

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH

Annual Report 2020-21

To: Academic Senate, Santa Cruz Division

The Committee on Research (COR) is charged with reviewing campus and system-wide policies and issues related to UCSC's research mission. The committee also advises and collaborates with the Office of Research to promote faculty research. COR directly supports faculty researchers by awarding faculty research grants (FRG), special research grants (SRG), and travel grants, and works to develop policy and strategy that assist with broad research goals, like increasing multi-principal investigator initiatives.

I. Summary

The primary focus of the committee for the 2020-21 year was exploring ways to increase financial support for faculty research across the campus and to streamline the Scholarly Meeting Travel program to allow for real time tracking of COR funds.

II. COR Advocacy for Research Support

In the spring of 2021, COR wrote to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) to ask for its endorsement of and support for additional funding to restore UCSC faculty research across the divisions.¹ This was ultimately shared with Chancellor Larive. Based on its conversations with representatives from various divisions, COR estimates that for the next 3-5 years faculty will be struggling to recover from the impact of the pandemic on their research activities. COR offered a specific proposal to address this need, followed by the rationale for the policy it recommended.

COR has reached consensus that because of the diversity of needs confronting faculty, the most efficacious way to address the problems sketched below would be to provide all Senate faculty (i.e., all those currently eligible to apply for COR grants) with a flat stipend for the next 3-5 years. Given UCSC's status as a major research institution, a similar policy would be commensurate with and vital to its research endeavors. Providing funding even at a relatively modest level, e.g., \$2,000 per faculty member, would require about a 150% increase in the current COR budget. *Yet keep in mind that this stipend would be in lieu of travel funds or competitive research grants such as COR now provides.* However, providing all faculty with discretionary research funds would seem to be the best mechanism by which to meet the diversity of needs faculty confront in restarting or repairing their research endeavors.

This practice would be commensurate with what already is done at the Berkeley, Davis, and Merced campuses of the UC system. For example, UC Davis currently provides \$2,000 in research funding to all faculty who apply (although an application is needed, almost all requests are funded). UC Merced currently provides between \$1,500 and \$3,000 in incidentals for faculty each year. These funds can be carried forward and accumulated up to \$9,000. UC Berkeley has the most generous allowance, currently at around \$4,000 through its BEAR (Berkeley Excellence Accounts for Research) program only for faculty with less than \$10,000 in other research funding or through

¹ See COR_to_Chancellor Larive_Re_Post-Pandemic Research Recovery Funding for UCSC Faculty_5-26-2021

an endowed chair. COR strongly urges that, following the UC Merced model, faculty be allowed to accumulate such funds for up to 5 years. This approach allows for the coordination of research funding with sabbaticals or time made available by securing other sorts of funding.

Evidence abounds regarding monies spent to support research projects even though no actual research could be done. For example, laboratory animals needed to be cared for even while no experiments could be conducted. Post-doctoral researchers, specialized technicians, Graduate Student Instructors (GSI) all remained on grant payrolls while laboratories remained closed and inaccessible. The deficits incurred in these cases, including the impact on junior faculty grants and start-up funds in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, will probably exceed \$1 million by the time a final accounting is done.

The problems related to deficits incurred in research budgets do not impact STEM fields alone. Because of grant accounting, these areas make the research-related losses somewhat easier to quantify. But in the social sciences, for example, human subject research could not be carried out, effectively halting research activity for faculty dependent on such data. Travel restrictions limited or prohibited fieldwork and archival research, activities found in almost every division of this university. Faculty whose grants required completion of projections within a certain time frame have been critically impacted. In addition, new proposals had to be put on hold since it was unclear for many months when such travel restrictions would ease, allowing research activities to plausibly be proposed or carried out.

Locally, the lack of access to library books, journals, archival collections, film and digital art not available online, brought research dependent on these resources largely to a halt. Impediments also included a lack of access to laboratory spaces in that all performance and studio spaces were unavailable for many months. Those faculty and graduate students dependent on these resources were crippled. It should also be noted that outside venues particularly for the arts, e.g., theatres, concert halls, museums, were all closed. Faculty dependent on these spaces for research endeavors thus had no recourse.

Finally, although difficult to quantify, everyone associated with the university—administrators, staff, graduate students, faculty—experienced the strain of transitioning their formerly routine activities to on-line formats. This resulted in an extensive investment of time and effort that had to be taken away from research-related activities. In addition, but related to the preceding point, there exists “Zoom-fatigue.” This term has become a semi-joking reference to this brave new world of on-line engagement. Yet one should not overlook how it tangibly and negatively saps the energy needed to do serious academic work because of the strains it induces while everyone struggles to meet “normal” teaching and service obligations. A further consideration involves how obligations generated by school closures and other family pressures have wide and disparate impacts on a faculty research projects.

COR is not responsible for or involved in assessing research output. COR appreciates that other campus committees such as the Committee on Academic Personnel (CAP) have already started to consider how to factor in such research deficits when reviewing personnel records over the next few years. COR’s concern, however, involves assessing research policy, and in that capacity offers suggestions regarding how to jump-start and repair research programs across the divisions,

including, but by no means limited to, repairing and restoring pandemic-induced deficits in research budgets.

Towards this end, COR has consulted widely with deans and representatives from non-STEM fields, as well as with Senate leadership in order to gain some sense of the problems not as readily quantifiable as those tied to specific grants or start-up funds. In order to help ensure continuity of action, Professor Jarmila Pittermann, who will chair COR for 2021-22, has also participated in these discussions.

The university and the world have been through an extraordinary time, one that has marked and changed institutions and individuals in many ways. Recovery will not be costless. Responding to unprecedented challenges demands bold and novel strategies. Based on wide consultation, COR has concluded that a faculty research stipend represents the best available strategy for restarting and reinforcing a severely wounded research enterprise. COR asks the SEC to endorse this proposal and to bring it to campus leadership for action.

III. Research Grants

A. Funding Overview

The committee has two funding sources, the Education Fund and University Opportunity Fund. This year the COR Grant program was funded at \$372,446. Compared to \$269,739 for 2019-20.

New Faculty Research Grants (NFRGs): The NFRG program provides new faculty with access to funding in the current fiscal year. It has proved helpful to new faculty as they establish their research careers. Of the 14 NFRG requests, all were funded. This is an increase of 3 applications from last year's 11 proposals submitted. The average amount of the awards was \$1,500 and the total amount awarded for this program was \$18,704. All NFRG proposals were reviewed by COR.

Faculty Research Grants (FRGs): The number of grant applications in this category was 76, which is 52 proposals down from 128 applications in 2019-20. However, this year COR was able to fund about 91% of the FRG proposals at an average award amount of \$2,500.

Collaborative Research Grants (CRGs):

This year the Office of Research provided \$40,000 in matching funds to COR in support of a Collaborative Research Grant program which awarded up to \$15,000 to projects with up to three collaborators. Of the 7 CRG proposals submitted, all were funded for a total of \$80,000.

Travel Grants. Through these grants, the committee supports faculty travel to scholarly meetings and intercampus travel to research facilities, field stations, and sister UC campuses. Senate faculty may apply for the \$1000 Scholarly Meetings (SMT) or \$250 Inter-Campus (ICT) travel grant, respectively. This program is funded annually in the amount of \$124,806. Travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the number of applications significantly from 92 last year to just 20 in 2020-21.

Research Grant Program	Funded	Amount
New Faculty Research Grants (NFRG)	14	\$18,704
Faculty Research Grants (FRG)	76	\$191,601
Collaborative Research Grants (CRG)	7	\$40,000
Travel Grants	20	\$6,517
Total		\$256,822

B. Amendments to COR Grant Guidelines

This year the committee amended the Scholarly Meeting and Travel guidelines to include child care expenses associated with an approved meeting/event as an allowable expense. Relatedly, the SMT program is now being administered through the same tool used for the COR FRG program.

IV. Reviews of Policy and Process

A. Divisional

- Associate Provost Proposal

B. Systemwide

- Proposed Presidential Policy on University of California Research Data and Tangible Research Materials

V. Upcoming Agenda for 2021-22

The committee will further explore the following topics in 2021-22:

- Continue to advocate for increased support of faculty research endeavors across campus.

Respectfully Submitted;
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