

Wayne State University  
Academic Senate  
Research Committee Minutes  
October 20, 2011

Present: Cinabro, Cacace, Ferreira, Huttemann, Mueller, Oupicky, Tisdale, Wildman, Kessel, Dunbar, Brock, Fazal

Absent with Notice: Avrutsky, Benkert, Golebiowska, Lanza, MacArthur, Mordukovich, Saydain, Stemmler, Thomas

Guests: Gail Ryan, Research Assistant Vice President, Director of Sponsored Program Administration  
Marlene Erno, Director Sponsored Program Administration Support

We approved the minutes of our September meeting. Our next meeting is 1 December, 14:00 in 1270 FAB. Charlie Parrish will be a guest to talk about the current Research Misconduct Policy.

Cinabro mentioned that he was meeting with VP for Research Ratner tomorrow. Topics on his list to bring up with her included the future of the Research Incentive Program. After inquiring to Provost Brown the response was a surprise that Provost Brown thought that the report in hand from summer of 2010 should be implemented. Dunbar, who chaired the committee that wrote the report, did think that the report should be reviewed and updated as things change and Cinabro noted that the report has not been properly reviewed by the Senate. VP Ratner has not responded to a request from Avrutsky about her budget. This will be another subject Cinabro would like to raise with her.

Gail gave a presentation, find it attached, and noted that preliminary numbers showed that Research Awards and Indirect Costs were at all time highs for the just ended fiscal year.

She reminded us of the history on Effort Reporting. The new web based system replaced the old paper system about a year ago. The procedure for certifying for graduate students, no one is unhappy about certifying for graduate students, is arcane, non-intuitive, weird, clunky...pick your favorite adjective. Why was this not fixed after the first round of use of this system? Not clear. What has been done is that the procedure has been documented more clearly, but the committee thought it would be good to make this procedure better. Gail and Marlene said that they would work with C&IT to build a better procedure for the future. Another aspect that needs improvement is certifying for students who have pay from multiple sources. If all the pre-certifications are not in place then a certifier

cannot do anything even though they have been asked to do something. Perhaps a clearer error message identifying why nothing can be done would ease this problem. Again some work with C&IT would be undertaken.

Cinabro asked if there was any plan to make the system into a real measure of research effort, pointing out that he spends substantial amounts of time during the 9-month academic year working on his research which the current system does not attempt to track, rather than a certification for compliance system. The answer is no, SPA apparently does not care, but comments by committee members note that the Medical School cares about cost sharing related to research effort. Someone likely cares as there are expectations that faculty carry out research and there are other measures of that effort beyond the awarding of external grants. This is another topic Cinabro will bring up to the VPR. The folks in OVPR probably do not want to hear Cinabro talk about this, as he has raised it many times already.

Many times we noted the value of the Research Dashboard for keeping track of grant activity. It is still not used by all, and a PADS seminar was suggested as a way to continue to convince faculty. Gail thought that was a good idea.

Grant close out procedures were discussed. Nothing makes a PI more distressed than having grant money returned to an agency. Reasons for this are disallowed costs, mistakes, late charges, and de-scoping of a project. Sometimes these are only found in the last days of a grant. This clearly should not be. SPA procedures inform PI's 90 and 30 days before the end of a grant, and then just after a grant has ended. This is certainly the time to review the grant and request no-cost extension, which many suggested is a great way to avoid problems as a grant comes to its end. One headache, and SPA is working on making this better, is that the informational emails sent to PI's and administrators are not very clear. Do the PI's have to do something? It is not always clear. We did note the inconsistency that SPA urges us to review our grants at least quarterly, but currently only reviews grants for un-allowed expenses only at the end. They are working to do at least annual reviews to avoid having problems in the last days.

Do SPA rules, especially in regards to allowed expenses, depend on who is administering the grant at SPA? They should not, but sometimes they do. This is mainly due the lack of clarity in the OMB rules. There is a memo that clarifies the interpretation of the rules, Dunbar helped to write it, and hope that OMB will simplify and clarify in the near future. It can sometimes be distressingly hard to buy a computer for data analysis.

A couple of minor problems were mentioned. Due to the way pay-periods are handled PI's sometimes have to certify effort for people who have left quite some time ago. This was thought to be a small problem and could continue to be dealt

with on a case by case basis. One PI, who applied the clever tactic of trading a budget cut for a longer grant period with a program officer, had problems with end dates of grants perhaps due to the difference between the submitted and awarded grant period. This does not seem to be a general problem, but Gail promised to investigate. Some times emails from SPA are not clear. We pointed out that they must include grant title and sponsor to allow PI's to identify what grant the mail refers to. SPA is currently automating a by-hand e-mail notice system and liked the feed back of what PI's wanted to see in notices.

Finally we asked the perennial question of when internal awards including start-up funds would be available in the Research Dashboard. We were directed to ask the Comptroller, Jim Barbret, who is former director of SPA and used to give the same answer when someone else was the Comptroller, as the Comptroller had to give the OK for that data to be included in the Dashboard. We plan to invite Jim before the committee before the end of the year.