

Minutes  
**COMMISSION ON RESEARCH**

7 May 2020

3:30pm-5:00pm

Zoom

CoR Documents available to CoR members in Team Drive: [CoR FY20](#)  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1LaHwyXGKUh\\_tfrfw1mt00nlm1ZqtfCMf](https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1LaHwyXGKUh_tfrfw1mt00nlm1ZqtfCMf)

Attendance (quorum met): Jeff Alwang, Raj Bhagavathula, Elizabeth Grant, Matt Holt, Uri Kahanovich, Kevin McGuire, Alan Michaels, Deborah Milly, Tasia Persson, John Phillips, Ellen Plummer (for Jack Finney), Karen Roberto, Wayne Scales (for Julie Ross), Erin Smith, Barbara Starling (for Ken Miller), Don Taylor, Stephanie Trout, Lijuan Yuan

OVPRI: Laurel Miner, Kim Borkowski

Members Absent: Ralph Badinelli, Nick Brown, Don Hempson, Blake Smith, Robert Vogelaar

Guests: Sandra Burks, Lynn Byrd, Wayne Scales

- I. [3:30] Introductions
- II. Approval of the Agenda
- III. Approval of Minutes
  - A. Minutes for 4/7/2020 approved electronically
- IV. [3:35] Continuing Business
  - A. OVPRI Update – D. Taylor / L. Miner
    - 1. Reviews of institutes and institute directors. As a university we have been delinquent on these reviews. This year, we plan to conduct and complete institute reviews for the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science (ICTAS) and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute (VTTI); as well as an institute director review of the Institute for Society, Culture and Environment (ISCE). A Commission on Research representative will serve as a liaison on the institute review committees.
    - 2. Ramp-up research. There are several groups, such as State Research Officers and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) who meet on a regular basis and the recommendations from those groups have been very useful. At VT, Mike Mulhare, Assistant Vice

President for Emergency Management, has been leading efforts to ramp-up as a university. Since research is a big part of re-opening, Dr. Taylor has been working with Mike and other key personnel in planning the phases for the university overall; as well as research operations. Instead of focusing on a date timeline, they are thinking more about what conditions might be in place to enable us to fully resume our research.

- a) Currently, the VPRI is required to approve essential research requests and research travel; however, in the next phase, the VPRI approval would be removed from the process and only the Dean, department head or lab manager level will approve.
  - b) In terms of conditions on phases, personal protective equipment (PPE) needs to be available and perhaps antibody testing available. One condition we likely cannot use is community spread. Instead, we will focus on protecting vulnerable communities. The goal is, to the greatest extent possible, to protect our population through social distancing, maintaining safe laboratory practices, cleanliness standards, and allowing the vulnerable to telecommute. We will likely have 3-5 phases that will lead the ramp-up on the research side that coincide with the university.
  - c) We are also closely coordinating the Fall semester, with a lean towards more normal operations. This would mean a fair number of students on campus, as well as some courses taught online by those vulnerable community members. The goal is to have as much in-person experiences we can to support the experiential learning that we find so valuable and has been part of our academic reputation. Should the need arise, there is a plan to pivot online in the Fall semester.
3. COVID-19 research seed funding. Our first deadline was yesterday and we received over 90 proposals. Dr. Matt Hulver may reach out to the CoR for assistance in reviews. Janet Webster is now categorizing proposals into groups to identify faculty members. Another exciting development is that VT Advancement is now asking for philanthropic money to help fund COVID-19 research.
  4. VPRI search. We have completed Zoom semi-finalist interviews and now we are coordinating finalists to visit campus. There will be some face-to-face meetings and Zoom meetings, as well as a tour of the campus facilities. Finalists are strong and have good backgrounds in leadership and scholarship who would be capable leaders in the university and in the role of VPRI.
  5. Questions
    - a) R. Bhagavathula asked who the institutes would be reporting to during the phased opening, would it be OVPRI? Whose permission would they need?

- (1) D. Taylor responded that we are currently in Phase I and researchers need permission to be in the lab from the Dean, Executive Director or appropriate Vice President, and then the VPRI approval. In Phase II, we will back off of the VPRI approval and have just Dean, Executive Director or appropriate VP sign-off on request.
- b) E. Smith inquired about the university's definition of a vulnerable population.
  - (1) D. Taylor answered that we are working on this now and noted that there are some privacy issues involved, and that to be effective, people would have to self-identify. There is a federal definition that identifies the vulnerable population; however, not sure if we are using this definition. Bottom line is we cannot ensure anyone's safety and our administration is very keen on protection of life, being lenient where we can be, but stringent with requirements for PPE and other safety measures to make it as safe as possible to be on campus.
- c) A. Michaels asked if it is likely that travel will be allowed prior to June 10 or after?
  - (1) D. Taylor responded that likely some travel will be permitted before June 10, such as field work; however, it needs to be deemed essential travel and requires approval from the Dean and VPRI. The Chrome River system now has an alert that describes the requirement of a pre-approval before you get reimbursed.

## B. Report of Ongoing Activities

- 1. University Library Committee – E. Smith
  - a) Met last week on April 28 and covered updates on library operations during COVID-19. The library is currently closed and there are discussions for how and when it will be opened. Committees have been formed to discuss building logistics and access to physical locations; as well as PPE. Decisions will likely be made and published on the library website in a couple of weeks. Online operations are fully functional. Library loans are working especially well with pretty good turn-around time on processing online requests.
    - (1) E. Grant asked about library staff scanning books for students to check out.
      - (a) E. Smith replied that they are currently not scanning anything; however, expect it to go back in operation once reopening phases are planned. Since the library is currently closed, she does not

expect anything over the summer, but believes there will be programming in place for the Fall.

2. Faculty Senate – B. Vogelaar
  - a) Absent. No update.
3. Policy 13005 – A. Michaels
  - a) Update that was proposed by CoR was approved for 2nd reading. Two weeks ago, the policy was presented at University Council and a couple of comments came out of broader discussion. There is interest in clarifying the outreach and instruction components and how the policy actually applies to centers and institutes. Since there is interest to continue discussion of Policy 13005 over the next year, please let us know if anyone is interested in leading.
4. Open Access Policy update – K. McGuire
  - a) Proposed updates to [Policy 13000](#). We have met with Legal Counsel to discuss the open access policy sitting within policy 13000 and there was a consensus on the updated verbiage. We are now waiting to have University Counsel review and approve the language. In the meantime, we appreciate any comments from the commission; otherwise, we plan to draft a resolution and will move forward in the Fall.
  - b) Review and discussion of Policy 13015. In relation to proposed updates to Policy 13000, minor reference changes were made that relate to data and ownership of data and research results to make them consistent with language.
5. Public Access to Research Data Committee – E. Grant
  - a) No report this month. Plan to meet with key people involved in this topic over the summer and will provide an update to the commission in the Fall.

## V. [4:15] New Business

- A. Election of FY21 Commission on Research Vice Chair – A. Michaels
  1. Received one nomination of Dr. Jeffrey Alwang prior to today's meeting and opened the floor for additional nomination or self-nominations. Any questions?
  2. CoR members voted for Vice Chair was held via Zoom poll with a unanimous vote confirming Dr. Alwang at FY21 Vice Chair.
  3. A. Michaels congratulated Dr. Alwang and thanked him for serving in the role alongside Dr. Raj Bhagavathula who will chair the CoR this coming year. He also noted that there will be planning meetings to discuss next year over the summer.
- B. ACC Postdoc Partnerships – Wayne Scales, Sandra Burks
  1. W. Scales provided a background of himself; as well as shared there was common interest in providing support for the postdoc community across

the university, including several colleges, the VPRI office and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

2. The presentation covered topics on: [Recommendations to the OVPRI to address postdoctoral needs](#): (1) Creation of an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (2) ACC Postdoctoral Fellowship Program to be leveraged to enhance faculty diversity (3) Postdoc Numerical and demographics at VT to be in line with aspirational peer universities (4) Leverage VT Future Faculty Development Program. Data included on slides demonstrated the support of the recommendations. [Presentation](#) located on CoR Team Drive.
3. ACC Postdoctoral Fellowship Program. VT is a member of the working group led by Florida State and Georgia Tech. This program is a strategy that enhances faculty diversity among underrepresented minorities and women through an exchange of talent between ACC institutions.
  - a) A. Michaels asked how do we currently recruit postdocs, do we post then open positions?
    - (1) W. Scales answered that if you have an opening you find someone within your research group that you have to fill the position or it is filled through search exemptions. The ACC Postdoctoral Fellowship program would be something more sophisticated than that. They would recruit in a strategic way for specific research.
4. Questions, answers and feedback
  - a) W. Scales asked the CoR their thoughts on an Office of Postdoctoral Affairs. Would it be a good thing, how useful would it be at VT?
    - b) M. Holt said that it was an interesting idea and asked how the office is envisioned to be set-up.
      - (1) L. Miner responded that ideally it would be run under the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) because research and postdocs go through our Human Resources process already. We have resources and training that could support postdocs to grow and develop throughout their career. We are considering having faculty member appointed as a part-time faculty sitting in the OVPRI to lead the postdoctoral affairs office. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 budget reduction scenarios, we will likely not be able to set-up the office during the budget cycle this year; but are hoping to do so in the near future. In the meantime, we have plans to help postdocs self-group through setting-up listservs and different groupings so they can start connecting.
    - c) M. Holt had a follow up question and although it is not a view that he shares, he has heard concerns that if we shift focus on

postdocs, that it will bleed off support for PhD programs. Is there empirical evidence of this?

- (1) L. Miner responded that she has heard something similar and the concern is that postdocs are less expensive on sponsored programs than graduate students. So, if we focus on postdocs we would have fewer graduate students on sponsored work. In response to that concern, postdocs are a critical part to the entire portfolio of our research enterprise. Whether we provide support to postdocs, I expect it would make Virginia Tech a better place to be a postdoc.
  - (2) W. Scales also mentioned that larger projects often require fast results and believes that we are in a position that we can get there with postdocs, who are more experienced.
- d) K. McGuire commented that having a support office would provide a better environment for postdocs and to have a community might help us recruit in general. Currently, many postdocs feel there is no connection to the university as they have very little interaction outside their PI and lab.
- e) E. Smith asked about the scope of the office of postdoctoral affairs? Will there be instructional support or development for postdocs?
- (1) S. Burks replied that we certainly hope there will be and would plan to leverage some existing programs on campus to promote both professional development and preparation for promotion.
- f) W. Scales asked the CoR what their perspective is on the value of ACC postdoc programs in your department and do you believe your organization would be willing to do this to get a match?
- (1) K. Roberto responded that she thinks several institutes would be very interested and could be good brokers for the program. A. Michaels agreed.
  - (2) K. McGuire commented that if this is more broadly open to include individual faculty, this might encourage faculty to seek other funds to support postdocs.
  - (3) A question was asked about whether matching or splitting position would affect interest?
    - (a) W. Scales responded that his understanding is that they are willing to be flexible and that it would be done in a way that was most successful.

VI. [5:00] Adjournment