Having chaired the UCSB Faculty Grants committee for a couple of years, I thought it might be useful to share some of my personal observations as to the "habits" of highly competitive proposals. Please note that these are my own observations and do not represent, in any way, the *policy* of the committee, nor do they even necessarily represent my own personal beliefs as to what *should* constitute a strong proposal. I am simply sharing what I observed to be effective with the committee with the hope that everyone in need has the best possible chance of being funded in the future.

1) **Consider your audience and their need to understand your motivation**: While the faculty grants committee tries hard to make sure that reviewers are at least in areas related to the proposed work, this is nothing like NSF, NIH, NEA, or any other organization where your proposals may be reviewed by the foremost experts in the subfield[1]. In the case of Senate Grants, people in Chemistry may review proposals from Mechanical Engineering, someone in Education may review Social Science proposals, and proposals in Art might have a review from English. With this in mind, many of the best scoring proposals give some background on why the proposed work is important, new, and relevant in comparison to related efforts (including helpful and relevant citations) in a way that is understandable to a smart and interested reviewer outside the field. I found reviewers were eager to learn from different fields and seemed to hold in esteem proposals which could explain the broader context and importance for a proposed work.

2) **Be specific in your goals and methods**: While the points from (1) are important, please don't misinterpret them as a recommendation that one's proposal should be written entirely for a generalist and lacking of domain specific details. On the contrary, many proposals seem to perform poorly when they are seen as lacking either *focus* or lacking a description of the *methods* to be employed. Two particular ways a lack of focus can come up: a) the proposal could be interpreted as covering a "grab bag" of loosely related activities whose connection back to the central point of the proposal is unclear and b) the proposal might be seen to concentrate too much on how it fits into some existing longer term or broader effort (a book for example) excluding important details of how *this specific new* proposed work will be carried out. High ranking proposals are often described as "cohesive" with clear set of goals and a set of specific tasks that support the meeting of those goals.

This takes us to a point very often raised by reviewers listed above: methods. Reviewers are very willing to accept that a sculptor, a molecular biologist, and an analytic philosopher will all employ wildly different methods to achieve their research or creative activities. However, high ranking proposals tend to not shy away from describing their methods in detail, and most have clearly thought out and well defined specific activities to ground the project description. Perhaps some concrete descriptions would be helpful here. **If your methods involve talking with people, some questions to consider**: with whom specifically will you be meeting; why are they the correct people for your project; what do you expect to learn; what are are the questions you going to ask them; how will you gather and process information across multiple different meetings, etc. **If your methods involve scientific experiments**: what is your hypothesis; what tests will you perform; what specifically will your tests look like and what methods will be employed to evaluate those tests (e.g., are there controls and how might specific variables be isolated);

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[1] Of course regardless of their qualifications, when reviewers don't view your proposal favorably it is clearly because they are dullards and simpletons

what specific methods will you use to analyze the data after it has been collected; etc. **If your methods involve archival or textual research**: what specific materials do you plan to search for/collect/read/analyze; why do you believe the materials will be available at the locations you specify; if versions of the materials are available digitally or in print, why is it important to travel to the specified materials in person; what specific themes or critical lenses will inform your analyses (at least, to start with); what permissions do you anticipate you will need to acquire; etc. **If your methods involve creative activities**: what is your typical process; how did you come to that way of work and why do you believe it is important in the broader context; how will you follow up on your activities; how has this process manifest itself successfully in the past, etc. Of course there is no general recipe for "methods", and to many of us working in a field these methods may be so obvious or second nature that we don't even consider them explicitly. However, the more you explain *what you precisely intend to do*, why you intend to do it, how you intend to accomplish it, and *why the methods used are appropriate,* the better off your proposal seems to be.

3) **Give a detailed, coherent, justified, and modest budget**: Once a clear idea of the proposal's goals and methods are established, another stumbling block is budgets that *do not match up* with the proposed activities or seem *overly excessive*. On the second point: unlike federal agencies, the faculty grants committee is charged with giving away 100% of our allocated money to our peers and colleagues across UCSB. The goal of this program is to support our faculty in doing their jobs and we appreciate people asking for what they really need to do their work rather than "padding" to the maximum allowable request (or above). Proposals with modest budgets and demonstrated need[2] tend to do very well on average. Of course we want to support excellent larger efforts as well, but use your best judgement and consider that every dollar given to you is a dollar not given to a peer.

Furthermore, when making a budget try to include details that provide further details as to how and why the money is to be spent, preferably matching back up to the goals and methods in the proposal. For example, from my own area of research, let us consider three options for budget justifications. Bad: "4 quarters of 24% time GSRs" -- no justification or reasoning as to why this is the appropriate support for my work or why this is the correct amount of time. A little bit better: "2 quarters of 24% time GSR to work on hardware models, 2 quarter for software testing". Way better: "The completion of the project will be divided into three subtasks: the creation of the formal model, the development of the hardware simulator, and the validation of example programs. Having built several such verified systems in the past, the formal model is the most intellectually complex portion and I will personally lead that effort. By my estimate this should take around 2 quarters of work to complete. During this time, the support software to test these models needs to be developed and 2 part time GSRs will be employed to develop those portions in support of this work. One student will lead the development of the hardware simulator, including the creation of synthesizable verilog models and an appropriate testbench. In the past, students have built simpler hardware simulators over a single quarter, but given the size and complexity of this model I expect 2 quarters to be necessary. The second student will create example programs to run on the simulator along with reference outputs to allow us to ensure that the entire system works efficiently on a

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[2] Need might, in part, be demonstrated by describing how the requested activities are not an appropriate use for existing funds, how the timing of the funds is important, and/or how other funding opportunities are being sought (or at least were carefully considered).

set of representative computations. This second student will be refining their tests as the simulator becomes more functional over time and thus will also take 2 quarters of effort." This version is perhaps a bit verbose, but even if you can't understand my specific subfield you can at least get a sense for the thought put into the work and how the total amounts are justified. If you are attempting to budget some support for students (especially undergraduates), it is also helpful to justify why financial support is important and the need is not best met simply by providing "research credit". In general, the better your budget matches up with the methods and approach described, the better off your proposal seems to be.

As a final word on budgets, there are often budget items requested that are simply not allowed by the program. There is a list of those items on the Senate web page, and for questions I highly recommend contacting the faculty grants analyst (although please consider doing so at least a couple of weeks early because as you might imagine it is quite hectic for them as the deadline approaches). As to *why* specific items may not be allowed, one of the biggest reasons is point 4.

4) **Make the case that this is *your* research**: The expectation of the "ownership" of research and creative activities varies *significantly* among disciplines. In my own specific subfield, my research peers at other universities would be *very* surprised (and even a bit concerned) if I was to publish a paper that did not have one of my graduate student advisees as first author. The expectation is that *all* of my work is collaborative with students and vice versa. In other fields, a professor's and a graduate student's research are viewed as *completely* separate activities. Please keep in mind that, whatever the expectations of your subfield, the UCSB Senate Faculty Grant awards are intended as *faculty* grants to support *faculty* research. This has nothing to do with authorship, but it is important to make the case that this proposal is supporting *your* faculty career and *your* research or creative vision. In my experience, reviewers like to see that you will be *personally* engaged and participating in the proposed work. Funding requests that are perceived to be primarily funding the completion of a student thesis, supporting a student driven effort (with little faculty leadership), or providing a training exercise for students, tend to be scored less highly.

5) **Get it in on time**: I will be straight to the point here: rather than have a "pretend" deadline where certain late proposals are accepted under ill-defined conditions, the faculty grants committee has instead had a long term philosophy of being completely honest and forthright in spelling out the *absolute latest* time at which we can accept proposals. If you want your proposal to be considered, please get it in before the deadline.

I hope that the discussion above gives at least a little bit of insight into some the committee's discussions and deliberations. While you may not always agree with the outcomes, I can at least assure you that the process is the thoughtful result of a great deal of work by a lot of people that, in my opinion, really care to support their colleagues around campus. Thank you to Karen Lunsford, Anna Lin, Connie Howard, and Susannah Scott for their feedback on earlier versions of this document.

With Best Regards,

Tim Sherwood