research projects need more than one principal researcher, mainly when the research of multiple disciplines or being conducted in more than one place, while it is difficult for one researcher to manage the project on his own. Some research may also require the appointment of an assistant for the principal researcher.

### 3.2. Dean and the Research Development Committee in the Faculty

The dean has full authority to encourage the faculty members in the faculty and urged them to engage in the research activities. The dean forms the scientific research committee that consists of faculty members with high academic ranks and who are active in conducting the research.

The research development task includes:

- Organizing periodic seminars about the research methodology (and research developments at the global level) that serves the specialities in the faculty.
- Preparing research plans in line with the university's mission and strategies and the strategies of the faculty, as well as to support and monitor these plans and follow-up their executions.
- Facilitating the formation of research groups among the branches in order to conduct a particular or long-term project, and to report on the applications of external funding, as well as funding from the Scientific Research Committee at the university level.
- Helping the faculty members in identifying sources of funding through Preparing a list and information about the external funding agencies that are related to research carried out by the faculty.
- Supporting the faculty members with the lower academic ranks through training on the conducting and supervising research projects.
- Encouraging cooperation with researchers from other universities, research centres and the local community.
- Motivating and encouraging conducting research of multiple areas between different faculties at the university level.
- Preparing periodical reports.

### 3.3. The Central Research Committee

The central committee shall supervise and manage the task of research projects at the university level. This committee consists of faculty members with high academic ranks and who are active in conducting the research.

The tasks of the central committee include:

- (1) Reviewing and supporting the development of research plans in the faculties and providing the necessary advice.
- (2) Managing the funds that are responsible for.
- (3) Establishing and developing partnerships with other universities, research institutes and the institutions of the local community, as well as the regional and international development agencies.
- (4) Looking for funding opportunities in the form of gifts from specialized agencies in the development and supporting the research and charity organizations.
- (5) Organizing conferences and seminars on issues that are related to up-to-date aspects and are of concerned to the university.
- (6) Encouraging and supporting the research projects between the branches and between the faculties.
- (7) Training the leading researchers in the branches.
- (8) Receiving and giving the necessary feedback on the periodic reports presented by the research development committees in the faculties.
- (9) Use of the electronic system in all correspondence and information sharing.

## 4. Responsibility in Research Conducting

The university has to create a research environment with moral values, safety, confidentiality, transparency, objectivity, integrity, justice, social responsibility, cultural sensitivity, and responsibility. While the researchers have the freedom to choose the research topics, and methods of gathering information and results, they must fully comply with laws, in terms of research methods, management, and results, and not to violate the moral values (for more information, see the Code of Conduct and the research ethics).

The researchers at the university have to comply when conducting research with all policies, rules, and procedures, and conditions enforced by the university. Moreover, the research must adhere to the terms of the sponsor of the project is externally funded. Moreover, the results must be audited and investigated by their colleagues.

All the researchers from faculty members or students or any other research under the title of the Arab Open University have to receive training on how to conduct research with responsibility. The deans and the research committees at the faculties ensure that the researchers have sufficient training. The Training is conducted electronically or faces to face on a group basis in both cases.

## 5. Openness in Research Conducting

Because spread knowledge is one of the primary university's objectives, the university is committed to openness while conducting research. It is agreed that the outcomes of the research should be available for everyone through publishing the research or via any other ways. Except that openness with the research outcomes may need to be audited and investigated to check whether the University or the external sponsor owns the intellectual properties, that sometimes protection the intellectual properties that might be of commercial or marketing may call for

delaying of publishing these outcomes. In this is case, there should be an agreement on the postponing period as it comes with the agreement with the sponsor.

The university does not allow faculty members of students at the campus or use the financial aid/ support that is provided by the university to conduct confidential research. Moreover, if the researcher receives confidential information from the sponsor or any third party, then commitment to the confidentiality and the privacy of that information should not prevent the right the research outcomes; otherwise this information should not be used.

The principal researcher is responsible for reporting to the university's authorities about any confidentiality of the information before signing the agreement with the sponsor. Besides, if the sponsor or the agency gives the rights to publish the research outcomes then made adjustment without the researcher and the university approval, then the research and the university have the writes not to include their names in the published research.

## 6. The Research Records

The research records should be saved and documented in a correct way, and this is the liability of the principal researcher (at primarily) as well as the university; who have the rights to use these records. Unless stated otherwise in the agreement with the sponsor, the intellectual property resulted from the research is return to the university. The research records include the documents, records and the materials that belong to the research that is necessary for recording, re-implementing the research, evaluation or investigation the research outcomes [3].

These Records includes, among other forms, administrative information publication records (Original or photocopies or electronic forms and files that are downloaded /installed on the

computer Device/machine), or documented or recorded text or interviews (Written or Audio-Recorded) and communications and documents.

The University liability in preserving these records are as follows (not necessarily be exclusively for the university) [4]:

- Commitment with the agreements signed with the sponsors.
- Protection the Intellectual Property that is resulted from the research.
- Ensuring the right administration of the research factors, including the human factor.
- Facilitating the verification of any violations in the moral and ethical bylaws.
- Protecting the rights of those who are involved in the research in reaching the information and the records.

The records must be maintained as long as the doubts still exist, while the students' records are maintained till the graduation.

When the researchers leave the university, they are entitled to taking copies of the research records in which they participate (Copies only and not the origin). In case that the principal researcher transferred to another institution before completing the project, while there is no arrangement to continue the research inside the university, then the records can be transformed to the other institution with the approval of the rector.

## 7. Research Leave

A member of academic staff may apply for research leave to be approved by the rector in consultation with the relevant dean and the research committee if he/she meets the following conditions:

- has spent at least 6 years continuously serving the University at the time of commencement of the leave,
- has a rigorous research plan that promises to lead to publications of high quality,
- had a sound research record during his/her service, and
- that the rector can make arrangements, without financial implications, to cover her/his teaching and other administrative responsibilities during the leave.

The research leave may be granted for up to 12 months. The staff member will be paid 75% of his/her full salary, with the remaining 25% withheld until the satisfactory completion of the leave. The staff member is allowed to make arrangements for sponsorship by a third party. The staff member is to submit a report within 3 months of completing the leave. If he/she is evaluated by both the rector and the dean as fully accomplishing the plan of the leave, he/she will be paid the withheld 25%. The staff member is to sign an undertaking to serve the university for two more years after the research leave. It is the discretion of the University to continue employing the staff member for those two years.

## **8. Research Center**

Research centres play a pivotal role in advancing the research profile of universities, and in realising their mission. They contribute substantially to enriching academic life and heightening community engagement, as well as creating new, and ripening existing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary relationships.

### **8.1 Principles**

The following represents the general principles governing the establishment of research centres at AOU.

A research centre at AOU is a formally constituted university entity, establishment of which is to be approved by the University Board of Trustees, and it has the following:

- (1) Must have clearly defined mission and objectives consistent with University mission and goals, and with faculty strategy, if it is established within a single faculty.
- (2) Usually is, but not necessarily, interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary in nature, involving inter-faculties and inter-branch cooperation.
- (3) Could be established jointly or in partnership with another (other) external institution(s).
- (4) Cooperates with researchers from other universities, research centres and community organisations (including industry).
- (5) Focuses on, and substantially contributes to research, but may combine research with training and/or teaching and/or cost-recovery consultancy service.
- (6) Usually does not require appointment of new full-time academic staff.
- (7) Has a critical mass of researchers within the university interested in its objectives and scope of work , and are committed to allocating part of their time to it.
- (8) Has adequate financial resources and is able to attract extramural funding.

## 8.2. Governance

A research centre must:

- (1) have its own by-laws stating, among others, mission, objectives, physical location, partnerships, membership, accountability lines, governing board and its composition and meetings, the appointment of the director, finances and reporting systems,
- (2) be governed by a board recommended by the rector and approved by the Board of Trustees,

- (3) have a director accountable to the dean (who is then accountable to the vice-rector) in case the centre is established within a college, and otherwise directly to the vice-rector,
- (4) be subject to regular reviews, nature and composition of which are to be stipulated in the by-laws,
- (5) define conditions, responsibilities and rights of membership, and
- (6) state the name of the University (and its logo) alongside its name

## 9. Intellectual Property Rights

This section establishes the university policy toward ownership of intellectual property right of works created by university members of staff and students.

### 9.1 Copyright, Patent and Invention (5)

Common understanding of copyright is that it “is the ownership and control of the intellectual property in original works of authorship”. Subject to certain limitations and exceptions, “the copyright owner has the exclusive right to reproduce the work, prepare derivative works, distribute copies by sale or otherwise, and display or perform the work publicly”.

- “An invention is a novel and useful idea relating to processes, machines, manufactures, and compositions of matter”.
- A patent is a permission issued by a Government or a union of governments (e.g. the European Union) “giving an inventor the right to exclude all others from making, using or selling the invention” within the territory of the granting Government.

## 9.2 Intellectual Property Ownership, Disclosure and Governance (6)

The University retains copyright ownership in the following cases:

- University-funded works,
- Works initiated by the University for specific purposes,
- Works that have been developed over time, building on previous findings of numerous members of staff and/or students,
- Course materials,
- Works performed by members of staff and students substantially using university resources, and
- Works performed by University employees in the ordinary course of their employment.

In all other cases, University employees and students as authors own the copyright of their works, unless these rights have been granted to a third party. Works by external individuals or organisations hired by the University as consultants or contractors are owned by them, unless specified otherwise in the agreement.

Authors may request re-transference of copyright ownership of their works, ownership of which has been retained by the University for any of the conditions mentioned above. The University rector is the authority to decide whether to allow or deny the re-transference. In the case of allowing re-transference of ownership to the author, the University shares with the author any royalties derived from the work. Authors retain the moral rights in their works falling under the ownership of the University, and have the right to use it for no-personal gain purposes, and are not permitted to passing it to a third party unless the University rector grants such permission. In this case the third party will not be permitted to use it for commercial purposes.

If a creator/author believes that her, his or their work has a reasonable chance of commercial value, a disclosure form is to be completed explaining the nature of the intellectual property and how it may be of commercial interest to the University. The University then decides to claim the intellectual property, or share it with, or license it, or assign it to, the creator(s) or author(s).

## 10. Electronic Research Portal

The Research Portal is a repository of all information pertinent to research at the AOU. It provides access to all research-related policies and manuals and allows submission of research proposals and monitoring of their progress (see AOU Research Grant Policy). Using the Portal, colleges and branches submit their research reports online, following a template available in the portal. The Portal will also be used for any correspondence related to the research activity at the AOU. Part of the portal is publicly accessible, which comprises lists of accomplished and on-going research activities at the AOU and other materials, meant to publicise, and promote dissemination of, research output of the AOU

## Endnotes

- 1) University of the Western Cape, 2009, P.1
- 2) Department of Education and Training, Government of Australia, 2015, P.5
- 3) University of Alberta, 2013, web document - no page number.
- 4) The part of this section following the endnote mark draws on Stanford University, Chapter one of the web document accessed on November 2015, no page numbering.
- 5) Ibid, questions are extracted from Chapter Nine, no page numbering
- 6) This section draws on Northwestern University (2015), Stanford University (web accessed on December 2015), and Victoria University of Wellington (web accessed on December 2015).

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