University Senate Research Committee Meeting
(online)
17 March 2023
1:00 PM

In attendance: R Rutenbar, K Wood, M Scott, P Morel, M Holland, B Yates, S Mutchler, D Reed, F Luyster, M Arlet, S Wells, C Hay, M Linares

Approval of Minutes: The February 17, 2023 meeting minutes were approved.

Old items of discussion: None

Update from My-IACUC planning committee – M Scott and B Yates
The current ARO system was built by Huron 15 years ago. Today's Huron uses experts doing best practices working with many institutions. The new ARO system, My-IACUC has a much more advanced backbone (new tools, new features) than the current system, which is built on an old Microsoft system that will cease to be maintained in a few years. The new My-IACUC system will be kept up to date by Huron forever. My-IACUC is fundamentally different in structure from the old system; while existing protocols in ARO will not be automatically transferred over, they can be cut and pasted into the new system. For existing protocols, there will be a 3-year transition period from the old system to the new system. The new system will have to be used for submitting new protocols. There will be unilateral communication from My-IACUC to CAMS, integrating the two systems. PIs will also be able to link their IACUCs with relevant grants. There will be libraries of protocols in the new system that can be referenced for procedures, drugs, etc. It will increase the workload in the short term for the PIs but is expected over the long run to save time and remove the redundancy present in the current system. Because only new animal study protocols will have to be added into the new system, there is time to move over existing protocols before they expire. Stress levels can be reduced by advance planning to transition an existing protocol over to the new system a few months before it expires. Right now, the biggest thing going on is populating the libraries with the standards for procedures, drugs, etc. so that PIs will be able to just take them off the shelves.
Testing/tweaking will be going on throughout this year to make it compatible with Pitt's needs with full implementation expected to occur in the fall/winter of this year. Departments will be kept updated on progress of the implementation timeline and feedback will be encouraged.

New policy committee volunteer needed - M Scott and R Rutenbar

A faculty member from the SRC is needed to serve on the "University Centers and Research Institutes Policy Committee." The current Centers and Institutes Policy is 30 years old and predates the emergence of the world-wide web, so it doesn't include an obligation for a working web page. The governance architecture references positions that don't exist anymore. It predates the spin-out of UPMC and the emergence of the SOM and Health Sciences. It makes some assumptions about budget models in a particular RDF that under the restart budget model

no longer exist. How are the Centers and Institutes born, managed, curated, sunset – all of that is very dated in the current policy. There are exactly 4 centers (LRDC, UCIS, Uxor, Center for the History of Philosophy) under the 1980's policy and they are practically unknown to most; however, the McGowan and the Hillman Cancer Center (a 9-digit business unit) are not among them. The new policy committee will concern itself with bringing order to a very disorganized situation. The anticipated time commitment for persons serving on the policy committee is 12-15 hours/week for 1.5 years. P Morel will be serving as the Senate representative. M. Scott expressed interest in representing the SRC on the new committee.

Research update – Rob A. Rutenbar, SVC for Research

New Research Security Information. Federal rule making requires a draft of the rules be published in the Federal Register for a period of time to allow for comments. Pitt is talking with Rebecca Kaiser (lead on Research Security from the NSF) and Mike Lauer from the NIH on this, giving Pitt some input and advance insight on the rule-making process and the instructional training materials. The rule probably won't be super-prescriptive, but more of a "you need to do this kind of stuff; let us know how you do it." That is good in that the rule should not be 400 lines of what to do, but bad in that Pitt will have to figure out how to comply with it. It looks like the new research security requirements will get wrapped into the required Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR), requiring harmonization so that broad-spectrum requirements can be managed centrally, across upper and lower campuses. The challenge is to do it as efficiently as possible and the frequency of updates will depend on how often the feds change the rules; it will likely need to be done annually and Pitt will have to show that it has complied.

It is a proposed (not final) rule regarding foreign travel registration that will require advance registration and review of travel, as well as counselling of security risks associated with the travel. It is expected that this will be tough to implement and it will probably undergo changes due to comments and pushback, which is important to keep the rule from becoming heavy-handed and overly burdensome. FASEB should be encouraged to comment on the draft rule. Federally funded travel will no longer be able to occur without someone first being told about it. Only federal grant recipients who are travelling internationally will be affected, not foreign visitors to Pitt. M Scott will make sure this is on the radar of people at FASEB.

Comment period for the new NIH grant review criteria – CLOSED. The goal is to limit review to a more direct assessment of the impact of the proposed project and whether it can feasibly be done. The review will be rolled into 2 sections: 1) impact and significance, 2) approach and environment. This should lighten the burden on reviewers and allow PIs to focus their grants on getting good scores. Institutional environment won't be scored anymore, which should eliminate the bias that seems to favor certain institutions.

UPPDA Post-doctoral climate survey– Stephanie M Mutchler, PhD, UPPDA

The University of Pittsburgh Postdoctoral Association (UPPDA) has a board of 7 postdocs and works closely with the Office of Academic Career Development (OACD). OACD helps postdocs in

the Health Sciences with administrative matters. For postdocs in the Arts and Sciences or Engineering, Dr. Godley's office is available as well as a website. There are ombuds people to help postdocs negotiate and figure out the next best steps.

UPPDA works to connect postdocs with resources on campus. As of June 2022, there were 817 postdoc trainees, a number that has been trending downward everywhere in recent years. Postdocs fall into 2 classifications: associates (77%) and scholars (23%). Eighty percent are in the Health Sciences and more than fifty percent are foreign nationals. Males and females are equally represented (50% each). There are differences between postdoc associates and scholars in terms of pay and benefits. For associates, there are benefits and taxes are automatically taken from salary. For scholars, they are paid a stipend and taxes are not automatically taken. They also don't have flexible spending accounts (no pretax benefits) or Pitt-sponsored retirement accounts with matching contributions.

A postdoc climate survey is usually conducted every 2 years. Participation in the December 2022 survey was incentivized by 2 travel awards. The survey consisted of 35 questions. Answers were collected in a non-continuous, non-departmental way to protect anonymity of responders. There were 264 respondents from across campus. Most were associates and internationals from the SOM with 2 years or less time at Pitt. Twenty-five percent were at Pitt more than 2 years.

Answers to survey questions revealed the following:
Postdocs at Pitt are underpaid. Seventy-five percent don't make the NIH-recommended pay for scholars. Seven people made less than the minimum postdoc salary. Total pay was self-reported. Fewer than 50% got a raise exceeding the required cost-of-living increase. It is beneficial for Pitt to put people on training grants and NIH funding. While training grants look good on CVs, they are not available to foreign nationals. In response to an NIH request for more info on postdoc training, they need to be told that postdocs need an employee relationship with their institution in to get all the benefits that are possible.
Unaware of benefits. They don't know about compensated days (vacation and sick leave) or standard holidays. Otherwise, they are told by mentors not to take these days off. They also lack information on educational and parental leave benefits.
Need more cohesive onboarding. There is inadequate orientation and discussion with mentors about expectations and what constitutes a job well-done. Orientation is almost nonexistent for postdocs outside the Health Sciences.
Unaware of chain of command. Who provides answers to questions about taxes -(HR is only allowed to assist employees).
Sources of stress. 1) Finding their next position, 2) individual productivity, and 3) acquiring external funding. OACD is especially concerned with resources online for career development in and outside of academia.

Discussion/Comments
Academia does not sell itself well. It is hard to get postdocs for research labs. Other opportunities are now available: science consulting, data analysis, science policy. Many postdocs are going straight into industry. There needs to be security provided for postdocs as they go through the

last part of their training and transition to PI positions. Graduate students (predoctoral) want to learn better communication skills, understand anti-discrimination and equity issues in research. People aren't feeling very secure about the soft skills they develop outside of lab.

Award sizes are too small. The modular budget now is the same as in 1998. The money awarded doesn't cover the expenses of what you have to propose to get an award. The NIH's answer is training grants for postdocs or grad students, or not actually doing everything grant proposal. Trying to shift postdocs to training grants is problematic because it means they will lose all their benefits. It is also confusing for postdoc associates who are switched to training grants (scholar positions) because it brings uncertainty about getting to keep what they paid into their retirements. For clinical fellows on T32s, their departments step in and supplement their salaries so they get at least minimum pay and get to keep their salaries. More money federally is the right solution; Increasing the size of the federal minimum awards might help. Residents put on T32s are faced with finding new health care, which adds complexity and confusion.

Expectations of postdocs. OACD collects an exit survey, which revealed that more than 50% chose to do a postdoc because they wanted one thing and then changed their minds as they went through. The international scholars choose US postdoc experiences because it helps them later get a position in their home country. UPPDA is pushing for mentor-mentee contracts at hiring so both parties can lay out their expectations for the position. There needs to be a conversation and transparency about goals (number of papers and teaching volume). This may be facilitated by programs being formed that allow interaction between grad students and postdocs.

New items of discussion: M Scott was recently on Capitol Hill, on behalf of FASEB, shilling for more sustained funding for the NIH ($51 billion proposed). She remarked it was an interesting and valuable experience that she recommends to others (see how things work, who is there, where the offices are). Also needed is an increase for the NSF, in line with the Chips and Science Act, and other organizations that fund research, like the foundations.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:34 pm.

The next Research Committee meeting: April 21 (unless issues arise in the meantime)

Minutes submitted by: K Wood and M Scott