

University Senate Research Committee Meeting (online)
March 27, 2020

1:00 PM

In Attendance: A. Agarwal, C. Bonneau, A. Cohen, J. Cooper, A. Crunk, D. DeAlmeida, D. Harrell, M. Hravnak, M. Holland, G. Huber, M. McCall, R. Melham, P. Morel, L. Rodzicz, R. Rutenbar, D. Salcido, S. Sant, A. Sethi, P. Smolinski, A. Stephany, J. Woodward and W. Yates

The minutes of the 28 February 2020 meeting were accepted as standing.

R. Rutenbar gave an overview of the University situation in this period of the Covid-19 shutdown. There is a dedicated tab on the university Covid-19 response website for researchers which can be found [here](#). Information concerning changes to policy and FAQ can be found at this site. Federal agencies have stated that salaries from research grants can be continued to be paid to graduate students and postdocs. At this time only essential research activities can continue. There have been meetings of the Associate Deans of research in the various schools to determine what is essential research. Research in physics and chemistry has been halted. In the SOM there are number of clinical trials and research protocols that are continuing. Dr. Jeremy Berg is the contact person for the SOM on these issues.

There are three states of building accessibility (closed, open to authorized personnel and student buildings open to authorized students). Associate Deans for Research are working to determine if greater authority to operate can be granted. Buildings that are connected to medical facilities, such as hospitals have health monitoring (heat gun, questions) in place and access will be refused to anyone with a temperature or symptoms. Monitoring of the card swipe data is beginning in order to make sure essential people are those who are accessing the building.

The office of the SVC Research is working with the medical school to organize requests and donations of supplies such as personnel protective equipment (PPE) and reagents. Steve Reis of CTSI is working to organize and coordinate COVID 19 research activities on campus. The Office is also working on how to manage current corporate research to determine if work can proceed. Moreover, care is being exercised in new corporate research contracts to determine if the work can be accomplished and including provisions of “force majeure” in contract language, so that companies cannot insist that work proceed under any circumstances. The University must manage safety in situations where corporations are requesting continued research. The different Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) schools have taken a range of actions from not accepting any new corporate research (Georgia Tech University) to accepting university-controlled research (most schools, including Pitt).

R. Rutenbar stated that the university is trying to organize the efforts for such things as PPE, reagents and 3-D printing of any devices or parts. The point person for the management of

donations, inventory and requests of virus-related materials is Chris O'Donnell of pulmonary medicine in the Department of Medicine.

S. Sant stated that the School of Pharmacy is collecting PPE and who should be contacted for this? She also mentioned that her lab would be able to help with 3D printing of plexiglass shields for pharmacists and asked if such efforts were being coordinated.

R Rutenbar said that UPMC was coordinating 3D printing and that engineering was also involved. David Vorp in engineering is a contact person for this.

Steve Reis, the Director of the CTSI is putting the All of US project on hold and is coordinating Covid-19 research efforts. A pilot grant program has been put into place and details can be found [here](#)

J. Cooper stated that it was important for PIs to realize that trainees, such as graduate students and postdocs could not be forced to work during this time.

R. Rutenbar said that Assoc. Provost Nathan Urban is in charge of graduate academics. Graduate students and trainees have the right to discuss their situation with an independent intermediary and to refuse duties that they feel imperil their safety. There is a link on the Provost's office website related to this topic.

R. Rutenbar announced that a volunteer site is being set up to allow those who are idle and would like to help to get involved in various activities. Kathy Humphrey, SVC of Engagement, is leading this effort and information will be forthcoming.

W. Yates stated that the electronic conflict of interest (COI) disclosure system was close to being rolled out but has been paused to be released at a later date. The 2019 disclosures will remain valid and there is no mechanism for a 2020 disclosure. R. Rutenbar noted that it is possible that the delay will be until July 15.

W. Yates noted that DLAR has made changes to its procedures by reducing the frequency of cage changes. He stated that it was very unlikely that DLAR was going to require any additional help with animal care from volunteer researchers. Animal ordering is suspended and researchers should not initiate new experiments. There is a system in place that allows researchers to request exceptions to these rules, and this [form](#) can be found at the IACUC website. W. Yates stated that over 90% of these requests had been granted so far, as they were mostly justified or were directly related to the Covid 19 virus.

G. Huber followed this up with stating that the IRB will has a similar process in which studies are placed in a three tier system based on level of importance. Details can be found [here](#).

W. Yates said that under the current circumstances NIH is now allowing online IRB meetings.

J. Woodward stated that the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP) is moving to process proposals related to the Covid 19 virus as fast as possible.

P. Morel said that the NIH deadline for research and trainee grant applications has been delayed to May 1. J. Woodward responded that the OSP website has real time posting of changes in federal funding programs, which can be found [here](#).

A. Cohen asked about survey research studies on the stress burden on the elderly from the Covid 19 pandemic. W. Yates stated that the IRB would as quickly as possible in reviewing such studies.

M. Hravnak stated that some graduate students have concerns about completing degree progress on time, especially those Masters' students who may need to perform additional work to complete their degrees. R. Rutenbar said that this is a known concern, however safety is the top priority. M. Scott pointed out that sometimes the thesis committees may be able to adjust expectations in order to allow students to finish their degrees on time.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:10 pm.

Next meeting: April 24, 1 pm (anticipated to be online)

Minutes submitted by P. Morel and P. Smolinski