

Academic Senate Research Committee Meeting Minutes  
28 January 2010

Present: Ivan Avrutsky, David Cinabro, Boris Mordukhovich, Frederic Pearson, David Thomas, Harley Tse, Jeff Withey

Guest: Sarah James

The minutes from the December meeting were approved with minor changes.

Our meeting time for the Winter Semester will be 2:00-3:30 on Thursdays. As usual no time is good for all members. It took us a while to find a good time thus we are meeting at the end, rather than middle of the month. Meeting dates for the rest of the semester are 25 February, 25 March, and 29 April.

We discussed support of research. Cinabro spoke with the chairs of Chemistry, Physics, and Biology, the Deans of Engineering and Business, and President Noren. Also present with his meeting with the President was the VPR, but he did most of the talking. Cinabro provided a summary of his discussions.

The chairs made similar points: start-up money that they fund from ICR; inadequate technical and facilities support; the need to top up fellowships to make them attractive; and the value of some OVPR programs that they would like to see expanded or made more broad. The Dean of Engineering is pleased that working closely with the OVPR has improved the management of grants at all phases of their life cycle. Ivan echoed that things had gotten much better with a dedicated SPA staffer in the College of Engineering. They both focused on incentives which they think need to be re-thought or made more attractive. The Deans noted that they put much effort into retention.

The President thought that his main contribution to research was the enhancement program with its yearly theme. He recognizes that we are under resourced both in the management of research and facilities. He agreed that our incentives need to be changed to give more encouragement for faculty to do externally funded research. He also thought we were doing poorly at commercializing our research, but that TechTown was a good example of what we want to do more of in the future. He thought that it was not possible to drive research from the top down, thus his focus is on improving services and finding a way to provide more resources.

Our discussion of the above focused on a few things. What are we spending in support of research? That is what is going into OVPR and is it similar to our peers? Folks in the Med School seem to think that OVPR is bloated, while on the Main Campus there are persistent complaints about lack of service. Cinabro suggested that we have Rob Kohrman in to give his view about what the University is actually spending in support of research. Another question was about TechTown. Is it draining money, breaking even, or making money? We noted that the VPR does not spend much time talking about TechTown. Who do we talk to about it; the office of Technology Transfer, acknowledged to need to do better? Kohrman could at least be asked to provide a monetary answer about TechTown. Another point is that we, and the chair of the committee confesses to being guilty, often only look at the monetary value of research. There is a broader view that encompasses many things including student training, degrees, publications, prestige, etc.

The themes we had from before are:

- 1) We have woefully inadequate technical support for research.
- 2) Incentives for high performing researchers have to be rethought.
- 3) Programs to support research need to be more flexible. Existing programs are often far too restrictive to have broad impact.

- 4) Research priorities do not seem to get the attention they deserve by the service orientated parts of the University such as the Facilities and Purchasing.
- 5) We need to rethink how we are promoting collaborative and cross- disciplinary efforts. At the minimum internal communication about research activities has to be improved. We should have a thorough review of how the University deals with Centers and Institutes that promote research.
- 6) Research should be more integrated with the more traditional academic activities of the University.
- 7) Recruitment and Retention are the most important research activities done by the administration. Support for these should be integrated into the University's budgeting and planning process.

and let me add two new ones:

- 8) Are we spending our support for research dollars wisely?
- 9) We should take a broad view, beyond simply money, at what successful research is.

In the coming months we will turn these themes into a report.

Sarah James joined the meeting and gave us a preview and got our feedback on a new Proposal Development website being developed by OVPR. The idea is to provide guidance to potential PI's on how to manage a proposal from initial idea through grant management. The site looks promising, and the members, all fairly experienced thought it would be useful for new faculty. They also suggested some sort of "What's New" feature that would let the experienced know of important changes. The goal is to roll this website for all by the end of the winter semester.

Our next meeting is scheduled for 25 February.