

University Senate Research Committee Meeting (online)

June 12, 2020

1:00 PM

In Attendance: A. Crunk, D. Harrell, M. Holland, G. Huber, M. McCall, P. Morel, E. Oyler, L. Rodzicz, R. Rutenbar, D. Salcido, S. Sant, M. Scott, A. Sethi, P. Smolinski, V. So and W. Yates

The minutes for the 29 May meeting were approved.

Concerning the University research restart:

R. Rutenbar said 3 June was the formal restart of research at the University. There is a now a website that combines the recommendations of all the restart working groups that is organized by major. Decisions on restarting research for different labs is being made by the associated Deans and Directors based on the guidelines from the working groups. There is a committee for appeals for any restart decisions. A report will be given at the upcoming Board of Trustee's meeting regarding the shutdown, the restart and the financial picture of research activities. He stated that labs are coming back now. The timing of the restart of different areas was based building safety with the aim of opening buildings with greater lab facilities first.

P. Morel stated that there were some initial communication lapses regarding information on the restart.

M. Scott said she received communications through the lab manager rather than administrative channels.

R. Rutenbar said that the research email list is imperfect and will be reviewed in the future.

M. Scott stated that the Department Chairs may be bottlenecks in communication channels.

P. Morel commented that the speed of communication varied by department.

D. Salcido stated he received little departmental information regarding the restart.

S. Sant commented that the process might have been improved if the working groups had been allowed to share preliminary information.

R. Rutenbar stated that there is a limit to how much information can be shared before it has been decided upon.

P. Morel stated that there were several meetings of the working groups that was then followed by a period of limited information.

R. Rutenbar replied that based on input from the working groups, there was the need for administration to review and integrate the facets of the different plans. There was also the need to coordinate the plans with human resources and facilities.

He stated that the Health Care Advisory Group (HCAG) has been formed to recommend University-wide health standards and guidelines for all aspects of University function. This committee is chaired by Anantha Shekhar, SVC Health Sciences.

M. Scott stated that a careful restart may minimize the probability of future shutdowns.

R. Rutenbar said there a need to provide a plan for what to do in the event of a second wave of COVID in an area occurs.

M. Scott stated that before the shutdown some research groups may have been incorrectly self-classified as essential and remained open.

R. Rutenbar replied that a certain level of trust is assumed in labs performing the self-evaluation.

P. Morel commented during the shutdown there was a need to take care of unique animals, specimens, etc. which could not be restarted if stopped.

W. Yates asked if there will be educational programs for new researchers.

R. Rutenbar said that the Provost does hold workshops for new researchers and there will be COVID related education for personnel at all levels.

M. McCall asked what will be the impact of COVID related changes in protocols on manuscripts?

R. Rutenbar responded that there has been a need to change some IRB protocols in light of the COVID situation. Some data collection has been changed from in-person to online interviews. He said overall it will be difficult to predict the effect of the research shutdown on publications.

M. McCall further asked about how the COVID shutdown will affect tenure stream faculty.

R. Rutenbar said that virtually all research 1 level universities will extend the tenure clock by one year unless this not desired by the individual.

D. Salcido stated that a common item that come up on a faculty survey of the research reopening was if any bridge funding would be available.

R. Rutenbar said that there were no plans for expanding bridge funding. A letter has been written to congress about the issues facing university researchers caused by the COVID shutdown and hopefully congress will take some action on this. These difficulties are being faced by all comparable universities.

M. Scott asked if any bridge funding would be available for faculty renewing NIH research projects.

D. Salcido said that CTSI has developed some creative funding initiatives.

P. Morel stated that there have been difficulties in bring a Japanese Post-Doc to campus.

R. Rutenbar said due to the COVID shutdown the University has been shut to all international travel and visitors.

Concerning research with China:

P. Smolinski asked about any changes in the political situation with working with Chinese researchers.

R. Rutenbar said there is still political activity regarding Chinese foreign influence and the need to disclose any ties on the conflict of interest form. He stated an indictment has been issued by a grand jury in the case of the Harvard chemistry Professor who has been accused of lying about interactions with China. Also, there have been changes to the immigration policy related to Chinese personnel involved in the military-industrial complex. He further stated that there has been an Optional Practical Training (OPT) period post-graduation for Chinese graduates in the United States. The current administration is looking to restrict OPT with the narrative that his help U.S. graduates. U.S. industry is not supportive of this possibility.

P. Morel stated this sends a negative message to potential students.

D. Salcido asked if there are any plans to provide additional support to underrepresented minority researchers to build equity.

R. Rutenbar said that shutdown has led to a reevaluation of many aspects of the University function in all areas including research, education, facilities and others. He stated that the current strategic planning had been paused and will be reevaluated in light of the BLM movement.

P. Morel stated that her department is considering a bridge program to encourage researchers from underrepresented minorities. She also noted that Black students in several areas including the SOM have proposed changes to the curriculum and practices, including changing the name of buildings.

M. Scott commented that underrepresented minorities need role models.

M. McCall said that mentorship programs are also useful.

R. Rutenbar stated that the COVID closure has led to the shutdown of Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) on-campus activities at the University this summer.

L. Rodzicz asked when will other laboratories who are not included the initial phase of the restart be able to start and when will University activities return to normal?

R. Rutenbar responded that any lab that is ready to restart can submit their restart plan for evaluation. However, University activities are not back to normal and that in order to minimize personnel and contacts on campus those people who can work remotely should still work remotely.

It was agreed that the research committee meeting would be on July 10 at 1:00.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Minutes submitted by P. Morel and P. Smolinski