

AMENDED
COMMISSION ON RESEARCH
November 11, 2015
325 Burruss Conference Room
3:30pm – 5:00pm
MINUTES

Attendee: Randy Wynne (Chair), Benjamin Corl (Vice Chair), Srinath Ekkad, Martin Daniel (for Dennis Dean), Annie Pearce, France Belanger, Jewell Trent, Alan Grant, Myra Blanco, Sandra Muse (for Scott Klopfer), Sue Teel, Tom Bell, Jonah Fogel, Jennifer Irish, Ben Knapp, Giti Khodaparast (for Robert Vogelaar), Nathan Hall, Van Crowder, John Burton (for Barbara Lockee), Kaveh Rahimi and Monica Rich (recorder).

Absent: Paul Knox, Cheryl Carrico, Kurt Zimmerman and Stephen Hensell

Guest: John Rudd, Ken Miller and Peggy Layne.

- I. Approval of the Agenda - A motion was made and the agenda was approved.
- II. Announcements
 - a. Approval of the Minutes of October 21, 2015 – The meeting minutes were approved electronically.
 - b. Update on VPRI Search – F. Belanger reported the committee is negotiating with a candidate.
- III. Unfinished Business
 - a. Report of Ongoing Activities
 - i. University Library Committee – N. Hall – No report.
 - ii. Update from Faculty Senate – B. Corl reported a 1st reading on a resolution on shared governance was presented to University Council. A presentation was provided followed by much discussion. Following a request for deferral, Dr. Rikakis was asked to convene a meeting in order to come up with a solution that recognizes a more formalized process for the faculty, students, and staff.
 - iii. Centers and Institutes Update – No Report
 - iv. Research Administration – No Report
 - b. Committee on Research Challenges – J. Irish reported the executive summary had been finalized and posted for commission members to review and prepare to take action to accept before any wide dissemination. Next steps of the committee will be to identify priority items that fall within our commission to address. Then identify the appropriate committee to direct items that fall outside of COR mission. John Rudd was asked to look at our summary and full draft report to determine if any issues are already being addressed. The full report was available to the committee. The COR approved the acceptance of the executive summary (see attached).
- IV. New Business
 - a. Presentation on Sponsored Research Indirect – Ken Miller gave a presentation on indirect costs at Virginia Tech. Miller explained the components of Indirect Costs being Facilities Costs and Administrative Costs (F&A). He indicated our rates are negotiated with a federal cognizant agency. A specific point made was the ongoing and significant investments made by the university in research buildings and equipment in the last decade. And although we face growing regulatory compliance mandates from the federal government our Administrative Cost Component has been capped at 26% since 1991. Miller concluded his presentation by comparing Virginia Tech's rates with ONR peers from FY07-FY18.
- V. Adjournment: 4:27pm

**COMMISSION ON RESEARCH
COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH CHALLENGES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Fall 2014, the Commission on Research (COR) identified the need to better understand possible barriers to research at Virginia Tech (VT) in an effort to proactively improve support for different categories of researchers at the university. A Committee on Research Needs (Committee), consisting of volunteer members of COR, was formed to solicit faculty input via a survey. This report presents key areas of concern identified by this survey. While a number of specific suggestions for improvements are provided in this report, some key themes across concern areas suggest there is a need for better communication between the various administrative entities of the university and faculty conducting research.

During the spring semester 2015, the Committee developed a short open-ended survey to broadly identify research issues and successes. The survey asked respondents to identify three to five barriers to research and three to five best practices at Virginia Tech for each of the following categories: Research Resources and Funding; Teaching Support for Research-Active Faculty; Reporting, Administrative, and Service Tasks; Sponsored Research Administration; and Research Metrics and Recognition.

The survey was sent to tenure track and non-tenure track faculty in T/T, A/P (includes extension agents), and selected research only roles in February 2015. A total of 276 complete responses were received. Overall, six key areas of concerns were identified together with current VT best practices for each area. These are: 1. Funding, 2. Time, 3. Equipment, Infrastructures and Services, 4. Student Recruitment, 5. Sponsored Research Administration, and 6. Faculty Recognition.

Under **Funding**, best practices related to the various centers and grants available at VT, workshops, overhead and royalty arrangements, tuition waivers, and support for interdisciplinary research. Funding concerns related to lack of post start-up funds to maintain prosperous research programs, including seed, bridge, buyout, travel, matching, collaboration, transition, and GTA funding, as well as concerns regarding excessive indirect rates and redistribution of indirect funds.

Lack of Time was identified as a major concern. While best practices were identified for pre-tenure support and use of electronic tools, concerns were strongly voiced about lack of support for handling the many roles faculty have and the several time-consuming tasks they have to perform. With increased service roles, administrative tasks, compliance requirements, teaching

responsibilities and decreased or non-existent GTA support, mentoring, and administrative support, faculty are left with little time to stop and think and reflect about research.

Equipment, Infrastructures, and Services included several best practices related to equipment availability, library and statistical support, and buildings. Concerns were a lack of consistent support for major equipment purchases, maintenance and repairs of equipment, some library resources, quality labs, and technical and staff support for equipment and labs.

Student Recruitment included few best practices; those identified were mostly focused on interdisciplinary and minority programs. Concerns were identified regarding the difficulty of hiring quality students in traditional departments, since many students prefer higher paid institute positions, and the resulting lack of critical mass (of faculty) in certain areas.

The survey revealed **Sponsored Research Administration** best practices and concerns overlapped substantially and were reflective of which area the respondents came from and the relevant sponsoring agencies supporting these areas. In other words, pre-award and post-award were seen as best practices by some and as major concerns by others. There were also concerns about too many administrative tasks and forms in managing grants.

Finally, **Faculty Recognition** best practices included a number of existing recognition programs and awards. Most concerns reflected the lack of recognition for 1. Service and teaching with compensation being mainly dependent on research 2. Long-term contributions, 3. Technology transfer efforts, 4. Scholarly research that is not grant-based, 5. Research in liberal arts, and 6. Non-NIH or NSF grant work. Issues were also identified with outdated faculty webpages and lack of proper press coverage. Importantly, many teaching and research faculty with important teaching responsibilities mentioned feeling as “second-class citizens”.

In conclusion, this preliminary survey attempted to identify key areas of concerns for faculty to conduct research, while at the same time identifying some best practices. The Committee realizes the relative importance of various issues and best practices identified is likely biased by self-selection. Furthermore, this survey was intentionally open ended to obtain a broad view of issues and best practices beyond those that would be identified by Committee members alone. Therefore, we recommend a large-scale quantitative survey be conducted to better quantify and prioritize these issues by offering an opportunity for all research-active faculty to weigh in on these issues and best practices.

Committee on Research Challenges
Commission on Research
November 9, 2015