

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC SENATE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE
April 8, 2024

Present: L. Beale; D. Donahue; r. hoogland; P. Khosla; N. Rossi; B. Roth; S. Schrag

Absent with Notice: D. Aubert; S. Chrisomalis; L. Clabo; J. Lewis

Guest: Ezemenari Obasi, Vice President for Research

I. RESEARCH PRIORITIES

VP Obasi came to Policy to discuss his action agenda and Policy's opportunities to help incentivize research on campus. He is holding town hall meetings with each school to talk about the vision for the office and to hear from faculty what the historical challenges have been. He has to work through a long list of issues, none of which are unsolvable, but it will take time to review before decisions are made. He has asked faculty to share any concerns they have.

The university's research expenditures have been flat for about 10 years while other research institutions are growing by 3%. As a result, we have moved in the wrong direction—from a top 50 public institution to number 75 or 76. There is potential to turn the ship around, especially if we can build out a portfolio that is not NIH-dependent. The university (and the School of Medicine (SOM)) does well with NIH, but it is too singularly important, as it is 63% of our research expenditures. The Department of Defense, Department of Education, Department of Energy, Department of Transportation, state funding mechanisms, foundation funding mechanisms, corporate partnerships—all of those need greater attention. Federal relationships are now under Office of Vice President for Research (OVPR). Lewis-Burke and Associates (LBA), our federal lobbying firm, will help us diversify and build a more sustainable funding portfolio by providing deeper insights into the federal funding landscape. Representatives of LBA will be on campus next week to meet with any faculty interested on Thursday and with Senate members for lunch on Friday to provide a sense of the services LBA has to offer. They have already been helpful in arranging meetings for Obasi in Washington, D.C. last month, with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Energy, at which there were good conversations around Wayne State and their potential funding portfolios. Obasi will meet with some elected officials in D.C. next week, as well as with personnel involved in the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) and other funding agencies that might be useful for the university. The goal is to go after big interdisciplinary funding opportunities to move away from the flat funding history.

For the research division, Obasi is working to develop clear budget models for handling startups and retention packages. Various faculty advise him of prior commitments with no clear funding source, which is unacceptable. A decision for support cannot be made without knowing at the outset how it will be funded and whether we can afford it. Additionally, the CIAC I centers and institutes need a performance-based budget model. Many of them have been given institutional budgetary commitments for multiple years: they either do not expend the allocation or they request additional funds without using funds to which they have access, resulting in tying up money without using it to further research. That is not a good business practice, since monies must be spent to count towards our funding numbers—even ICR dollars must be spent to be counted.

At this point, when faculty seek OVPR help for startup or retention packages or equipment, his first step is to check accounts to see what funds are available that should be used before seeking additional dollars. It seems that accounts have built up in some parts of campus rather than using funds effectively, so the internal awards program has to be refined to make sure that there is a clear return on investments and that there is support available for arts and humanities faculty to move their scholarship forward. It will be important to better communicate the resources that are available, so transparency and attention to the purpose of accounts are important to ensure that are used as intended. It is also important to understand how colleges, departments and PIs are using their ICR splits and how OVPR is using its ICR split. Are they being used in ways that are good for the university?

Linda Beale asked whether the review of ICR splits was discussed in the two town halls that took place, and what the reaction was. Obasi responded that he met with Engineering and CLAS, and he believes everybody wants a high-functioning OVPR. What matters most is having good services so that faculty can execute projects without stress. He is open to having a different conversation about the ICR splits, but if a researcher's split increases, there must be a conversation about the increase in researcher responsibilities. If the university continues without change, research expenditures will remain flat. About 10 years ago, the ICR split changed without resulting in a growth of research expenditures. Therefore, a different philosophy should be considered, which is the purpose of dollars. If we take care of the purpose first, whatever is left over can be split in ways that make sense.

The challenges Obasi has heard associated with OVPR include IRB; contract setup; delays in putting indices together; disclosure agreements and material transfer agreements delays—much of which is directly tied to being understaffed. The cuts that the university has been dealing with for a long time and the annual OVPR budget cuts have resulted in taking positions away when they are vacant. Over time, various areas that provide services have been gutted, so service delivery is poor because there is not sufficient staff. If the office were right sized, faculty would have a more positive experience on the grants and administration side of things. Having a healthy process whereby we can speak openly about this ICR split is going to be necessary if we want to go in a different direction. Beale noted it has been a delicate topic from the time of the last policy change. How can we use those funds best to further research, and are we doing that now? If we can broach it in a way that faculty hear the discussion at the ground level and can provide feedback, that is the best way to find the best answer.

Obasi went through this at the University of Houston (U-H). There was initial pushback on splits going down, but it was important to consider the long term. Do you want 20% of a small dollar amount or 15% of a much larger amount? If the university can accelerate expenditures, the percentages returned to units will grow significantly, even at a smaller percentage. People will then be able to do their work well and will also be more motivated to apply for additional grants. Now, they seem often to say, "this experience was so awful, I do not want to do this anymore." It will take sacrifices on all sides to make long-term improvements.

There is a need for investment in professional development, both internally and externally, so that the staff within OVPR understand that they are a service entity. We have to be careful in how we engage faculty around whatever challenges they experience. We also need to make sure that we are using best practices in how we operate, which trickles down to the research staff that are embedded in schools, colleges and departments. If folks are not doing the same thing, we are vulnerable from a compliance standpoint, so we need to make sure that there is better communication between the schools/colleges/departments and OVPR about professional development for research staff. Obasi is considering technologies in which to invest that streamline processes and make the work more accurate. He often encounters issues around

difficulty in tracking expenditures on grants and things of that nature, and these are things that can be fixed.

The tech commercialization office will now be back under OVPR, and a new assistant VP for tech commercialization will be brought in. That search is ongoing and has some strong applications in the pool. At some point, candidates will be brought to campus, and Policy will be involved in that process.

Obasi noted this is like a rebuild from scratch, and it is somewhat frustrating because he is the type of person that wants to sprint. He cannot do that right now, but he must dig deep to understand where the barriers are in order to rebuild correctly. At some point he hopes to appoint an associate VP for research who will take over the core facilities and centers and institutes: they need attention on a day-to-day basis. One person cannot do it all, especially when he is in meetings about 90% of every day. That may mean bringing in a couple of staff to take some things off of his plate.

Beale had previously discussed with Obasi the core facilities and the center budget issues, so she asked him to expand on the issues there with Policy. When the two new institutes were approved this year, Policy did talk explicitly about the self-performance expectation, with training and other mega grants being a significant part of what a center under OVPR is intended to accomplish. How are you approaching that with the existing centers and moving that forward? Obasi responded that he has been transparent with the centers, both in meeting with them as a collective and one-on-one with each director. There are a wide range of challenges. For example, it is unacceptable that there are faculty members with no grant activity in some centers for whom OVPR pays 50% of the faculty member's salary. A process is needed when someone is hired to research but refuses to do that part of their job. In addition, he thinks onboarding of new centers and institutes requires review. There were commitments attached to the Ben L. Silberstein Institute for Brain Health and the Center for Emerging and Infectious Diseases (CEID): those financial commitments did not have a source account identified. His view is that arrangements with centers and institutes should be budget neutral. If research expect that everything they generate comes back to them, there is no way the university can accelerate research. A different model is needed for addressing these things so that the centers are sustainable but are also generating additional resources that allow us to build out new centers for the university. At U-H, he created a center from scratch that was financially independent in four years: it was the second largest center for campus expenditures. All of those things are in reach with a good business model, a clear mission and an understanding of purpose. It cannot just be a safe haven.

Beale raised the issue about centers coming due for review. Her sense has always been that center reviews have not pushed this performance and budget aspect as they should. Ideally, that charter review time should be an opportunity to push that agenda further. When the recharter comes to Policy, we have often talked with either the provost or the VPR and done a memo asking for better information—particularly associated with grants and budgets and what is being done with faculty that are not doing anything. That process should ensure that it is working because a center should not get chartered if it does not have an adequate plan to function appropriately to generate research funding and big grants. When Beale came on Policy a decade or so ago, she realized that centers were not reviewed in a timely fashion, and many seemed to be doing little more than the research that each individual PI could do on their own without a center framework. Policy has therefore been pushing to get centers and institutes better focused on the idea that the affiliated faculty should do research that they would not otherwise do because they can work together on big grants with reasonable budgets. renee hoogland added that centers have been left to linger for a long time. It requires a change of culture so that people know what to

expect, to know what a center is supposed to do. There needs to be formalization of the process to make the centers more productive and functional.

At U-H, Obasi provided an annual report to detail every grant applied for and received, expenditures, publication record, impact on student training and communities, and a list of partners. It was a detailed document presented every year that provided information on resources provided by the division of research. There was no guaranteed dollar amount for the next five years; rather, it was performance based on a year-to-year basis. There was a sunset if people did not perform, and people who did perform were provided more resources. The division always had funds to support new centers because there was not a lot of fat that was growing in this process. Everybody knew they did not have four years to waste. The notion that you can have five years of time before you are held accountable again seems problematic. He suggested the need for an informal annual report that keeps us up to date, because if something is going in the wrong direction, he would rather course-correct two years into it versus waiting five years. Policy agreed. More of that can be done informally through the VPR and through the agreement on the rechartering that can institute the kind of annual reports and annual revision of budgets that Obasi is talking about, because that is what is required here.

Noreen Rossi asked how much of the aggregate research portfolio of university is within the centers. They are supposed to be the nidus for more fertile research, but is research growing in the areas in which the centers have been created (e.g. neuroscience or geriatrics)?

Obasi responded that there are a few important factors. First, for a university-level center, is there external funding for the center? Has the center been able to translate that investment into being a national center? That is a low bar. Second, looking at person-by-person, if OVPR is paying 50% of a person's salary, what percentage of that person's salary is covered on grants, and if there is a gap, is that defensible? Accountability is needed, as it relates to each person's individual performance and the collective performance to secure a big national center of excellence. Those pieces have to be front and center when we think about a productive center or institute.

Beale noted the difficulties with answering Rossi's question about how much the center has served as a nidus for the development of bigger grants. For example, CEID listed every grant that any person with any minor affiliation had as though it were a center grant. If the center did not generate those grants because it did not even exist, then that is not a center grant. That is going to be important to be able to figure out how to categorize things as center versus individual PI grants.

The other piece that Obasi has heard from some of the colleges is the lack of attention paid to the credit splitting as it relates to expenditures. For some reason, OVPR has largely been reporting data based on what the PIs have, and that can really hurt the perception of other colleges' contributions to team science research—another one of those unacceptable pieces. Why would someone want to collaborate if they are not getting appropriate credit? At the same time, faculty who are collaborators have to advocate for themselves to ensure that split accurately reflects their contributions to the project. At U-H a significant discussion in committee led to a shared definition of intellectual credit, what should go into it, what should be considered, the purpose of ICR, what should go into that split, et cetera. That way faculty had a definition and about eight factors to consider to advocate for what their percentage should be, rather than just having a strong-minded PI that assumed all the credit.

Rossi shared that as PI she had two active investigators from medicine and CLAS on her NIH grant, but she discovered when she looked at the budget that they were not being paid as expected through the grant. Most PIs do not look at their budgets but should be proactive and follow the

expenditures. Not paying the investigators meant the expenditures were off. Lack of staff is a factor—they are either novices who make mistake or senior people who are overwhelmed. OVPR needs staff who can assist faculty in reading the spreadsheets.

Obasi noted that raises a bigger issue. PIs should do monthly budgetary reconciliations. Regrettably, those reconciliations happen here only quarterly, annually or even at the end of a grant. These expenditure problems would not occur if reconciliations were done monthly.

Beale agreed that is an important piece—faculty complain that they do not know how to get the information on their grant expenditures. Working on that low hanging fruit will hopefully make a difference in faculty's perceptions of how OVPR supports their work. Obasi noted that he does not yet have a senior administrative assistant so that work is being done by people who have other jobs. It is hard for him to do his job without having someone to handle some details. If this is true for a VP, he cannot imagine what it is like for others.

Rossi noted the IRB office have done a good job, but there is too much work for one individual. As the BOG personnel committee representative, she has brought this up to them. Even though we know in advance when a key staff member will retire, there is no overlap to onboard replacements. There are key positions where that is needed, but it does not seem to be on anybody's radar. Obasi responded that there is a plan for filling the IRB positions. OVPR is challenged to address the timeliness issue with limited staffing resources. There were some positions that were paused until the new VP came on board, so he is creating a rapid response subgroup to provide a quick internal turnaround review in a matter of days if a federal award is funded. That should solve a number of issues. Instead of investing in an external IRB, it would be internal to us with our training and values and would not require a wait. He may have to do a two-month stopgap with an external entity to clear the backlog until we can hire the two people needed to set this up. This model should solve the problem rather than putting another band aid on a systemic issue.

Rossi noted another problem results from external mandates. For example, accreditation agencies require nursing, allied health and medical students to do some kind of scholarly work. The students send in poorly done IRBs/IACUCs that clog the system for others. Perhaps there should be a separate process for them. She is designing a course for Medicine in which students will learn how to prepare a Wayne State IRB. There are also a number of faculty (not only in Medicine but elsewhere) who are less well-versed in filling out the forms: admittedly, it is not always obvious, and the animal one is much more extensive than the human one. It requires attention to detail, but clinical faculty who supervise some students and have never filed IRB forms themselves sign off without reviewing the forms. That clogs the system with eight cycles on an exempt protocol. Better communication might facilitate things.

Obasi noted U-H has a student-only IRB, which was helpful. He agrees faculty should be held accountable, since this should be a training experience for students. The protocol review should stipulate that the student's faculty mentor has read and approved that the submission is the best potential application. That adds another layer of accountability. Graduate students may have templates, but they do not yet understand the science well enough without help. Faculty struggle with this form, so of course students will, too. We can improve by having better templates and boilerplate language that people can cut and paste to streamline the process. The same is needed with our material transfer and contracts that go through the Office of General Counsel. Policy agreed that would be helpful.

Obasi indicated he would like to attend the Senate's Research Committee's meetings. There needs to be a strong relationship between the VPR and that committee, which would be difficult to build if he is not a regular participant. It is a good first step in building trust for the elected

faculty that engage with him to influence developments. Rossi noted former Interim VPR Tim Stemmler was a member of the committee before he became assistant VP. When he became the interim VPR, he did not have a liaison because OVPR is short staffed, so he regularly participated as the administrative liaison. We have a precedent for having the VPR as part of the committee, and Obasi is more than welcome.

The committee thanked Obasi for taking the time to discuss these issues with us.

II. APPROVAL OF POLICY PROCEEDINGS

The proceedings of the April 1, 2024 Policy Committee will be approved by email.

III. REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

Provost Clabo was not able to attend the meeting.

IV. REPORT FROM THE SENATE PRESIDENT

Free speech issues: Policy discussed a number of free speech issues. New York University shut down a library poetry reading about Gaza. U-M is considering a disruptive event policy that is chilling. Columbia recently issued a new protest policy that still is concerning, and has suspended organizations, including the Jewish Voice for Peace and Students for Justice in Palestine.

At Wayne State, there is a FOIA request from the ACLU looking for various items with a focus on emails and other items related to antisemitism and Gaza protests. They are checking the emails of 47 university administrators (many AVPs, every BOG member, every VP, provost, president). The Academic Senate has turned up in their emails in discussions about the Senate's own discussions of free speech. The administration has alerted us that they are now checking those references to the Academic Senate to see if any of that is discoverable. Obviously, we have dealt with this topic over the last two years in various settings, including the panel discussion about campus speech originally planned for the November meeting but moved to a meeting this term.

Faculty access to Canvas courses: Beale alerted Policy that Jennifer Lewis had a difficult experience when she requested that LMS admin/C&IT open a prior Canvas course so that a student could submit work from an incomplete grade last year. She was denied access into her Canvas course, on which she had all the materials about the student (what the student had submitted, what the grade was up to the point of the incomplete, et cetera), but she was told she could only have access to that student's records, not her entire course. For that, she was told to supply the student's name, identity and signed contract for the incomplete. She was informed this was a new C&IT policy. Beale and Lewis separately wrote Kurt Kruschinska (Sr. Dir., Registrar) and Rob Thompson (CIO) about the problem of access to prior Canvas courses. They agreed that they will allow full access to all assets in a course for a full year, including the ability to access the grades within the course. Beale will invite Kruschinska and Thompson to an upcoming Policy meeting to further discuss this issue, since many faculty likely see their old Canvas course files as a record of their intellectual property and course histories and would be surprised to learn that access is limited in any way.

AI lunch hosted by the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL): OTL is hosting an AI lunch at the Student Center on April 23 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Beale cannot attend but suggested someone from Policy attend (perhaps Hoogland since she is on the AI committee).

Lewis-Burke Associates: Obasi has invited members of the Academic Senate to a lunch meeting with Lewis-Burke Associates on April 12 from 1 to 2 p.m. at McGregor. A general meeting for faculty is being held on April 11 from 1 to 2 p.m. at McGregor.

Fall Opening Faculty Engagement Committee: The Office of the Provost is expanding and introducing new Fall Opening activities to engage the entire community and create a livelier campus. Nine committees have been created, including a faculty engagement committee. Provost Clabo has requested a Senate representative. Policy agreed more information is required.

Campus Police Oversight Committee: The Campus Police Oversight Committee has been left hanging for a year. Policy will resume working on this soon.

Foreign Influence Policy: Policy agreed the best solution is to bring the entire Foreign Influence Policy Committee to an upcoming Policy Committee meeting.

V. ACADEMIC SENATE PLENARY MAY 1 AGENDA DRAFT

Policy discussed potential agenda items for the May plenary. Beale will consult with the provost to finalize which presentations should be included.

Approved as revised at the Policy Committee meeting of April 22, 2024.