

July 25, 2024

Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance (SPaRC)  
2024 Awards Committee

Re: Letter of Support for Kris Williams for the SPaRC Career Achievement Award

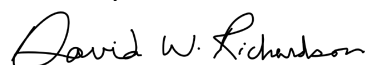
To Whom It May Concern:

It is my honor to write a letter in support of the nomination of Kris Williams for consideration of a 2024 SPaRC Career Achievement Award. While my time at the University coincides with the latter half of his research administrative career, I consider myself fortunate to have met Kris very early upon my arrival to the campus. In my early engagements with him, it was readily apparent that Kris is a respected administrator for the GCOE's Materials Research Laboratory (MRL) who has contributed to the administration of research throughout his career. MRL has been the perfect vehicle for Kris to share his research administrative skills for both Kris and the lab play a critical role in providing access to resources to advance individual and institutional scientific achievement.

In creating what would eventually become Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance (SPaRC) and its educational certificate program SPaRC'Ed, it was imperative to the program and our institutional research administrators to showcase the central and departmental perspectives along the sponsored project lifecycle. When asked to volunteer to create and teach the departmental perspective for the introduction to research administration, Kris jumped at the chance and remains on the introduction instructional team to this day.

While his experience is invaluable to those he serves, it is his deep appreciation for supporting research in and of itself that sets Kris apart. In his daily efforts, he tries to reduce the administrative burden on his supported investigators by being creative and autonomous while remaining compliant with all applicable regulations. In closing, I strongly support his consideration for a 2024 SPaRC Career Achievement Award.

Sincerely,



David W. Richardson  
Executive Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation

July 28, 2024

Ms. Kamil Tamimie, Assistant Director  
Members of the Selection Committee  
SPaRC Career Achievement Award  
Sponsored Programs Administration  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Dear Members of the Selection Committee,

It is my great honor to write in support of the nomination of Kris Williams for the 2024 SPaRC Career Achievement Award. With over twenty years of service at the Materials Research Laboratory (MRL), Kris's expertise and unwavering dedication have profoundly impacted our faculty and staff, elevating MRL as a hub for cutting-edge interdisciplinary research in materials science. His contributions, from managing substantial grant budgets and contracts to leading critical facility projects, have been both significant and enduring.

In my role as Assistant Director for Administration at MRL, I have had the distinct privilege of working closely with Kris and witnessing his invaluable contributions to our daily operations. As the Associate Director for Administration, Kris has excelled in managing cross-functional teams, including Business, Purchasing & Shipping, Storeroom & Receiving, Safety, and Lab Improvement. He also serves as a liaison for IT, HR, and Research Communication, ensuring seamless coordination and efficient daily operations at MRL.

Specifically, Kris leads the MRL business team in managing over 160 active awards annually and oversees the submission of more than 110 new proposals to SPA for review. His support reaches over 50 resident faculty and 90 faculty affiliates across 14 departments. Kris excels at guiding faculty through the complexities of proposal requests, adeptly navigating obstacles to ensure timely submission, even during his vacation. His extensive experience and unwavering dedication make him an invaluable asset. Faculty greatly appreciate his collaboration on large grants, center proposal development, and post-award management. Known for his expertise, Kris is a trusted resource in business and research administration, skillfully interpreting agency and university guidelines to ensure compliance and drive organizational success. His commitment is essential to the ongoing success and growth of our research programs.

As someone new to sponsored research administration, I am immensely grateful for Kris's extensive institutional knowledge, approachability, and unwavering support. Beyond his role as a supervisor, Kris has been a mentor, dedicating considerable time to introducing me to the complexities of sponsored research administration. His guidance has been instrumental in helping me collaborate effectively with faculty, SPA, OVCRI, and sponsoring agencies to develop proposal packages for NSF, DOE, DOD, and SBIR & STTR grants.

Working alongside Kris and learning from his expertise has been invaluable to my professional development.

Together with MRL Director Paul Braun, Kris has also been open to my suggestions and supportive of new initiatives, such as creating a comprehensive webpage for MRL's proposal development and grant management. This initiative aims to enhance our faculty's research support and reduce administrative burdens. As a member of MRL's executive leadership team, Kris has encouraged my active involvement in strategic planning and implementation efforts, guiding me in serving as a liaison between MRL leadership and major research centers, including the Materials Research Science and Engineering Centers (MRSEC), the Illinois Quantum Information Science and Technology Center (IQUIST), and the Center for Hypersonics and Entry Systems Studies (CHESS).

For his exceptional contributions and steadfast commitment to advancing sponsored research administration, I wholeheartedly endorse Kris Williams for the SPaRC Career Achievement Award. His contributions have been both significant and enduring, making this recognition a well-deserved tribute to his remarkable career.

Sincerely,



Monica Liu

Assistant Director for Administration

Illinois Materials Research Lab

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July 29, 2024

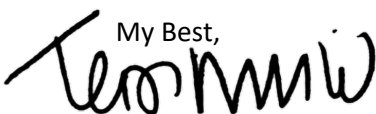
Dear Committee Members,

Please accept this letter as my full support for Kris Williams for the Sponsored Programs and Research Compliance (SPaRC) Career Achievement Award. As Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration for the Grainger College of Engineering, I have had the privilege of working with Kris for over ten years. His knowledge in research administration is unparalleled, and he has continually been a resource and advisor to me, to all business managers in our college, and to the campus community on all research topics. It truly is an honor for me to write this nomination for Kris.

Kris embodies an individual that “has made significant and sustained contributions throughout his/her career to the field of research administration at Illinois”. He has dedicated his career to the Materials Research Lab (MRL) since he began his university employment in 2000 (1996 if you include his years as a student). The MRL is one of the largest shared-instrumentation facilities in the country, with over two hundred advanced instruments that support research and education. In his role as Associate Director for Administration, Kris provides financial oversight to this large and complicated facility. He provides outstanding support to the faculty that reside in the MRL (50+ faculty that generated \$32M in research expenditures in FY23), while balancing multiple proposal submissions, supervising his team, and advising large research centers that are making an impact on our campus and the state of Illinois (Center for Hypersonics and Entry Systems Studies (CHESS), Illinois Quantum Information Science and Technology Center (IQUIST), and Illinois Materials Research Science and Engineering Center (MRSEC), to name a few).

In addition to his dedication to the MRL and Grainger Engineering, Kris has emphasized the importance of service to campus. He is well-known in the research community and has served on various key campus committees such as the Research Development Community Executive Committee and the Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) Special Policy Committee. His extensive research knowledge has been vital in these committee roles.

Kris is an invaluable resource to Grainger Engineering and the University of Illinois. I am truly thankful to call him my colleague and I submit this nomination without hesitation. If you would like to discuss this in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

My Best,  


Tessa M. Hile

Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration

July 30, 2024

Dear Selection Committee:

It is my great pleasure to nominate Mr. Kristopher Williams for the SPaRC Career Achievement Award. I have known Kris since he started at MRL in 2000 (the year after I joined the faculty as an assistant professor), worked with him in his role in the MRL business office when I was a MRL Faculty member in a non-administrative position on various sponsored research efforts, and then have worked with him on an almost daily basis since I became the MRL Director in 2016. Kris, as the MRL Associate Director for Administration, is responsible for all MRL operations outside of the shared facilities. He manages approximately 30 direct reports, including the administrative directors of several major centers, and oversees all aspects of MRL operations, such as pre-award, post-award, construction, renovation, financial agreements with other campus units, and faculty recruitment and retention.

On campus, MRL has become a go-to unit for hosting large and complicated centers. MRL now manages IQUIST, CHESS, the Energy & Biosciences Institute (funded by Shell), ICAM (funded by BP) and multiple large federal centers. These centers could have chosen other units, but they opted for MRL because of its reputation for successfully managing significant and intricate projects—a reputation largely attributable to Kris. His extensive knowledge of university policies and procedures, federal procurement rules, and various federal agency policies, combined with his proactive approach to problem-solving and his willingness to get his hands dirty and dive right into finding solutions for the most challenging problems is why MRL has this reputation.

Kris is also an outstanding manager. He dedicates time to one-on-one training, leads by example, empowers his team to make decisions, and approaches professional and personal challenges of his staff with compassion and kindness. Over the past decade, MRL has experienced minimal staff turnover, which I believe is a testament to the positive work environment Kris has fostered. Notably, MRL's sponsored research activity has increased 400% over the past eight years, while the staff size has remained constant. Despite the increased workload, staff burnout has been avoided, thanks to Kris's effective management of workflows, staff training, operational efficiency, and his ability to remove barriers.

In addition to managing MRL's operations, which allows me to maintain an active research group and develop a long-term vision for MRL, Kris serves as my indispensable advisor. I do not make major decisions without his input. His judgment is exceptional, he has a keen ability to foresee the potential consequences of decisions, and can swiftly devise plans to implement ideas. Kris often proactively presents his own suggestions for improving MRL's efficiency and effectiveness, and I value his insights highly.

Beyond his contributions to MRL, Kris has been a significant leader within the College of Engineering and the University at large. He has led the development of college and campus policies, served on numerous committees, and played a pivotal role in enhancing the skills of research administrators across campus through his support of SPaRC and the SPaRC'Ed certificate program. His dedication to

SPaRC-related activities and long-term commitment to MRL and the campus make him an outstanding candidate for the 2024 SPaRC Career Achievement Award. In my view, there is no one more deserving of this honor.

Sincerely,



Paul V. Braun, Ph.D.  
Director, Materials Research Laboratory  
Grainger Distinguished Chair in Engineering  
Professor of Materials Science and Engineering  
Professor of Mechanical Sciences and Engineering  
Professor of Chemistry  
Professor of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering  
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# Melanie J. Loots

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July 24, 2024

Ms. Kamil Tamimie, Assistant Director  
Members of the Selection Committee  
SPaRC Career Achievement Award  
Sponsored Programs Administration  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

It is a great pleasure to nominate Mr. Kristopher Williams for the SPaRC Career Achievement Award. While in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, I worked with Kris, beginning when he assumed responsibility for the business office in the Materials Research Laboratory (MRL). I rank him very highly in comparison with his peers in research administration on our campus. Kris possesses detailed knowledge and understanding of the regulations governing sponsored projects and the myriad requirements for submission of sponsored proposals to a diverse group of federal and private sponsors. His work at UIUC has had significant impact on sponsored research, both within the MRL and across the campus, as illustrated by the examples below.

I first became acquainted with Kris at a critical time for the MRL. Since the Laboratory's founding, research at the MRL had been funded by a longstanding block grant from the Department of Energy (DOE). In 2005, DOE's Division of Basic Energy Sciences changed its funding model to one of smaller, more narrowly defined grants, and also phased out funding for some activities. The MRL's DOE funding was abruptly halved, while the number of its sponsored transactions and budgetary uncertainty substantially increased. In the wake of this major change, Kris stepped forward to assume the leadership of the business office at that time, and demonstrated the qualities for which he has become known as a research administrator. He is calm in a crisis, and listens to all sides of an issue - considering the viewpoints of faculty, staff, students, college and campus administrators, and sponsors. He makes sure that he has accurate information and is well-informed of the issues and constraints. He is loyal to the MRL, the GCOE and the University. He always acts with integrity and is not afraid to speak out about problems and issues.

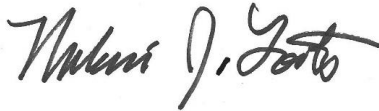
These characteristics enabled Kris, working with the MRL Director, faculty, and campus administration, to develop a plan of action that would allow the MRL to move forward in the new DOE funding environment. Kris then led a sustained effort to revise MRL's business policies and procedures to support the future course of the unit, which now serves as a model for sponsored research management. The revisions supported a substantial expansion in MRL's sponsored activity, as the lab grew to become the home for large interdisciplinary

projects, today including the NSF Materials Research Science and Engineering Center, the BP International Center for Advanced Materials, the Energy Biosciences Institute, and the Illinois Quantum Information Science and Technology Center. In addition, MRL has evolved to be an advanced instrumental facility for the campus, with a strong record of sponsored funding from NSF, NIH, DOD and other sources.

Kris has also demonstrated his leadership, diplomatic skills and generosity in the development of sponsored research policy on campus. When it was recognized that the campus lacked a definition of institutional base salary and a consistent approach to effort and compensation on sponsored projects, Kris was an active participant in the initial discussions, beginning in 2011. He then agreed to co-chair the 2014 Implementation Committee that developed the CAM Policy Effort and Compensation on Sponsored Projects as well as a definition of Institutional Base Salary. Further, he developed training in the new Policy, and clearly delineated its relationship to the NIH salary cap and other constraints. As a trusted source of information on sponsored programs administration for his peers, he conducted extensive outreach to units engaged in sponsored research. His efforts were vitally important in gaining campus understanding, support of and compliance with the new policy.

In recognition of these and many other contributions by Kris in support of sponsored programs on campus, I urge that he receive the SPaRC Career Achievement Award.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Melanie J. Loots". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melanie J. Loots, Ph. D.