Minutes of the Meeting of the Penn State Faculty Senate Committee on Research

March 18, 2013

8:30 – 10:30 am 217 Business


Absent - Abou Camara, Christopher W. Craighead, Melik C. Demirel, John W. Hanold

S. Blair Hedges, Ronald J. Huss, Karen M. Peters, Joseph W. Pitts, Gregory E. Raab, David B. Spencer, Kim C. Steiner, Ronald P. Wilson, Candice A. Yekel

1. Meeting called to order at 8:37 a.m.

2. Chair’s report – Ray mentioned Denise Solomon and John Nisbaum will visit with the committee to report on the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee for the Review of Graduate Faculty Membership.

3. Neil Sharkey – Commented on the Graduate Faculty Membership report as a simplification to the current structure. Sharkey reported on the University Senior research officers meeting:

   a. Affirming that we are dealing with similar issues as other universities: innovation, intellectual property, and economic development. There was focus on federal funding and economic development. Suggested visiting innovationdeficit.com – the website provides information on the potential long-term consequences of reduced federal funding and impact on innovation. FASEB.org has other similar videos. Discussion among committee members included comparison with other countries in Europe and Asia, and effectively communicating to political representatives the need for investing in the future by supporting research for innovation. Sharkey pointed out the challenges of retaining post-docs and researcher given the increased research spending in other countries such as China, India, and the European nations. Discussion also referred to increasing the role of Extension in this process. Sharkey pointed out this was possible but needed more resources to reposition their mission.

   b. Report on research income – Grant and contracts: $447 million (versus $473 million last year – down by 5%). There is a CIC initiative to better track and compile research data – showing how research drives the economy; not just funding but employment numbers, products that research consumes, the economic engine that is driven by research. PSU has signed on to this initiative as it could help frame the argument for additional resources. Long-term vision of this initiative is to be able to also monitor graduate and undergraduate students and
show the impact of education – in a data secure manner. Sharkey responded to the question that there was no discussion of raising indirect costs but there were discussions about doing a better job with F&A: to communicate F&A being a true cost of doing business. There was discussion of how a 5% increase in indirect costs could impact investigators’ ability to conduct research and even get research funded. Discussion also included separating the funds going back (to academic departments) and F&A as we might be losing money to do research. Sharkey mentioned that last year we spent $140 million on the research enterprise that included start up packages. There used to be instrumentation grants which is no longer the case – now it’s mostly an institutional expense. Sharkey proposed inviting the incoming President to a Fall meeting.

4. Graduate Council Update– Kathryn Hume spoke on behalf of David Spencer. The Graduate Council needs an expedited process for creating and modifying policies in case students might need such decisions during the summer when graduate council is not meeting.

5. Steinn Sigurdsson updated the committee that there will be no informational report for the April 2014 Senate meeting.

6. Chet Ray – Reported on Engaged Scholarship initiative. RES submitted a report on undergraduate students in research. This report is being condensed and will be included in the report to be submitted to the new President. Ray also asked for suggestions for future discussion topics or guest lectures.

7. John Nusbaum and Denise Solomon – Visited with the committee to share their views and get feedback on recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Subcommittee for the Review of Graduate Faculty Membership.

   a. Key recommendation – simplify the membership process with a two tired structure – full and associate membership: full membership to tenured and tenure track in a program that offers a graduate degree program. Associate for all those not on a tenure track or not in a graduate degree program.

   b. Distinction between duties: Full member– certain activities that provide significant leadership impact on the graduate program.

   c. Another issue that came up was concerns serving as a non-tenure-track faculty as the leader of the grad program/PIC. Discussion recommended that a footnote could leave room for flexibility.

   d. Discussion referred to the continued role of graduate program director as the gatekeeper. Solomon acknowledged this issue but felt the new recommendations provided more control to graduate programs.

   e. Discussion – the new recommendation still did not seem to address the issue that faculty were being kept away from working on grants and doing research. Solomon suggest that these changes were separate from the tenure status.

   f. John Nusbaum spoke on behalf of the Committee on Academic Standards.

   g. Solomon also commented that for form B faculty that are full-time, the new recommendations do pull away some responsibilities. For instance, right now they
can chair doctoral committees without prior approval. However, the footnote allows for flexibility.

h. Solomon, on dissemination of the report: The report exists as recommendations to the Graduate Council, to then decide what specifically needs to be done. Graduate Council will be in charge of announcing the changes. Ray recommended vetting it through the Senate as the leadership would like to see it.

8. Meeting adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

Minutes submitted by Chet Ray, Committee Chair