April 19, 2013

TO: Deans, Directors, Department Chairs and All Faculty
FROM: Barbara Entwisle, Vice Chancellor for Research
SUBJECT: More on the Sequester

Sequestration—the $85 billion across-the-board federal spending cuts in federal fiscal year 2013—went into effect a month and a half ago, and as a campus, we are beginning to see some of its effects. With respect to research funding, federal and other awards to the university were consistently ahead of last year up to the end of February, but since that time, we have fallen a bit behind. We are hearing of cuts to some ongoing awards. In addition, there are new and competing renewal projects that reviewed very well (top 10%) but have not yet been awarded. I am hoping that the federal agencies are in a position to move ahead with these awards now that the Continuing Resolution has been signed, although it is possible that uncertainty will continue through the end of the federal fiscal year (September 30).

In practicality, over time we'll likely see effects across Carolina’s research community including undergraduates, graduate students, post-doctoral scholars, staff, and faculty. Interestingly, where we may be seeing the most impact is on our PhD programs. My information is spotty and not systematic, but I am hearing from a number of sources that next year’s cohort of PhD students may be smaller. I am pleased that departments, programs, and faculty are carefully calibrating the commitments they are making to graduate students. As a faculty member and PI, I feel a special obligation to our students—a feeling that I am proud to say is widely shared on this campus. I plan to do everything I can to protect our students from the impact of budget cutbacks at the federal level, and I urge you to do the same. That said, the decisions being made now may affect the size of PhD programs going forward, and it will be important to plan carefully. Postdocs are also vulnerable, and I ask you to keep their needs in mind as well.

Carolina’s research program is central to its overall mission of research, teaching, and service. Given that trends in funding at the federal level are expected to be flat at best, my office is taking steps both strategically and operationally to better diversify our portfolio as we also maintain our competitive strengths. To succeed, we will all need to work together.