

University Senate Research Committee Meeting
22 January 2016
1:00 PM
156 CL

In Attendance: K. Barlow, E. Chasens, K. Erickson, G. Huber, M. Kovacs, R. Melhem, P. Morel and P. Smolinski, and J. Woodward

It was noted that minutes of the December 2015 meeting were sent by email.

The proposed mission statement of the Committee was sent out for an email vote and 10 positive acceptance votes were received. The mission statement is accepted.

Action Item: The mission statement will be sent to Lori Molinaro for posting on the Senate web site.

J. Woodward, Associate Vice-Provost for Research Operations, provided an overview of the research operations at the Office of Research since she started there a year ago. She stated that one goal is to improve communications including internal communication and communications between the staff and researchers. J. Woodward will continue to have meetings with the faculty in various Schools. Efforts will continue on trying to improve the dissemination of research information to faculty.

Other goals are to reduce the Office of Research staff turnover and understaffing, empower staff to make decisions and the development of an internship position with the School of Law. The Office of Research has hired 9 additional staff and Dr. Woodward is working to create a work environment built on teamwork and open communication.

Efforts are being made to increase the efficiency of Office of Research functions which include grants management, research agreements (clinical, corporate, non-disclosure, educational and community), federal contracts and data reporting. Benchmarking of 34 institutions found that a range of 2-10 days being required for pre-submission of proposals to the Office of Research prior to the proposal submission deadline. At Pitt the deadline was reduced to 3 days, from 5, and this seems to be working well. Corporate and clinical contracts are more complex and generally take more time than proposals. Dr Woodward recommended that faculty contact her directly if these contract negotiations are taking too much time. Several committee members told of how Dr. Woodward had provided rapid assistance in particular cases, and she was commended for the positive changes at the Office of Research since her arrival there. A request for funding to the University has been submitted for an all-electronic grants system that will include connections to Research & Cost Accounting and Research Compliance. This would give the Office of Research access to IACUC and IRB approval letters in a central location,

The Office of Research has a goal of increasing internal and external staff training and professional development. This will include asking faculty to give scientific talks so that the staff can become more invested in the research enterprise. Dr. Woodward asked for

suggestions from the committee for faculty who could talk about their research in lay terms to the Office of Research staff.

G. Huber mentioned that the Office of Research Compliance is also working on streamlining procedures and providing education to faculty and staff.

J. Woodward mentioned that the Office of Research & Cost Accounting deals with grants post award and efforts are being undertaken to streamline processing. This was in response to a comment that sometimes there is a delay in the creation of account numbers. J. Woodward is working to ensure that information is passed quickly to Research and Cost Accounting once a grant is awarded and to increase the communication and transparency between the two offices.

A comment was made that research and training modules should be simplified. J Woodward noted that she has instituted a change in the Office of Research that only those training modules required by funding agencies will be required at the time of grant submission. This essentially means that only the COI and research integrity modules are required prior to grant submission.

Comments were made that various Schools require budget and technical review prior to proposal submission. Most probably require a budget review while a technical review is probably not as widely required. There appears to be a wide range of requirements imposed by each school. A committee member posited out that this can create a problem when Schools insist that a 3% salary increase be budgeted for each year but when some NIH institutes are not allowing this cost. J Woodward is working with each School to streamline the process.

At the end of the discussion J Woodward passed out her card and encouraged all faculty to contact her directly if they are having an issue with anything at the Office of Research. She has been very receptive and efficient in dealing with problems, as several committee members attested to.

A discussion of the document “Initiatives for Advancing the Institution-Wide Strategic Plan” which was circulated to the Committee by email ensued. This document was forwarded to the Committee by Senate President Frank Wilson and it was noted that the appropriate Faculty Senate committees would soon be contacted by the working group leaders in order to organize continuing engagement. To date, the Research Committee has not been contacted by anyone from the working groups. G. Huber and J Woodward were not aware of this document and suspected that these groups had not yet been formed. They committed to inquiring further about this and reporting to the committee in the future. Concerns were raised about several of the proposed initiatives and about the fact that there does not seem to have been much faculty input. The research committee feels that it could contribute to initiatives 3, 5 and 6 since these all concern the research enterprise at the university. The committee plans to further discuss the initiatives at the next meeting.

There was a discussion of the dates of future meetings this term and religious holidays. A note or survey will be circulated with regard to the future meeting dates.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 pm.

Minutes submitted by: Patrick Smolinski and Penny Morel