

MINUTES
Committee on Research
April 2, 2013

Present: Scott Oliver (chair), Elisabeth Cameron, Nathaniel Deutsch, David Koo, Sri Kurniawan, Debra Lewis, Barbara Rogoff, Matt Robinson (Committee Analyst)

Absent with Notice: Fitnat Yildiz, Andrew Smith (GSA)

Reconsideration of FRG Allowable Expenses

During adjudication of the 2013-14 Faculty Research Grants (FRGs), COR decided that budget requests for subscriptions would not be allowable. This affected two applicants and one applicant appealed the decision. The committee discussed the rationale behind not using COR funds for subscription costs, primarily citing the function of the university library in providing faculty members with access to subscription materials. The committee agreed to reconsider these two grant budgets following the collection of more information from the two applicants.

Summer Salary Composite Benefit Rate

UC Office of the President has put forth a plan to charge faculty summer grants academic year benefit rates of 33-36% instead of actual costs of 10-12%. Members of UCORP project that this overcharging for summer benefits could cause a net loss of \$16 million. The campus chancellors have been presented with two scenarios, both of which charge the 33-36% rates. In one scenario, these fringe benefits are paid for via faculty grants. In the second scenario, the benefits are paid for from campus general funds. Members of UCORP believe that both of these options are detrimental to the research mission of the University of California.

COR expressed their confusion over the assignment of 33-36% fringe benefit rates to summer salary when it is known that the actual composite cost is much lower. The increase would necessarily mean less funds for the actual research, in particular graduate and postdoctoral stipends. COR also expressed frustration about the timing of this announcement and the lack of time for meaningful Senate action, at both the system and campus levels. COR members discussed the potential ramifications of the high summer salary fringe benefit rates, including faculty members opting to take course buyouts from their grants in place of summer salary. Chair Oliver will remain in contact with the UCSC Senate Executive Committee (SEC) and UCORP regarding this issue.

Consultation with VCR Margon

COR met with VCR Margon regarding the content of the committee's response during the Senate review of the Office of Research (OR) Self-Study. The Self-Study was completed and shared with the Senate for review in anticipation of an external review that has since been cancelled by the EVC. COR asked the VCR about the reasons for cancelling the external review. The VCR responded that he was surprised that the external review was cancelled and he did not understand why it was so. The VCR also explained that his office is facing a \$173,000 permanent budget cut on July 1, 2013. The resulting loss in staff will make it even more difficult to serve faculty on campus.

COR began the consultation by explaining that the use of the term “compliance” in the committee’s response to the OR Self-Study—in the context of the campus placing excessive emphasis on compliance to the extent that research is impeded—was likely a poor choice of words. The VCR agreed that many of the “red tape” issues that frustrate faculty during the research process at the university have little or nothing to do with OR and its policies. COR asked if the VCR sees his position partly as an advocate for Principal Investigators (PIs). VCR Margon answered that he never receives phone calls from faculty members complaining about compliance. COR asked if a survey tool or suggestion box could be developed or an OR staff assigned for faculty to seek answers. VCR Margon answered that he would prefer phone calls.

VCR Margon then turned to the COR letter of January 16, 2013 in response to the OR Self-Study. One suggestion made by COR was that OR make efforts to go paperless in some of their processes. COR used the example of the Scholarly Meeting Travel (SMT) applications which were made paperless this year using Google Docs. VCR Margon explained that OR processes interact with various databases and programs at the university that operate behind firewalls. Paperless processes for OR would require high levels of involvement from Information Technologies (IT) and would thus be high-cost. VCR Margon acknowledged that going paperless is a valuable goal for a number of reasons, but the current budget climate does not lend itself to these sorts of projects.

Another point made by COR in its response to the OR Self-Study was that there is a perception on campus that the hard sciences are favored over the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Divisions. VCR Margon said that he asked each of the five divisional deans if they had been asked about this by COR and each dean said that they had not. Further, each dean indicated that he was satisfied with OR and did not expect all divisions to be treated equally. COR clarified that the committee was addressing a perception, not necessarily the reality. The point made was that the perception exists and nothing in the Self-Study addressed or refuted it. COR asked if VCR Margon had documentation of OR support, offering detailed history of divisional support. VCR Margon replied that this is a complex question given that most of the funding he promises is contingent on PIs or divisions securing extramural grants. Also, some funds from the VCR office support multiple divisions. These complications prevent the gathering of this information.

VCR Margon returned to the issue of excessive compliance, noting that each year the amount of research awards brought in by the university is rising and that all external indicators show that UCSC is doing a superlative job. Many of the maligned processes on campus have little or nothing to do with OR and its policies. COR brought up a specific example of compliance directly relating to OR policies that is frustrating faculty. UCSC OR requires signed forms from collaborators at other UC campuses before submission of a collaborative proposal to NIH. A COR member nearly cancelled a submission due to her inability to get this document and was told by her OSP liaison that this was an internal requirement that could be ignored in this particular case. VCR Margon stated that he did not have the answer to this specific example right away but that he would look into it.

VCR Margon explained that OR issues of compliance—including animal research approval, human subjects approval, personal financial conflict reporting, responsible conduct of research agreements, and patent agreements—exist on all UC campuses in the exact same form.

Regarding training sessions required by certain external grant organizations, VCR Margon contended that UCSC requires the bare minimum of training modules. COR reiterated that the use of the term “compliance” in its January 16 correspondence was intended more broadly than the technical definition used by OR. Even if the “compliance” issues that are hampering PIs on campus are not a result of OR policies, COR contends that the VCR office ought to serve as an advocate for ease of research throughout campus.

VCR Margon took issue with COR’s assertion in the January 16 correspondence that disclosures do not typically lead to patent submission. He explained that, on average, 40% of disclosures in the UC system lead to patents. UCSC has had an average above 40% for the last six years. In fact, UCSC is in the upper third of the UC system for percentage of disclosures leading to patents. COR pointed out that this data was missing from the OR Self-Study. VCR Margon replied that he did not view the Self-Study as an opportunity to showcase data like this. In general, he viewed the Self-Study process as unclear and lacking uniform guidelines for completion, and was mandated by the EVC to be eight pages or less.

VCR Margon concluded by noting that COR’s charge includes consultation with the VCR but this has taken the form of 15 to 20 minutes at a few meetings per quarter (the average over the last several years has in fact been 30 minute consultations at 80% of COR meetings). The complexity of the research mission at UCSC necessitates more consultation time. He also noted that COR ought to have consulted with him prior to sending its January 16 response to the OR Self-Study. COR agreed that a more structured consultation plan would be necessary for the upcoming year.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 pm