

MINUTES

**Commission on Research
February 13, 2025
3:30-5:00pm
Zoom**

Present: Nicole Pitterson (presiding), Gibran Ali, Thomas Archibald, Ella Atkins, Manish Basal, Thomas Bell, Jessica Crawford (for Leanna Blevins), Joseph Gaeddert, Ron Gibbons, Dan Givens, Randy Heflin, Ben Knapp, Andrew Krum, Barry Miller, Albert Pan, Jonathan Petters, Jorge Reyes, Karen Schnatterly, Ryan Stewart, Dan Sui, Michelle Theus, Quinn Thomas, Sophie Thompson, Esra Buyuktahtakin Toy, Caitlin Woodson

Absent with Notice: Alberto Cano

Absent: Esther Park, Daniel Pauly, Elizabeth Sicking, Janell Watson

Guests: Sandra Burks, April Myers, Melinda West

Research and Innovation Support: Kim Borkowski, Laurel Miner

Nicole Pitterson called the meeting to order at 3:32pm. A quorum was present.

1. Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the agenda. The motion carried.

2. Approval of or Announcement of approval and posting of minutes of December 12, 2024

Nicole Pitterson noted that these minutes have been voted on electronically and can be accessed on the [Commission on Research Sharepoint](#).

3. Presentation

Sandra Burks, Project Manager of the Research Faculty Leveling Project in the Office of Research and Innovation, gave a presentation on Research Faculty Leveling Project. The purpose of the project is to evaluate and implement a structure that supports the recruitment, retention and promotion of research faculty. This effort is supported and led by an advisory team, key stakeholder group and external consulting group, Ernst & Young. Information on current structure and distribution of research faculty ranks was reviewed, as well peer review analysis results and VT research leader listening tour feedback. Sandra opened the floor for discussion. Topics included creating categories for research faculty based on scope, experience, education, skillset; as well as creating a system of flexibility for growth within the promotion process and career pathing. In closing, Sandra invited a representative from the COR to join the stakeholders' group if desired to provide input and report back to the commission.

4. Other Items

Laurel Miner, Assistant Vice President for Research and Innovation and Chief of Staff, provided information on a proposed resolution to clarify postdoc eligibility in the faculty handbook which includes language clarification on the duration of a postdoctoral trainee period, notably that

individuals are eligible to be postdoctoral associates for a maximum of five years from the date of conferral of a terminal degree. Additionally, a statement has been included to recognize that extenuating circumstances may warrant an exception to the eligibility and will be reviewed by the Office of Research and Innovation. Examples of those exceptions will not be listed in the handbook; however, the Office of Research and Innovation will develop processes for potential exceptions. Laurel opened the floor for discussion. Comments included allowing postdoc individuals define their own careers and to include appointment language noting contract length in the faculty handbook.

Nicole Pitterson gave an update on the Innovation Campus Institute noting that the provost's office has drafted a charter for the formation of the Institute for Advanced Computing, a thematic institute that will house both academic and research activities. Per policy 13005, the Commission on Research (COR), as well as the Commission on Graduate and Professional Studies and Policies (CGPSP), will review and provide feedback, comments, questions and suggestions for revision. The COR will receive the draft on February 14, 2025 and will schedule another meeting on February 20, 2025 to discuss the charter as a group, with a final review submitted to the provost's office by the requested deadline of February 21, 2025.

Randy Heflin, Senior Associate Vice President for Research and Innovation, provided a general update on the current federal landscape and how it is impacting the research community. First, he described a funding freeze issuance on all sources of funds to allow the government to review what they want to fund and not to fund, as well as executive orders on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) indicating that the federal government would not fund DEI or allow federal contractors to conduct DEI activities. A federal judge issued a temporary restraining order, which has affected both of these activities. Next, he provided an update on a memorandum issued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) on establishing a cap of 15% on facilities and administrative (F&A) rates for all recipients of NIH funding. Virginia Tech's negotiated rate is 61% and this change would have a significant impact on the university. This change was temporarily blocked by a federal district court judge. There will be court consideration to evaluate arguments from plaintiffs to determine if it is appropriate for the federal government to cap the rate. Randy opened the floor for discussion and comments. Topics included impact of stop orders, what F&A covers, as well as noting that key university offices and various organizations that support higher education and research are deeply engaged in monitoring, assessing, and responding to the changing federal landscape.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 5:03pm.