

University Senate Research Committee Meeting

(online)

28 May, 2021

1:00 PM

In Attendance: D DeAlmeida, D Harrell, M. Holland, M Kenney, M. McCall, P. Morel, E. Oyler, L. Rodzicz, R Rutenbar, S. Sant, M. Scott, A. Sethi, P Smolinski, A Stephany.

The minutes from the 30 April 2021 meeting stand were approved as submitted.

Research Report from Rob Rutenbar

Covid 19 update

R. Rutenbar reported that the Health Advisory Committee is meeting regularly to discuss how Pitt will be changing his Covid stance. He stated that M. Holland is on this committee and can give a more detailed update. M Holland reported that there are multiple discussions going forward on how Pitt will alter its posture in light of new State and Federal guidelines. He indicated that whereas occupancy limits may be relaxed it is likely that masking will still be required.

P. Morel asked why Pitt was slow to create new directives for research labs. The research enterprise is being significantly impacted by restrictions on lab occupancy and there is now widespread vaccination. M. Holland responded that new directives will be forthcoming, maybe by the end of July.

Problems with hiring and retaining technical staff

P. Morel raised an issue that was brought up at a recent faculty meeting concerning the fact that it is often not possible to attract and retain good technical staff due to problems with being able to offer them competitive salaries. In addition, HR is reluctant to allow meaningful raises that might be necessary in order to retain qualified staff.

R Rutenbar noted that HR is undergoing a large overhaul of its systems. This is a large project that will create a more streamlined and sophisticated system. The aim is to create a transparent career path with defined job titles and roles. The present system is very disorganized with multiple job titles and job descriptions.

L Rodzicz noted that Staff Council has been concerned about this issue for some time and that they had been advocating for increases in staff compensation. The requirement for annual appraisals is a step in this direction. A Stephany agreed and described how difficult it can be to hire and retain staff.

S. Sant noted that attracting the right candidates can be difficult as it is not clear how positions are advertised.

M Scott noted that she has encountered a great deal of rigidity from HR when trying to provide a raise for someone and ultimately this person had to leave for a different position.

M McCall agreed that she was aware of similar problems

R Rutenbar suggested that the committee talk to Dave DeJong, SVC for business and operations as he is in charge of HR and other operations.

ACTION ITEM: The committee will invite SVC DeJong to an upcoming meeting

Lack of on campus day care:

P Morel raised the issue of a lack of on-site day care for faculty, student and staff. This was brought to the fore during the pandemic when many faculty and staff struggled to juggle work and childcare obligations. It is also noted that it can create difficulties when recruiting promising new research faculty who may have small children. The existing facility, UCDC, is excellent but it is much too small and has a 3 year waiting list!

L Rodzicz noted that D DeJong has addressed Staff Council on this issue and that he was working with UPMC to address these concerns

ACTION ITEM: The committee will D DeJong to address this issue also when he addresses the committee

Research support for faculty impacted by COVID 19 shutdowns

P Morel asked if Pitt Research has any plans to provide support to researchers impacted by the pandemic shutdowns.

R Rutenbar replied that the Provost will be allocating funds to the Deans of the Schools to be used for this purpose. These funds will be distributed by individual Deans, although it is not clear how this will be handled.

R Rutenbar also noted that Office of Sponsored Programs has created a website that provides instructions on how to apply for No Cost Extensions to existing grants.

He also noted that the Federal budget for research is increasing such that agencies are in a better position to be more flexible with funding for investigators impacted by Covid.

Trade Compliance

R Rutenbar announced that the Office of Trade Compliance (formerly Export Control Services) has been moved to the Office of Research Protections, under Bill Yates. This was done to provide more staff help to the office especially as the landscape around international collaborations and activities is becoming more complicated.

Committee Chair and co-Chair

P Morel asked for nominations from the committee for Chair and co-Chair to serve in the upcoming year. She noted that this could be her last year on the committee as an elected member, and she would be happy to help whoever wants to take on the role of Chair in the next year. Based on the suggestions we will send out a ballot via email.

ACTION ITEM: Please indicate if you are interested in being considered for Chair or co-Chair by sending an email to P Morel (morel@pitt.edu) and S Sant (shs149@pitt.edu)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15pm. The next Research Committee meeting will be in mid July – date to be determined

Minutes submitted by P. Morel and S. Sant