Minutes of the Meeting of the Penn State Faculty Senate Committee on Research
April 29, 2014

8:30 – 10:30 am 217 Business


1. Approval of minutes

2. Updates from Neil Sharkey - Update on research income from last year is showing a good trend given the budget constraints. We were down over 6% but are now back up. Updates on a new initiative called the PSU Fund for innovation that would involve tech transfer, and getting faculty and students to think innovatively; more innovation is being targeted, and PSU can do better at tech transfer, as there is a push for institutions to be a major economic driver. Neil Sharkey discussed the document on innovation that was uploaded on Angel. The idea is to commit to innovation; we are beginning the 1-year pilot program starting Fall 2014. Colleges will be expected to invest in proof of relevance with central money to match funding. Due diligence will be expected from colleges. Question: Would these projects be team-led? It is expected they would be team-led, and not focused on undergraduates; intercollege collaborations would be handled by the individual units, ideally a license/patent would be good, but due diligence would be required in the absence of license to ensure marketability. The academic culture issue would have to be addressed too – innovation versus simply working on the next manuscript. Ronald Huss – the program would include a techcelerator workshop – 10-week workshop for would-be entrepreneurs, limited to six teams, in which the teams would go through IP, building the company, and how to raise money. The target is to get 24 teams to go through with hopefully a high number of them being formed as actual companies. There will be no requirement for IP through PSU or be affiliated – the graduating teams have provided good feedback. Last year 10 companies formed and seven so far this year. These companies have hired employees, about 50-60. PSU has incubator spaces available (2nd floor of tech company; and across town there is space) at reasonable cost. Some of these companies are locating to nearby places, such as Philipsburg; in these places there is serial entrepreneurship evidence, employees forming their own companies; exploring various types of programs and ideas. The focus would also be for teams to better understand the SBIR process and other such programs, and the Ben Franklin program, which is an economic program. Question – Do we have a liaison program for venture capital community? Neil Sharkey - We have familiarity, and linkages are growing, challenge is geography.
The PSU innovation fund was presented to the deans who seem very receptive. There will be a limit, only four submissions per year. The biggest expected challenge would be to ensure separation of business and academic research. Several remarks and comments were shared on this issue. PSU is focusing on this initiative as one avenue of economic development, the other is with VP position being advertised to work with industry that leverages PSU intellectual to progress their mission.

3. Graduate Council Updates from David Spencer – The final report of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee for the Review of Graduate Faculty Membership is being presented to the Graduate Council. There is some clarification of full and associate membership for faculty not necessarily teaching in graduate program, who can serve on graduate committees clarifying and expanding the process for graduate faculty status. The report would be same or about the same version that we saw with some feedback; Question: Is the permission to teach being incorporated in this one?; Not certain. First the report is being presented to the committee on academic standards); Once it goes into the Graduate Council then it goes to the Graduate School for implementation.

4. Research and GenEd – Task force is looking for inputs, information gathering right now, and then will use summer for developing. The question posed to SCoR is: How can general education be leveraged to create positive impacts on research and scholarship?
   a. Thematic topics would be beneficial towards research; that's a positive, getting students engaged into research. SCoR suggests that we advocate thematic topics; even beyond the GE courses – there is more potential to engage the students with that approach. Concern on the campuses is that themes could be rigid and inflexible, that is the fear; so the themes need to be flexible, a menu of things to choose from - suppose the final 10 themes don't fit interests? Response: The task force is proposing that faculty will be involved but the concern is how would this be implemented? Would the thematic topics involve relating courses and the approval process? Different process to approve the themes could be an overhead cost and a burden on the Faculty Senate for this approval process each year. There is a suggestion to reduce the number of credits, and that would have ripple effects on changing the curriculum – however this is about the students and not the Senate; Comment: If this an evolving process from previous active collaborative learning, what is the relationship with the previous changes? Or is it this just stepping away from the past? The problem is not teaching courses but how students select the courses. We have very little specific information about what is being done, how this is going to be handled and whether we will have time to train and retrain for new courses? Other previous changes in universities have taken a long time (up to 5 years) to make their big shift and we are trying to accomplish this in 2 years; concerns related to whether undergraduate students are a cost or a resource? We have raised this concern earlier too.
b. Other discussions focused on” Guidelines that would be expectations of student; and resources for faculty. GenEd could incorporate skill sets that would be required for research. But what about self-motivation that would be required from students; and faculty resources? So GenEd will solve part of the problem but other issues would need to be considered. Could faculty select or recruit students rather than just the other way around right now?

5. Meeting adjourned at 9:45 AM.

Minutes submitted by Chester Ray, Committee Chair