University Senate Research Committee Meeting
(online)
11 November 2023
1:00 PM

In attendance: Scott M, Wood K, Yates B, Dauria E, Pastin M, Burdsall M, Gallaher J, Morel P, Marsland A, Hauck H, Manley A, Reed D, Xia Z, Luyster F, Wells S, Arlet M, Holland M

Absent with apologies: Rutenbar R

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

2. **New policy committees**

It was announced that the Academic Visitor Policy Committee needs a volunteer from the faculty to assist with the committee. The Academic Visitor Policy's primary focus will be on determining the requirements and insurance coverage for visitors on campus. The existing visitor process in the departments is not uniform and a streamlined procedure is needed for all visitors coming to campus; this issue became more prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic with varying regulations. It was noted that summer undergraduate programs often receive stipends and might be eligible for coverage, but certain visitors, such as those on sabbaticals, might not be paid by the University and require appropriate coverage. The complexity of insurance coverage for foreign visitors was highlighted, particularly in the event of accidents in the lab. The need to consult HR and the office overseeing workers' compensation for clarification on coverage was acknowledged. The overall goal is to ensure that all necessary procedures are followed to legally bring visitors to campus, regardless of their category. An email will be sent out for interested faculty members to respond and volunteer.

Additionally, a policy has been proposed for decommissioning the consultant Conflict of Interest Policy (https://www.policy.pitt.edu/consultant-conflict-interest). The existing policy has become obsolete and there are already other policies in place that cover conflicts of interest. Meeting attendees were asked to review the policy and provide any comments or concerns.

3. **Research update** – SVC for Research, Rob Rutenbar

A research update was not available for this meeting.

4. **Regulatory update – Bill Yates**

The new visitor policy is nearing completion and will be implemented with a new charter. Implementation of interim data policies are in progress and a collaboration with Pitt IT is underway to develop tools for data archiving; updates and resources will be provided as

they become available. There are multiple bills in Congress that aim to tighten research security requirements, in addition to expected new regulations mandated by the Chips and Science Act and NSPM 33. The final regulations and implementation timeline are still unknown, but the release date for the regulations is anticipated to be early next year.

Discussion ensued about potential amendments that may impact funding for DEI and gain of function research, which has raised concerns. Per Mike Holland, possible channels for lobbying Congress on behalf of these areas of research are being explored: Pitt is part of AAU, ATLU, and AAMC, and usually signs on to letters these organizations write on behalf of the academic community; members of Congress are being briefed through the data office; and Pitt's connections with local representatives can be used to address issues relevant to the NIH. The continuing resolution keeps the NIH funded and there is good news in that the state legislature has passed funding at 2019 levels. Funding remains flat, but still significant (over $150 million). There is no limitation on tuition increases for the next year.

5. New Compensation Modernization Project – presentation by M Pastin (HR). Also attending from HR: James Gallaher and Mark Burdsall

The **compensation modernization project** came into being because the previous classification system was not keeping pace with market changes and needed to be updated. The objectives of the modern compensation program include closer market alignment, agility, ease of use, flexibility, transparency, and expanded career paths.
The project has been divided into three phases: development, deployment, and ongoing expansion. Phase one involved job baselines, creation of job families and sub-families, job catalogue creation, and mapping staff employees to the new structure. Phase two focused on introducing the job catalogue, pay grades and guidelines, and providing supporting documentation. The project is currently in phase 3, which involves the ongoing expansion of the project, with a focus on career ladders, establishing internal equity, and conducting regular internal and external equity review studies.
Career paths within the university can be progressed through, enabling personnel to become experts in their current roles and by moving within jobs. The career paths provide standardized pay ranges and consistent job functions across job families and sub-families. The pay ranges in the catalogue will be reviewed and updated annually as appropriate.

It was stated that the streamlined review process will provide clear career growth opportunities that should help with recruitment, retention, and visualizing a future career path at Pitt.

Following the presentation, a discussion ensued about challenges encountered during work on the compensation modernization project: how to address changes in job classifications, particularly regarding the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA); implementing

the new system required reevaluation to account for grant-funded salaries and management of overtime costs. Legal aspects of accurate job classifications were discussed.

Meeting attendees emphasized the importance of better communication and consultation, which was considered to have been inadequate and the cause of dissatisfaction among affected employees. Challenges in understanding and mapping unique skill sets to standard classifications were mentioned. Transparency issues with the new system, concerns about inconsistent implementations, and frustrations with poor mapping were also expressed.

The conversation expanded to broader issues in health centers, with concerns about exclusionary practices affecting faculty members with independent labs. The need for alternative HR models, faculty engagement, and individualized solutions was emphasized. Participants shared perspectives on challenges faced by principal investigators (PIs) in hiring and managing staff.

The discussion concluded with a commitment to reassess and improve processes, along with expressions of gratitude for feedback.

Links provided by M Pastin:

https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/human-resources/SitePages/Guide%20to%20Using%20the%20Staff%20Job%20Catalog.aspx

https://pitt.sharepoint.com/sites/human-resources/SiteAssets/SitePages/Staff%20Compensation%20Structure/Pay%20Grades.pdf

6. Update on previous items

The agenda for future meetings included discussions on graduate students, clinical trials, IT solutions, NIH updates, and the PITTS EI 3 Fellowship.

M Scott reached out to Dr. Godley to discuss matters related to graduate students, hopefully in the Dec meeting. Dr. Corby will also be contacted for a discussion on clinical trials and exploring the integration of IT solutions into that context. It was noted that meeting should focus on specific aspects for clarity and efficiency.

NIH circulated information about a simplified review framework effective next year, emphasizing the impact of science and the investigator's ability to carry out the research. This could have implications for grant writing and requires attention by committee members. A link was provided in the agenda.

NIH is also seeking feedback on updates to research misconduct regulations. The deadline for feedback is December 5th.

Promotion of the PITTS EI 3 Equitable Inclusive Innovation and Incubation Fellowship was encouraged by M Scott; it is a valuable initiative that could enhance our research funding portfolio.

The need for efficient time management and coordination of discussions with relevant experts was highlighted. The meeting ended with a reminder of the next research committee meeting and a call for input and collaboration.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:36 pm.

Next Research Committee meeting: Dec 15, 2023 (unless issues arise in the meantime)

Minutes submitted by: K Wood and M Scott