

Wayne State University
Academic Senate
Research Committee Minutes
December 1, 2011

Present: Cinabro, Avrutsky, Cacace, Ferreira, Golebiowska, MacArthur, Mordukovich, Tisdale, Kessel, Dunbar, Brock, Fazal

Absent with Notice: Benkert, Huttemann, Lanza, Mueller, Oupicky, Saydain, Stemmler, Thomas, Wildman

Guests: Julie O'Connor, Director of Research Communications
Matt Lockwood, Director of School of Medicine Communications
Nick Denardis, Associate Director of Web Communications
Charles Parrish, AAUP President

We approved the minutes of our October meeting. Our next meeting will be late January. Look for a message about scheduling it early next year. Tentatively we will have Phil Cunningham, AVP for Research Compliance as a guest to continue our discussion of the Research Misconduct policy.

We began with a presentation by Julie who ran down all the methods that are used to inform about research. All new awardees should get a letter from Julie asking about their research. MacArthur noted that he never got one despite numerous recent awards. The Web of Science is also scanned regularly for Wayne State related items. These are ideas that are turned into stories that are disseminated in many, many ways including News Hits, Press Releases, Facebook, Research@Wayne, and research e-blasts. LinkedIn was mentioned, and Julie and Nick will look into it. They also produce magazines New Science and Research Corridor which work is being done to turn into fancy electronic, new media versions. We flipped over to Matt who mentioned the recent Today@Wayne, and the plan to make this general current events email and web site into something that would be more individually targeted, WSYou. There are events and a specific research calendar. Blogs are hosted by a few who were invited and most who volunteered. There is new digital signage and the Spotlight On posters. Much is being done, and clear the word is getting out, and Wayne State research activity is regularly in the news.

The limiting factor is personnel. Two in the OVPR and four in Marketing. They are overwhelmed. The chair noted that most of the stuff in the presentation was about communicating research to non-researchers and little about communication among researchers. There is a research calendar, which needs to be promoted more, and targeted seminar series Nano@Wayne and Water@Wayne, both of which are very successful. Something more general including a social component was suggested as an excellent way for researchers from different disciplines to meet and mingle. Also an easily accessible list of recent grant titles and PI's would be a valuable asset.

While waiting for Charlie we spoke briefly about the revived Research Incentive program. Dunbar is heading the committee and Cinabro is a member. The parameters as defined by the VPR and Dean of the Graduate School are incentivize research, support graduate students, and limit the spending to what is currently going into the competitive

GRA program. The basic goal is to forgive tuition for externally funded graduate students. While Dunbar thought this could go forward quickly, Cinabro noted that the desire to understand how effective the competitive GRA program currently is in order to justify eliminating or reducing it, and the careful thought that will be needed to implement the simple idea within the budget constraint may take longer than Joe thinks.

Charlie Parrish arrived and spoke about the current Research Misconduct Policy. A quick summary is that while it is based on NIH guidelines, he finds it a bit too one sided against the accused. Wearing his hat as the Union President he does not think that the current procedure is in compliance with the union contract which has guarantees of due process to protect employment. I will point out that the procedure is about finding misconduct in research, which while potentially very damaging to a researcher, is not directly connected to a job action. In reality it is very likely, but not necessary, that any finding of research misconduct would very likely lead to some sort of job action.

Charlie ran down the procedure. When an accusation of research misconduct is made to the AVP for Research Misconduct, he or she conducts an investigation and makes a recommendation to the Deciding Officer (DO), the VPR, on whether to proceed with a more thorough investigation. The DO then appoints a Committee of Inquiry who has broad discretion to conduct interviews and make a further recommendation to the DO. This part of the process is basically meant to be secret, although in practice it often breaks out into the open. There is general agreement that most cases, 80% was mentioned, do not get beyond this stage. The next stage is the appointment of an Investigation Committee (IC) by the DO and notice to the funding agency if external funds are involved. The IC then conducts a hearing like procedure which must include questioning of both the accused and accuser. Aspects of this procedure that Charlie found objectionable include that the DO alone appoints the IC, that the accused and accuser never confront each other, and that the accused is not allowed to be accompanied by anyone when being questioned by the IC. The IC then writes a recommendation to the DO. The DO then makes a decision on scientific misconduct and informs the funding agencies triggering severe punishments. The accused does have a right to final appeal to the Provost. Charlie found it strange that the final appeal takes place after the funding agency is informed.

Charlie suggested some changes to the current procedure that would alleviate his concerns. There should be some checks on the DO's appointment of the members of the IC. Clearly a bloody minded DO could pack the IC with enemies of the accused, making the "hearing" a sham. Second the accused should have the right to a face-to-face encounter with and ability to question the accuser as part of the "hearing". Third the accused should be allowed to be accompanied by someone during the "hearing". Fourth the final appeal to the Provost should take place before the final finding of research misconduct is made and reported to the funding agencies.

Unfortunately we did not have any time to discuss this, but I find the suggestions that Charlie is making to changes to the Research Misconduct policy to be modest and sensible. We will visit this again when AVPR Cunningham visits the committee.