

University of Rhode Island
Meeting of the Council for Research
Monday, October 6, 2008
URI Library, Conference Room A

Attendance:

Members Present: Vice President Peter Alfonso, Chairman John King, S. Bradley Moran, Marcella Thompson, Jami Halpern, Cynthia Blanthorne, Nikhilesh Dholakia, Manbir Sodhi, Thomas Mather, Mark Wood, Karen Markin, Raymond Wright, Joelle Rollo-Koster, Betty Young, Clinton Chichester, William Krieger, Sookhyun Kim, Theodore Walls

Others Present: Jill Diehl

Members Absent: Graham Forrester, Ginette Ferszt, Jane Miner, Harold Bibb

Assistant VP Bradley Moran opened the meeting at 3:06pm due to the Chairman and Vice President being delayed.

New Member, Dr. Theodore Walls from the Department of Psychology, was introduced to the Council. Professor Walls' research interests are related to statistics design and engineering modeling. He was appointed by the Faculty Senate for a three-year term to replace Will Krieger, who resigned from the Council.

At this time, Vice President Alfonso and Chairman John King arrived at the meeting.

Vice President's Report:

URI Commission on Research and Innovation Report: VP Alfonso announced that the URI Commission report being released would announce that external grants and contract awards at URI have been flat for the past seven or eight years, showing a growth of only 26% in the past ten year period, while average growth at similar universities was 117% during this period. The report will attempt to answer why this is so, and what to do about it.

Two major recommendations are being made. The first is a \$100 million state allocation for research at URI, which may not be well received at this time of financial challenges. The second is increasing support from leadership, including the Board of Governors, Higher Education, and the new university president (to be hired).

Potential results as a result of the study range from the worst case scenario is that the General Assembly may feel that research is not worth the costs of supporting it, to a greater investment in research support. Saul Kaplan, the Governor's representative, was the person who proposed the state investment, so it is hoped that there may be support from the Governor's office.

The recommendation calls for fifteen to twenty additional research faculty to be hired. The full report is due to be released October 7th. (Note: report has since been forwarded via email to Council for Research). *Financial Report:* The September financial report notes the receipt of \$20 million, from which \$14 million came from six big grants. We have been averaging \$5.5 million per month so \$20M in

September is a very large single month amount. \$531,000 has been raised so far this fiscal year for the URI Research Foundation.

Review and Discussion of Ad Hoc Committee Report: Sponsored Projects Submissions:

This Council for Research Ad Hoc Committee consisted of Manbir Sodhi (Chairman), Mark Wood, and John King. Their goal was to examine the procedural process for proposal submissions. The committee voiced their concern for the amount of responsibility currently invested in one person, Franca Cirelli, who works very hard.

The committee report made six recommendations:

- 1) Redundancy
- 2) Redesigning Submission Process
- 3) Deadline Enforcement
- 4) Distribution of budget preparation effort
- 5) Setting up Web-based calendar
- 6) Providing proposal preparation training for faculty and staff

Assistant VP for Research Administration Bradley Moran applauded the report, saying it is exactly right, and gave an update on the progress made to date concerning its recommendations. He noted that at GSO, Senior Research Grant Assistants (SRGA's) are in place to allow for efficiency so that Franca only needs to check the budget and proposal, and push the "submit" button. Federal grants allow payment for SRGA's only through indirect costs. GSO has made a decision to pay for SRGA's out of their indirect cost budget. Other colleges do not have such staff support available, and therefore must rely on greater assistance from the Research Sponsored Projects staff. Discussion noted that there is no exam for SRGA's, and that a vetting procedure would be beneficial for other colleges to acquire trained SRGA's to help with proposals.

Moran noted that the Research Office submits about sixty proposals per month. Currently, there are only four staff in the Sponsored Projects Department. One of them is out sick for the next two weeks. Franca is responsible for submissions, Julia for subcontracts, and Mary for action notices. Moran agreed with the Ad Hoc Committee recommendation that more staff are needed, and noted that the search has begun for the director's position vacated as a result of Gail Wing's retirement. He expects this process to wrap up by the end of November.

Moran is in favor of immediately implementing a five-day advance deadline submission policy, with no exceptions, noting that Woods Hole has a 30 day mandatory policy. He noted a recent example of a blatant disregard for staff, which occurred on the Friday before Labor Day when a professor brought in a submission at 2pm without any prior announcement. Moran said that growing staff is essential, as the stress level is high and people are working hard to keep up.

Chairman John King reiterated that the Council for Research voted to implement the proposed changes as soon as possible, and said that this should be made "widely known." He asked when the recommendations would be implemented. Moran answered that the replacement process for Gail Wing is happening now. VP Alfonso is waiting for the committee report (due out October 7) to use as leverage for making

changes. Jill Diehl noted that the fifth recommendation, addressing staff and faculty training, has been addressed by scheduling such training sessions intermittently throughout this academic year's Research Seminar Series.

Moran noted that the first floor of the Research Office is being painted and spruced up to provide a nicer atmosphere and a sitting area for researchers. He hopes that the small amount of money being spent will also improve morale. Council members agreed that the office was in need of sprucing up. They remarked that the Council has no financial resources available to make changes, but that recommendations for deadline enforcement should be implemented. It was noted that a policy is needed before it can be enforced. Members discussed the web-based calendar recommendation and noted that IT is conducting calendaring workshops. Chairman King requested that the Council receive monthly updates on the progress of the recommendations.

The Council agreed to vote again on the need to come up with an enforceable, five-day advance submission deadline policy that can be passed by the Faculty Senate. A motion was made by Mark Wood and seconded by Marcella Thompson. It passed unanimously.

Members noted that proposal submission is only half the battle, and that completing research is the real war. A member remarked that the Council for Research and the Research Office seem to be biased toward serving the hard sciences, rather than all disciplines of the university, and that GSO serves their own. A suggestion was made that help be allocated more equitably across all colleges. It was noted that GSO chooses to pay for their own grant support staff out of their indirect cost reimbursement rates, and that other colleges could also choose to allocate funds for Senior Research Grant Assistants (SRGAs) to help with proposal and budget development, as well as grant management. However, some colleges and business managers choose not to review grants or assist with pre / post award monitoring. It was suggested that each college consider adding an SRGA to assist with this process. Further discussion noted that when colleges get only twenty-seven cents back on the dollar, and the rest of the money goes elsewhere, it is hard to hire SRGA's. A suggestion to recommend that budgets are submitted ahead of proposals to give Franca time to review them while giving the PI time to work on the body of the proposal may alleviate some of the strain. Assistant VP Moran offered to visit individual colleges to discuss potential strategies and solutions.

Reallocation and Recruitment Deadlines

Topic Deleted from Agenda

Schedule for Review of Centers / Institutes

The Centers / Institute Review Schedule was distributed to members. Chairman King noted that some centers on the list are overdue for a review, and some no longer exist. He will work with the Research Office to determine which need to be contacted for review. Mark Wood noted that the Higher Education Alcohol Research Center is defunct.

Conflict of Interest Policy for Council for Research Members

Tabled until November 3 meeting

Other Business:

Post Doc Issue

Assistant VP Moran will be meeting with Cliff Katz and Laura Kenerson to address this issue. Concern was voiced that there is no transparent, well-defined, centralized policy for this longstanding problem. Since there are not many post docs on campus, a consistent policy has been elusive. Most people don't know what the post doc compensation levels are. NIH levels list a beginning salary of \$40,400, with 4% annual increases. A concern has been that PI's submit a salary level and it gets rejected by Cliff Katz. Another concern is the cost of health insurance. The cost is \$15,000 for family coverage for employees. As post docs are treated as employees, this reduces URI's competitiveness with other universities, as some can hire two people for our cost of hiring one. There is also confusion about whether grants can pay for individual, rather than family coverage. VP Alfonso said that the concern that PI's must use the family rate even if the person is single was found to be untrue. He said that the State of Rhode Island considers graduate students and post docs to be employees, so if they have a family, we must pay the family rate. The URI Commission report may have recommendations about changing this determination, as well as charging in state tuition for graduate students. This may have to be handled externally through the General Assembly, but that would create a problem with workers' compensation benefits, which are only available to employees. Some departments are outsourcing rather than hiring post docs, as costs are too expensive. Members suggested that perhaps a different policy for trainees might be possible.

The Council recommended that a concrete post doc policy be posted on the website.

Provost Vision Statement:

This was distributed to Council Members and added to the November 3 agenda.

At this time, a representative from Dean Maslyn's office came to "kick us out" of the library. The meeting adjourned at 4:36pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Diehl
Grants & Contracts Specialist

PLEASE NOTE: Since this meeting, Bradley Moran met with Cliff Katz and Laura Kenerson to discuss the post doc issue. He set up a special meeting for them to meet with the Council for Research to discuss a proposed post doc policy. **This will take place on Thursday, October 30, at 3pm in Conference Room A of the URI Library.**

It was also decided to **also hold the regularly scheduled meeting of Monday, November 3, at 3pm** in Conference Room A for discussion of the agenda items of the Provost Vision Statement, as well as the Council's Conflict of Interest Policy. **Provost Donald Dehayes will be invited to this meeting.**