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

September 10, 2013

8:30 – 10:30 am 217 Business

Attending: Beebee, Camara, Demirel, Hanold, Hedges, Loeb, Marko, Ray, Sharkey, Sharma, Sigurdsson, Spencer, Steiner, Vrana, Yekel

Absent: Barnstable, Forest, Huss, Spadaro, Wilson,

Guests: Physics, Smeal (Grad council members)

1. Welcome – Meeting began at 8:35 am by Chair.

2. Introduction of Members – Spencer introduced two guests from the Graduate Council. First organizational meeting of the Graduate Council is next week.

3. Assignment of Committee Secretary (Minutes of Meetings) – Amit Sharma

4. Approval of Minutes – Minutes of the April 23, 2013 meeting were unanimously approved.

2. Remarks from the Chair Chester Ray:

Ray noted that the committee be involved in activities that would be valuable to the faculty. He also emphasized the need for members to be engaged, think outside the box regarding challenges that can be addressed. He noted that there were a few items that we have been charged to do. He pointed out that Sharkey would like a discussion, feedback on certain items.

3. Remarks from Interim Vice President for Research – Dr. Neil Sharkey

Sharkey had updates on priority issues, and proposed a discussion on strategic planning.

Campus computing and research and teaching computing - University is in the process of constructing a centralized data center – but need to balance its centralized and distributed aspects. Institute of Cyber Science did a cluster hire that was led by Padma Raghavan. Also trying to enhance computational abilities, and strengthen the faculty involved in this area. (Infrastructure)

Governance – Academic Leadership Council is discussing how to strengthen faculty representation. New governance will be in place over time. The purpose is to have a strong perspective from the faculty to assess needs. Padma Raghavan has been appointed as the Strategic Initiatives VP; she will be involved in other projects including cyber computing.

Big data and larger projects from NSF, large instrumentation and foundation awards are also being discussed. We are also reviewing the internal down select mechanism with the perspective of making it a developmental process, through resources for the teams.

Developing young faculty through seed grants – Working with institute directors to find ways that would support faculty with seed grants. Provided examples including that of the Social Science Research Institute, Hucks, and others. Intention is not to adopt from each others’ best practices.
Integration of centers within academic units – Working on how to improve integration between institutes and academic units so that the latter have greater inputs in co-hires.

Other thoughts – Restore functionality in Sharkey’s office.

Tech transfer (carried over from Hank Foley) – There has been increased interest in potential commercial spin-offs, with a particular focus on developing resources in both front and back end. The front end that deals with industry and stronger than at the back end.

Strategic planning – Starting the 5 year strategic planning process at central administration and at units, as it was delayed for the next president. Sustainability seems to be front and center, a great theme around which to build our strategic plan.

Sharkey invited comments and questions from the members:

a. Spencer Pointed out that must we not forget faculty that are not part of centers and institutes, as future institutes would come out of such faculty members. We need to nurture those potentials. Sharkey agreed, and is aware of it. He has spoken with the Deans about it.

b. Sigurdsson – Noted the reduction of support for computing at the department level. Also noted the long response time on service requests. Response from Sharkey: Agreed with this as the no. 1 challenge. He is hoping that within 6 months current efforts will make a big difference with help from Raghavan and faculty guidance. He also invited inputs; balanced between centralized and distributed computing. Working with experts and faculty to resolve this issue. Institute of cyber science model could be seen more globally and also to support issues on the ground.

c. Relationship with industry – Is the process of royalties working? Sharkey noted that there has been interest but less activity. Hanold added that the University has initiated a few master agreements, and interest in seeking out more collaboration with. Another issue is sequestration from federal dollars that flow through the industry; except in the case of international collaborations.

d. Vrana noted that cost of maintaining patents was high. Sharkey and Hanold agreed that we need to be more strategic and central in that effort.

e. Ray asked what is the new model for Intellectual Property rights? Sharkey responded that within the current policy, unless the investigator objects the industry can have the IP if they want it; PSU interest is in the research. It has been a creative idea of Foley, specially when maintaining licenses has been costlier than grants coming in. The effort now is to auction off licenses that PSU holds.

f. Ray asked as to how often does industry seeks PSU help? Sharkey clarified three channels of funding: 1. Recruitment – for undergraduate students; 2. Philanthropic support; 3. Research dollars. It depends, some companies are involved in all three (larger companies) while others in one or the other.

g. Ray asked how would reductions in federal funding impact PSU and how will PSU deal with it? Sharkey responded that PSU is facing what higher education in general is facing as the new structure of funding. Response from PSU will include placing emphases in the right places.

h. Ray asked if cuts in federal funding has effected faculty hiring in non-tenure positions, and lost faculty jobs in fixed-term? Sharkey responded that effect has not been dramatic. Others added that while effect has not been much, we have not had to do this before. Others suggested
bringing representatives of Congress to the campus, and other lobbying efforts. Sharkey responded that the challenge was to get them to make the right choices for PSU.

i. Steiner asked whether research was being subsidized. Hanold clarified that most federal research pays full F&A, except USDA and State funding. Sharkey added that several faculty are pursuing foundation work in the present climate which would also fall in the latter category. Vrana added the importance of continuing to invest in research to maintain our top rankings. Sharkey added that large equipment is costly. Additional comments on the importance of ‘knowing’ the costs associated with research, and approach it in a holistic manner. Higher administration is also engaged in this topic, convincing the society and the politicians of the value we create, specially in the current fiscal climate.

j. Sharkey asked the committee to provide feedback on the strategic plan. Also, identify the “two most important things that your unit needs...” to be valuable for the society; a SWOT analysis of where the unit want to go in the immediate future, and what prevents them from doing so? He added the importance of identifying thematic issues (for instance sustainability). Such feedback will help identify valuable priorities, such as computing infrastructure.

k. Another question: Is the University working on IBIS replacement?: Sharkey responded that the University is still trying to advance the Myresearch portal. Yekel added that a commercial product would replace Prams that would be used for non-financial compliance issues. This is likely to improve efficiency at the investigator end, particularly by reducing the number of questions. Focus will be on IRB related issues, and leaving rest for the University to manage. Sharkey added that there is a need to create a right balance of risk averse. Additional comments repeated the need to know the cost of funding, specially related to space and salaries.

5. Presentation by Janet Conner, Council on Engaged Scholarship has a working definition that has been developed over the last 2 years with a University wide task force asked to look at it from the directive of the last strategic plan. There is some conceptual and financial support from higher administration. Several discussions have taken place along with other representative committees such as with leadership council and on academic education, and about how it can be embedded in the curriculum. This council will make a presentation to the Senate in October with a forensic session in December. The 9 senate chairs will also be invited for a meeting. Ray added that the SCoR has been charged to provide a half-page report, informational report to the Senate on undergraduate research that will be included in the report for the new president. Ray thanked Conner for visiting SCoR.

4. Remarks from Graduate Council Representative David Spencer. Spencer noted that committee on graduate research is focusing on: 1. Interacting with SCORE 2. Graduate exhibition. Spencer also invited the Graduate Council to this meeting; he acknowledged members that made it to this meeting, and hope will find activities of interest. Ray asked about the overall goal and purpose of the Graduate Council. Spencer explained that the council is a conduit on information from administration back to colleges; members are elected representatives; but the council have much narrower focus on graduate student issues. The council focuses on research that are graduate student related, course and program approvals to graduate student life to research activities, and interaction with administration. Ray asked what were some of the concerns that the council was dealing with. Spencer explained that recent issues
included graduate student benefits, graduate student leaves of absence, issues related to new graduate programs and new courses, and course change and course proposals. Beebee noted the universal dissatisfaction of graduate course approval process. Spencer clarified that the council has an electronic process for approval of new programs. The perception of the old paper system might still exist. Delays could also relate to the college approval process. He clarified that the times taken for approval at the council have been going down over the last couple of years.

6. Review University Faculty Senate Documents
   a. Schedule of Meetings
   b. Membership List
   c. Priorities Form

5. Assignment of Secretary and Subcommittees from Research Committee Priorities Form
   a. Undergraduate Research Experience – How can we improve undergraduate research experience? Ray noted that Sharma will be chair the subcommittee. Sharkey noted the importance of baseline data; Varna noted how we might be subsidizing undergraduate research; Sigurdsson noted that this should not be an unfunded mandate.

   b. Indirect Cost with University Planning – generate a report of indirect costs of all campuses. Ray will get more clarification on SCoR has been asked to accomplish.

   c. Conflict of Commitment Policy Development?

   d. Financial Conflict of Interest? Sharkey offered to help with this charge to the committee. Yekel clarified that this is related to the individual financial conflict aspect. The policy has been in place for several years, and implementation has been staggered over years. It is currently in year three. With the exclusion of College of Medicine, the policy is being implemented in all others. So far there have been 3000 disclosures. Asked where did the investigator list come from? Yekel explained that investigator list has been obtained from several sources including sponsored programs going back to 5 years. Discussion pursued about how faculty may or may not be on the list even though they were or were not involved in research. Loeb commented that its unclear how this involves as much to research as to how faculty is obligated to the University. Presentations were made to this committee at the Faculty Affairs Committee, and concerns were about changing language from the time of presentations to draft that were finally shared of this policy.

   e. Principles of Scholarly Intellectual Property? – Ray asked if there a report? Sigurdsson clarified there wasn’t any report written. He was the chair of the subcommittee. Teaching and research policies were defined. There was less consensus on teaching than on research IP. There is an open space here that needs to be filled in, as it also involves graduate students (noted by Spencer). Ray suggested that we pursue this issue, and Sharkey offered to provide inputs.
6. New Business:

Frantisek noted that faculty at non-UP and Hershey campuses that were tenured faculty at UP (moved to satellite campuses) had and lost graduate status. In other instances, a non-tenured track faculty who moved to satellite got tenure and received graduate status. Ray asked if there is no graduate faculty appointment at satellite campuses. Loeb clarified that when campuses broke away a two-tier system was set up; the logic was that campuses didn't have resources to conduct research. This has created a two-tier system, and prevents faculty that would like to conduct research, work with graduate student. Ray clarified if SCoR's role would be that those wanting to do research are not even allowed to serve on graduate committees. He added that a short report will have to be generated to be given to the appropriate individuals, with recommendations. Sharkey commented on the application process for graduate faculty status. There was discussion on how this is an administrative issue, and in some cases the problem is the lack of consistency in the process. Sharkey suggested involving Intra-University Relations and Faculty Affairs. There was discussion on resolving this issue given our emphasis on research.

7. Adjournment – Meeting was adjourned at 10:28 a.m.

Minutes submitted by Chet Ray, Committee Chair