

University Senate Research Committee Meeting

(online)

29 January 2021

1:00 PM

In Attendance: Amerigo, C. Bonneau, A. Crunk, D. Harrell, M. Holland, L. Johnson-Osho, M. McCall, P. Morel, E. Oyler, R. Rutenbar, D. Salcido, S. Sant, M. Scott, A. Sethi, P. Smolinski, A. Stephany, V. So, J. Wallace, W. Yates,

The Committee welcomed Vice Provost for Faculty Diversity, John Wallace, and Director of Faculty Diversity & Development, Lorie Johnson-Osho to the meeting.

Dr. Johnson-Osho, who joined Pitt in December 2020, gave a presentation about the resources that are available to faculty for increasing diversity. The resources for recruitment include a packet for search committees and [other information](#). Pitt is a member of the [National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity](#) and faculty have access to a number of seminars and educational activities focused on retention of a diverse faculty. Other resources are available in the Health Sciences including the Academy of Master Educators, and the Office of Academic Career Development that organize various seminars and training sessions.

John Wallace presented new initiatives that are ongoing at Pitt at the moment.

1. Pitt has recently joined the National Institutional Change network ([IChange](#)). Fifty four institutions are participating so far the program is a three year systematic change initiative to cultivate a more inclusive and diverse campus cultures. The first year is a self-assessment of the campus, the second year will involve action planning and the plans will be implemented in the third year. This program will allow for data collection on diversity issues, the development of strong recruitment and retention strategies and the ability to connect and interact with other institutions in the network.
2. Pitt has initiated a cluster hiring initiative with the aim of hiring 50 faculty from diverse backgrounds across the University over the next 4 years: 25 in the Health Sciences and 25 in the Provost area. There is an application process for departments who wish to participate which can be found [here](#)
3. Pitt is applying to NIH for a [FIRST grant](#) which is designed to increase institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion and to create a culture on campus that supports diversity and inclusion.

The committee requested that the slides be made available for future reference. J Wallace stated that they were not yet finalized but that they would be made available once they are finalized.

The committee thanked J. Wallace and L. Johnson-Osho for the very informative presentation and P. Morel mentioned that the research committee would be hosting a University-wide showing of the movie, Picture a Scientist. J Wallace asked that we let his office know when this would happen so that they could advertise it.

The minutes from the 18 December 2020 meeting stand as approved

Picture a Scientist showing:

The license to show the movie has been purchased and the next step is to finalize a date for the showing and panel discussion. D. Salcido said that the Senate Plenary is planned for the first week in April and thus we should look to find a suitable time and date during that week. We will ask the film maker to participate in the panel discussion, and there was some discussion about other potential panel members. These include Christine Schmidt from the University of Florida, who has developed a highly diverse faculty in her department of Biomedical Engineering. Other suggestions were Lorie Johnson-Osho and maybe a member of the community.

The film company can arrange for a virtual showing that would last 72 hours and would culminate in the panel discussion.

Action Item: Penny will ask Lori Molinaro to contact the film company to find out whether the film maker would be available for a panel discussion in the first week of April

Action Item: Shilpa will ask Christine Schmidt for her availability to participate in this panel.

Research Report from Rob Rutenbar,

Covid 19 update

R. Rutenbar gave an update on the status of COVID-19 vaccination. Faculty and staff should check on the Pitt coronavirus [website](#), which is updated on a daily basis. Pitt does not have vaccine as yet but is slated to receive some. Some Pitt students and faculty are being vaccinated through UPMC, if they are in the IA category. Pitt just sent out a vaccine survey and is asking all to fill this out so that they can plan vaccine distribution.

P. Morel mentioned that the distribution of vaccine is a little haphazard as she was able to get vaccinated at UPMC Mercy on the South Side. M. Holland stated that this may be because they needed to use excess vaccine that could not be kept after thawing.

IP Policy roll out

R Rutenbar informed the committee that the IP policy has been approved and that his office was working on developing the guidance document, which was likely to take some time. He mentioned that the fact that some people had signed Option 2 of the previous IP assignments creates some issues for the implementation of the new policy. This option allowed people to take advantage of new revenue distribution matrices as they become available. The new IP policy provides a more generous distribution of revenue to inventors and their departments. In order to be fair to everyone, the decision has been to apply the new distribution matrix to all past, present and future deals regardless of which IP assignment option was signed. In the future there will be a single IP assignment option which will be signed by all new hires.

P. Morel asked that the committee be shown the language of this new assignment as well as guidance document.

New policy on conflict of commitment and outside activity

R Rutenbar announced that the conflict of commitment and outside activity policy will be revised. The old policy is very short and was written in 1988. The committee will be kept informed as this moves forward.

Other Business

M. Scott attended a webinar organized by ResearchAmerica! whose goal was to highlight priorities and programs at NIH to help researchers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. She provided details of some of the initiatives being proposed by NIH to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on early career as well as established investigators. Her report can be found on the next page.

The meeting was adjourned at 3 pm. The next Research Committee meeting will be on 26 February 2021 at 1:00 pm.

Minutes submitted by P. Morel and S. Sant

NIH update from Drs. Larry Tabak (Deputy Director of the NIH), and Mike Lauer (Deputy Director of Extramural Research) – 1/11/21

Goal of the webinar organized by ResearchAmerica! was to highlight priorities and programs at NIH to help researchers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

They based their assessment of needs on the COVID-19 impact survey that was sent out a couple of months ago. They had 46k responses.

Main priorities:

1. Early career scientists, including trainees and early career faculty

- concern is about career trajectory
- new Stephen Katz award (no preliminary data required, R01 level funding)
- Extension of eligibility of ESI status
- help for graduate students/post-docs given that the number of available faculty positions has fallen by ~70% - suggested extensions to career development awards (K as well as F grants) – not much additional concrete right now

2. Established investigators at risk for losing funding

- Continuation of the policy of allowing preliminary data submission AFTER submission of a grant (able to submit up to 30 days prior to the study section meeting)
- Instructions to reviewers to disregard temporary declines in productivity because of the pandemic
- suggestion that there may be flexibility in use of funds associated with administrative supplements so that this money could be used after the end date of the parent grant

3. Funding of high-priority clinical trials

- not just COVID-19 related

Some important questions from the audience:

1. help for women in the workforce – no clear answer but they both recognized this is a significant issue
2. help for infrastructure especially animal facilities because of changes required due to COVID-19 – this is being discussed and hopefully more information about this will follow. General recognition that this is also a major and important problem that should be addressed.