January 15, 2012

Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity  Cert. Mail No.: 700832030000296945970

Dr. Rodney Erickson
President
Pennsylvania State University
201 Old Main
University Park, PA 16802

Dear President Erickson:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has completed its compliance review of the Pennsylvania State University (PSU), a recipient of NASA financial assistance. This limited scope review, focused on the Department of Geosciences (Geosciences), was conducted pursuant to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), and NASA's Title IX implementing regulations at 14 C.F.R. Part 1253, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs receiving Federal financial assistance through NASA.

The review was conducted to determine whether PSU was in compliance with NASA’s Title IX regulations; specifically, to ensure that the Geosciences program provides equal educational opportunity regardless of gender. Please find enclosed a copy of NASA’s report of the compliance review and the NASA Title IX regulations.

Based on an evaluation of the data provided by PSU and from on-site interviews and observations, NASA finds PSU and the Department to be in compliance with Title IX, but recommends implementation of a number of recommendations to strengthen compliance with Title IX. NASA’s compliance recommendations are tailored to help the University and Department create more inclusive learning environments and to better ensure that all students have appropriate access to important information relating to sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and safety.

We have also included a summary literature review on gender equity and STEM programs as an appendix to our compliance report to further assist PSU in its ongoing equal opportunity efforts in this area. For additional civil rights technical assistance, you may also wish to visit our MissionSTEM website at http://missionstem.nasa.gov/. The MissionSTEM Web site is designed to assist NASA grant recipients in meeting their compliance obligations under NASA’s equal opportunity laws and regulations. To this end, the site provides a host of information and resources on compliance requirements as well as promising practices of our grant recipients.
NASA also observed a number of promising practices of PSU and the Geosciences program in this review. For example, the Graduate School has a policy provision that specifically addresses discrimination and harassment in the context of graduate student terminations. The explicit inclusion of this provision in the Graduate Student policy and the utilization of the Title IX coordinator’s office in connection with resolving such matters is an important means of demonstrating the Graduate School’s commitment to students’ rights under equal opportunity laws.

PSU was very helpful in facilitating NASA’s review prior to, during, and after the on-site visit. NASA wishes to thank Vice Provost for Affirmative Action, Ken Lehrman, III, as well as the faculty, staff, and students of the Geosciences program, for their participation in the review.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release the report and related records upon request. If NASA receives such a request, it will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personal information which, if released, could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please contact Ms. Sharon Wagner, on 202-358-0953 or swagner@nasa.gov.

Sincerely,

Brenda R. Manuel
Associate Administrator for
Diversity and Equal Opportunity

Enclosures

cc:
Ken Lehrman, III, Vice Provost for Affirmative Action
Dr. Timothy L. Bralower, Department Head, Department of Geosciences
Dr. William E. Easterling, III, Dean, College of Earth and Mineral Sciences