

University Senate Research Committee Meeting

(online)

15 September 2023

1:00 PM

In attendance: Scott M, Wood K, Yates B, Hay C, Conner B, Rutenbar R, Caldwell A, Luyster F, Reed D, Holland M, Dauria E, Arlet M, Sethi A, Wells S, Hauck H, Kear R, Dahiya S.

Absent with apologies: Xia Z

1. Approval of Minutes: The May 2023 meeting minutes were approved.

2. Welcome to new members

New members were warmly welcomed, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of student members, whose perspective and proposals for relevant topics are important to committee discussions. Committee members were also encouraged to review the mission statement on the Senate's website to ensure alignment with the objectives of their committee service.

3. New policy committee: Research and Clinical Training with Human Cadaveric Material Policy Committee

A new policy related to research and clinical training on human cadaveric materials was discussed, specifically the importance of having a faculty member volunteer to join this committee to provide input on the policy's formation was stressed. Qualifications for policy committee membership was provided by Brittany from the Policy Office, with relevant knowledge of the subject matter and its context be one of the most important criteria. are important. Persons interested in volunteering for committee assignment were instructed to contact Robin Kear.

4. Research update – SVC for Research, Rob Rutenbar

Several policy matters were discussed, including the establishment of a new committee focusing on centers and institutes, and a policy related to data governance. It was noted that some of the current policies dated back to the late 1980s, which created certain challenges given the changes in the institution.

The committee also addressed issues concerning data management, particularly regarding federal regulations and compliance requirements. The importance of managing data securely was emphasized and the implications of upcoming federal laws, such as the Chips and Science Act, were highlighted.

Questions were raised about the possibility of new COVID-related regulations or boosters. It was mentioned that COVID management efforts had been temporarily scaled back during the summer, but a more comprehensive medical advisory infrastructure is now in place.

5. Discussion of new interim policy on data management– VC for Research Protections, Bill Yates

The SRC was reminded of evolving federal regulations and requirements for data management and sharing. The interim policy was introduced as a needed foundational policy to address the immediate data management issues faced by the institution. It is meant to be a temporary measure to address the pressing concerns related to data management. It serves as a starting point to establish a more comprehensive and detailed permanent policy that will be developed by a larger policy committee in the future.

The interim policy is the work of an interim committee that was formed and tasked with formulating an interim policy that outlines the university's stance on data management, including ownership, retention, and sharing. Committee members were from various relevant departments, including IT, the Privacy Office, several deans, the Council's Office, and the University Library. Aspects of the policy discussed included its implications for data retention, security, sharing, and the need for infrastructure and support for researchers to comply with the policy requirements. The need for standard guidelines and templates for data management plan were considered, as well as the challenges associated with data sharing and publication.

The permanent policy will likely delve deeper into the specifics of data management, addressing various types of data across different fields and establishing guidelines for proper management and sharing. Developing the permanent policy will involve more extensive discussions and consultations to ensure that it meets the needs and standards of the institution while complying with federal regulations and best practices in data management.

The interim policy will be subject to review and potential approval by the Faculty Assembly and Senate.

6. Discussion of issues that emerged from the recent faculty assembly

- Graduate student health policy

A sudden increase in copays for treatments under the graduate student health policy seemed to have been implemented without sufficient consultation with relevant stakeholders, including Robin's office and the group overseeing student and faculty matters. Even Dr. Saleem Khan, the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the SOM, was reportedly unaware of these changes beforehand. There was an expression of uncertainty about the rationale behind this significant rise and mention of the availability of some interim funds for supporting graduate students with unexpected medical expenses. However, there

seemed to be limited information on the specifics of these funds. Several queries were raised regarding the implementation and implications of the new policy. Concerns have been raised by students about the implications of the policy change on their out-of-pocket costs. Further investigation into this matter was suggested and others were encouraged to engage with graduate student representatives to explore options for accessing hardship funds to cover the increased medical expenses.

- Messaging for graduate student security and safety issues

Concern was expressed about a relative deficiency of readily available information for graduate students, when compared to undergrads, particularly those situated in UPMC-owned buildings as opposed to Pitt-owned ones. The issues raised included the policies in place during critical situations like an active threat or the procedures for evacuating the buildings. Although it was noted that some information was available in the buildings, it was not widely known or discussed among faculty and graduate students. It was suggested that efforts should be made to compile and disseminate this information to graduate students. Additionally, the idea of offering CPR and "stop the bleed" classes to graduate students was also proposed, emphasizing the importance of raising awareness about these resources.

- Faculty notification of \$8,000 increase in the graduate student stipend, along with fringe benefits, occurred with only one month's notice.

While acknowledging the positive impact on students, there was an expression of dissatisfaction with the lack of prior notice, which hindered effective budget planning. Some attendees shared their experiences and emphasized the challenges posed by the abrupt change in the stipend. One member mentioned an email suggesting support to cover the increase, which was later partially or completely retracted. Concerns were raised about the implications for budgeting and the advice provided to seek assistance from the respective cost center in case of financial constraints.

7. Focus for the SRC for this academic year

Input was sought from committee members on what to focus on in the coming months throughout the academic year. Participants were encouraged to share any specific issues that were relevant to their areas or that they believed deserved more attention and improvement. This input would serve as a basis for addressing concerns and providing feedback.

Rob Rutenbar: Noted the continuous cycle of rulemaking and adjustments at the national level, with an ongoing expectation of federal requirements for incorporating research security regulations. He emphasized the necessity of keeping up with the evolving regulatory landscape and acknowledged the significant changes that will need to be implemented. The role of the National Science Foundation was highlighted, particularly

Rebecca Kaiser and Mike Lauer, in addressing these issues publicly. It was agreed that the topic should be revisited in future discussions.

Zongqi Xia conveyed via M Scott his desire to follow up on a few initiatives he had been leading over the past year, especially to discuss the availability of patient data and making it more accessible on the PITT side without the need to rely solely on UPMC. Regarding potential participants in this discussion, Mark Henderson, the Chief Information Officer (CIO), was mentioned due to his involvement in previous discussions. It was acknowledged that Mark Henderson's input was valuable, given his prior experience in a different institution where he had successfully implemented ideas to similar challenges.

8. New business and actions taken last year, requiring more information

- Topic of compensation updates

Referencing a previous presentation by Tina and others on the staffing team. The aim was to have a similar presentation for research personnel, highlighting its significance. The importance of understanding how things are changing and the potential benefits was emphasized. However, it was noted that specific dates for such presentations, possibly by the end of the year, are still pending. The matter will be followed up on updates, provided as they become available. There was brief mention of engaging with the HR department for potential discussions.

- Recommendation per R Rutenbar to invite Barr von Oehsen, the new director of the Pittsburgh Supercomputer Center (PSC) and the Vice Chancellor for Research Computing, to speak at an SRC meeting. Barr von Oehsen has expertise in successfully proposing significant infrastructure projects at the national level and an extensive background in mathematical physics with experience in cyber infrastructure. His role as a bridge between the center of research computing and the CIO was highlighted.

- Challenges related to the institution's current payment system, particularly regarding compliance and the thresholds for reporting

It was acknowledged that the previous payment system, Vincent, faced viability issues and that the search for a replacement had been ongoing. The complexities of the federal regulations and the necessity of finding a suitable alternative were discussed at length. Suggestions were made about potential solutions, including collaboration with the IRB and exploring different payment options. It was agreed that finding a more comprehensive solution, possibly through collaboration with the CFO's office, would be beneficial. Additionally, the need for improved transparency regarding tenure expectations, especially concerning grant roles, was highlighted. The discussion concluded with an acknowledgment of the need for further exploration across different departments and the potential involvement of relevant faculty members in the conversation.

- Complexity of paperwork and procurement processes related to research grants

It was suggested that the procedures and the reason behind their complexity be explored, especially as regards securing independent contractors. It was noted that this area falls under R Rutenbar's jurisdiction, but it also intersects with the CFO's responsibilities. The group acknowledged that the process involves multiple offices within the organization and agreed to identify all the touchpoints involved.

- Challenges associated with obtaining documentation aligned with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements

The process, increasingly complex over the years, has become difficult as concerns the several stages, such as pre-award and post-award activities. The group recognized the need for collaboration across various departments to address the issue effectively.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:53 pm.

The next Research Committee meeting: Oct 20 (unless issues arise in the meantime)

Minutes submitted by: K Wood and M Scott