Minutes of the Meeting of the Penn State Faculty Senate Committee on Research
December 10, 2013

8:30 – 10:30 am 217 Business


Absent: Colin Barnstable, Abou Camara, Christopher Craighead, Chris Forest, Ronald Huss, Matthew Krotowski, Kim Steiner, Kent Vrana, Candice Yekel

Guest: Dean Younken

1. Approval of minutes - Robert Loeb moved, Amit Sharma seconded; motion to approve was passed unanimously.

2. Neil Sharkey’s update - Data center and campus computing - added capacity requested at UP adds $18 million to the cost of data center. Original plan was to build a hard building. Hershey project will move forward, but we might reconsider whether we are doing this right with one single building/facility – this discussion continues. Materials research institute (first University wide institute) – one of our strongest assets (ranked no. 1), Carlos Pantano is stepping down by Summer, external search has begun. Presidential search update – sense that the committee is optimistic of other good candidates – we might have an announcement by Spring. Innovation and entrepreneurial are issues to be discussed – getting projects from lab to stage where a company might want to invest is challenging. The provost and others are trying to come up with ways to fund such initiatives – invest campus dollars, philanthropy, and other aspects (venture capitalism and tech transfer, among others). The question is how can we get better? Strong push for institutions like ours to push for innovation. We need to enhance efforts in getting multi-million dollars, multi-institution grants; how can we be proactive. He is going to the CIC meeting of our peers, and this would be on the agenda to understand how others do it. Research income – College of Medicine is up 40% on grants and contracts; unfortunately most other units are down somewhat, and not unexpected. Still not doing too badly. John Hanold – reviewed NSF’s total S&E expenditure rankings for FY 2012 for the top twenty overall by NSF fields and subfields. PSU overall ranking is 18; mentioned that we have a much more diversified portfolio which might encourage interdisciplinary research. In about 90% of these institutions NIH is the no. 1 sponsor. Melik Demirel mentioned other sources of rankings; Chet Ray mentioned funding lack in life sciences, medical – why we haven’t moved up in rankings; Tom Beebee mentioned the disparity of some ranking scores; other comments: we seem to have picked the right peers as big 10s are well represented in the rankings.

3. Dean Younken (Graduate school Dean) – Commented to clarify the status of graduate faculty at other campuses. A committee has been asked to look into this issue, and the update is still not available (this is a sub committee of Graduate Council). Some insights on the current categories for graduate faculty standard, and this might change – we
have three categories: form A, B, and C: A = tenure line in departments that offer the
highest degree (primarily the Ph.D., but also DMA (music), and D.Ed.); Form B = either
non tenure line, full time research scientists, adjunct faculty or tenure line with no
highest degree offered (Form A and B must hold the highest degree), membership is
available to any faculty who meets those criteria, participation (depending on where
their graduate program is located). Sometimes the limiting factor is geography where
the student has to be at UP for course work. Alternatively there are other graduate
programs in other locations - Hershey, Harrisburg, Erie, Great Valley; we do have quite a
number of faculty at other locations that participate in graduate programs here at UP.
This is largely due to a combination of whether there is a graduate program on campus,
where students have to take courses, and whether faculty’s campus has a program that
would offer research – location, access are key criterion, otherwise we don’t have any
restrictions. Emphasize – some UP programs have not offered membership because of
how ranking for those units are determined – tremendous amount of weight on faculty
research productivity and how many students were chaired by faculty members. If the
faculty had not chaired a student for the last 5 years, example of psychology where the
ranking slid because of relatively few numbers of students had been supervised per
faculty member due to broader faculty membership. While this should not be
encouraged as the sole criteria, but this is a factor. But there definitely need to be
opportunities to participate in training graduate students; one of the issues being
considered – examining PSU’s needs as a graduate institution for instance for
professional masters programs. Does someone who brings expertise for such a degree
need to have a doctoral degree? Robert Loeb – Any faculty from other campuses?
Answer is Yes; Robert Loeb continued... location should not be a valid criterion,
consultation with students can be done at a distance. Melik Marko – students don’t
even know (including faculty) whether there are experts in other areas, another issue. If
you have a full faculty graduate membership then it could mess up grad teaching
schedules, but the interest is to mentor graduate students... as the students are not
even aware of faculty resources at UP. Dean Younken – yes technology has helped a
great deal to overcome location, but still difficult to mentor students. For instance, the
part time student completion metrics are problematic due to the location issue. One of
graduate council emphasis has been students being embedded on campus. Robert Loeb
– perhaps there are ways to integrate faculty from a distance... holding on to the old
rules might be the challenge; Dean Younken – its not a rule or a procedure but the
support has to be invited. It’s a reality... there are some faculty at UP struggling to be
invited as graduate faculty members, nomination must come from the graduate
program. Dean Younken – All graduate programs were asked to verify graduate faculty
roaster... when assessing impact on ranking, programs started to drop UP graduate
faculty that were tenured. Viewed less as a status but more as a functional necessary
role... not teaching graduate courses, advising students, conducting research. It has also
to do with how much activity. Melik Marko – still there are some at UP that don’t
participate in members and those outside. Dean Younken – comes down to having some
relationships, connection, research expertise, shared interests; Steinn Sigurdsson
mentioned that sometimes a former relationship, recognized relationship helps...
example from faculty in psychology. Dean Younken – Form C faculty can teach graduate
professional courses... we do not want to designate faculty as members if they don't
have resources to participate, we still have some faculty with status from original
contract. She has never been asked to take away status... but if they don't have access
to students then that creates another problem, and becomes a hollow status. Other comments - how some with status do not have access to students, faculty colleagues etc. Blair Hedges – what about multiple program memberships? Dean Youken - movement to consolidate programs and therefore memberships, especially if they are not active in a program. Blair Hedges – that is penalizing interdisciplinary research. It's a negative for exposure to program; Neil Sharkey – part of the motivation to bring others into the umbrella; Chet Ray – is the discussion today being addressed in the deliberations of the special committee? Dean Youken – yes if they go through the whole list of questions... we should be hearing something soon. Dean hopes to see some product soon... the concern is that even if there is a mechanistic way to create a space, how do you actually nurture and foster relationships or engagement from students and faculty in the long term... how do you create an environment, which is less mechanistic. Robert Loeb – even a simple website exposure would be helpful; Neil Sharkey – but it won’t solve the problem of building relationships.

4. Undergraduate research – Amit Sharma provided an overview; Tom Beebee referred to the Senate report... undergrad research was one of those... where exactly engaged scholarship is going is not clear yet; our report tries to be within that... is research within engaged scholarship; Chet Ray – some how faculty need to know recognition and be rewarded for taking students into research; Blair Hedges – funding needs to be aligned... University distributes to colleges, and college to students. Intercollege funding is a problem, penalizing interdisciplinary research. Schreyer can do it, but its limited funding... some fields cost a lot of money. Chet Ray – but experience is that they can contribute to the activities; Blair Hedges - the funding is not a lot... system could be improved taking it away from the associate deans, just one administrator at Old Main, and making the system more effective. Chet Ray – consolidation would require committee development... but we should not be penalized for interdisciplinary. Blair Hedges – decentralization of funding; plus there is a single website which is not well maintained; Steinn Sigurdsson has heard from college of science – quantitatively what is expected of us, in terms of research... in context of student faculty resources, because there is some talk that every student has to have research experience... you don't want all those students to be in the lab. There needs to be a discussion to be elitist but resources is an issue and so is student performance. (Both Steinn Sigurdsson and Blair Hedges); Effort and resources, tell us what you want. Chet Ray – we should tell them what we want... these are some of the venues to look at... that's where are focus needs to be, what is important and possible, including requesting extra support and resources. Also engagement whether research or study aboard helps; College of Science is getting something as lab experience as exposure. Tom Beebee – what actually is the definition of research and is not included it as lab? Chet Ray – whether it doesn't or does? Frantisek Marko – on campuses we only have undergraduate experience... it’s not for all, some enjoy it and others don’t; Chet Ray – this is just one component and we need to highlight how we can improve this experience... and may not be for everyone.

5. David Spencer – Brief update on Graduate Council Committee on Graduate Research

6. Chet Ray – Requested committee members to bring issues that they want to address to him for future meetings.
7. Adjournment

Prepared by Amit Sharma