

## **University Senate Research Committee Meeting**

(online)

19 May 2023

1:00 PM

**In attendance:** M Scott, K Wood, R Rutenbar, C Hay, P Morel, F Luyster, Z Xia, D Tudorascu, S Wells, A Puniani, Arlet M, Kear R

**Approval of Minutes:** The April 21, 2023 meeting minutes were approved.

### **Old items of discussion**

Several topics were raised regarding issues in the research environment: turnover, recruitment/retention, career development, and postdoc/graduate student career choices. Specific actions were proposed, such as discussing these issues with HR and providing data to support further discussions.

### ***High turnover rate in research finance team***

The loss of experienced staff members was a major concern, seen as disruptive and challenging for various departments. The idea of creating distinct tracks for personnel at the faculty, staff and research finance levels was suggested, similar to what other well-operated institutions like the World Institute have implemented. This track approach may reduce burnout among staff members and provide career growth opportunities.

### ***Hiring and retaining technical staff***

The conversation also touched on the difficulties in hiring and retaining technical staff, graduate students, and postdocs. Recognized challenges included competition from industry salaries and the need for more standardized salaries and greater transparency in compensation. Additionally, the importance of creating meaningful career paths for staff scientists was emphasized to improve retention and satisfaction among research staff. The meeting participants acknowledged the need for further discussions on these topics and suggested involving HR representatives to address these concerns and seek solutions. Amanda Godley, from the Provost's office, was mentioned as leading a national conversation on the topic.

### ***Changing landscape for postdocs and graduate students***

The discussion also touched upon shifting perception of academia as a career choice, with more students opting for opportunities outside academia due to better pay and conditions. This change was attributed to the challenges that academics face in securing grants and the increased awareness of alternative career paths. Some SRC participants emphasized the advantages of academia, such as flexibility in pursuing research questions, compared to industry. However, it was acknowledged that academia also has its limitations, including the need to secure funding and the pressure to cover salaries. Work-life balance was considered an important factor, especially for students, and it was suggested that the approach to work and life integration might

need to evolve. The challenges of academic promotion and the demands of editorial work were also discussed, with concerns about the balance of pro bono work and grant-funded research.

### **Research update – Rob A. Rutenbar, SVC for Research**

Rob Rutenbar provided updates on research security discussions, the formation of a central organization for research security (RSI-IASO), concerns about the U.S. debt default, and the potential impact of a Supreme Court case on affirmative action policies in academia.

#### ***Implementing new research security measures.***

Rob Rutenbar mentioned ongoing conversations with federal government officials regarding the implementation of new research security rules stemming from the Chips and Science Act. He noted that he had a meeting with NSF leadership, including Rebecca Kaiser and Kelvin Droegemeier, who is an advisor to NSF. The meeting included representatives from APLU, where Rob served as one of the VPR delegates. They discussed the creation of a central organization for research security called the Research Security and Integrity Information Sharing and Analysis Organization, also known as RSI-IASO. This organization is meant to connect with research universities on best practices and guidance for research security and integrity. Rob highlighted that the RSI-IASO meetings involved various stakeholders, including provosts, presidents, and leads on international engagement and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). They discussed the challenges and nuances of implementing research security measures, especially for new assistant professors. It was emphasized that many universities, even those with significant federal funding, face challenges in complying with these requirements. There is a disparity in resources between large and smaller institutions and the legislation is not very prescriptive, leaving room for interpretation and operationalization by organizations like NSF.

***Other topics mentioned.*** The potential for a U.S. debt default was also brought up, with concerns about its consequences for research funding. Additionally, there was mention of a Supreme Court case that could affect affirmative action policies and the potential ripple effects on research and recruiting in academia. There is uncertainty about how these changes might unfold; universities will need to adapt to new constraints that may emerge due to the Supreme Court's decision.

### **Future items of discussion**

Topics identified as areas requiring further attention and follow-up in the future included ongoing HR-related issues and EHR data challenges.

Previous discussions with Tom Songa, one of the co-chairs of the Faculty Affairs Committee, included criteria for promotion. Another important topic concerned understanding the status of faculty members, specifically regarding tenure. There was a concern about ensuring that “research” positions are not considered second-class faculty positions. These issues were identified as important matters for further consideration.

There was a discussion about issues related to electronic health record (EHR) data and the challenges faced by faculty members who have dual appointments between the University of Pittsburgh and UPMC. Suggestions included infrastructure improvements, potential collaboration with UPMC, the value of EHR data for clinical research, and leveraging biological data. The importance of drawing upon successful models from other institutions like Mass General and UCSF was emphasized.

**The meeting was adjourned at 12:58 pm.**

**The next Research Committee meeting:** September 15 (unless issues arise in the meantime)

**Minutes submitted by:** K Wood and M Scott