

University of Rhode Island
Meeting of the Council for Research
Monday, December 1, 2008
URI Library, Conference Room A

Attendance:

Members Present: Vice President Peter Alfonso, Chairman John King, Nikhilesh Dholakia, Cynthia Blanthorne, Graham Forrester, Manbir Sodhi, Marcella Thompson, Jami Halpern, Thomas Mather, Mark Wood, Karen Markin, Joelle Rollo-Koster, Betty Young, Clinton Chichester, Ginette Ferszt, Jane Miner, Theodore Walls

Others Present: Provost Donald Dehayes, David Sadowski, Jill Diehl

Members Absent: S. Bradley Moran, Raymond Wright, Harold Bibb, Sookhyun Kim

Chairman John King opened the meeting at 3:05pm.

Minutes of the meeting of October 30, 2008:

The minutes of the meeting of October 30, 2008 were approved unanimously.

VP Report:

VP Alfonso reported both good news and bad news:

Grant and Contracts Awards Up

The good news is that year to date grant and contract awards through November 30 are still very much ahead of last year, with \$42.1 million having been received in fiscal year '09 so far, versus \$26.5 million at this time in fiscal year '08. In the first five months of this year, we received 66% of the total funds we received for all of last year. The number of proposals submitted is also up, with 277 submitted by November 30 this year, versus 248 last year at this time.

Faculty Grants Program Funding Down

The bad news is that state funding for the faculty grants program is projected to be less than last year. This allocation comes from next year's projected state funds (rather than from overhead revenue). The program usually gets about \$90,000 from the state; however, last year it received only \$67,000 and the Division of Research and Economic Development added \$5,000 to that amount. State funding for research has continued to decline, dropping from about \$200,000 to \$150,000 last year, \$135,000 this year, and projections are even less for next year due to the projected \$350 - \$380 million state deficit. It seems that the best case scenario is that URI will lose \$10.5-\$11million additional state dollars, thus reducing the University's state support to the mid \$50 million range, which comprises less than 10% of the University's total budget. Thus, cuts will

need to be made across the University, and the belief is that “no one should escape the pain.” As a result, funds for the faculty grants program may suffer more cuts. However, VP Alfonso will try to supplement funding to meet a target of goal of \$70,000 for the next Council for Research faculty grant cycle.

VP Alfonso noted that the University’s indirect cost rate charged on grants is 49%, however only about 25% is actually recovered. Years ago, salaries for pre-award staff were paid by the state; they now are covered by overhead. Staffing is as lean and thin as possible. It is important that we recover as much indirect costs as possible to support operations.

Chairman John King reported that Sea Grant Director Barry Costa-Pierce might be willing to contribute to the faculty grant program funding on an indefinite basis, perhaps in the \$20,000 - \$30,000 range; however, strings are attached. Eligibility requirements may need to include grants that are marine related, conducted by young investigators with ADVANCE objectives. This support would bring the total grant program up to the \$100,000 range again. Chairman King would like to set a goal for the program’s base funding to be brought back up to \$100,000, and then supplemented with the additional Sea Grant support.

Progress Updates:

* VP Alfonso reported that the recent Faculty Forum to discuss the URI Commission Report attracted 78 people, a record attendance for this Friday Seminar Series.

* A new URI Research Magazine will be published soon.

* As Assistant VP Bradley Moran was away, VP Alfonso relayed his progress update, stating that the online appointment calendar for Sponsored Projects is now up and running. (M. Sodhi reported difficulty trying to view the online calendar; this will be investigated.) Also, the Search for the Director of Sponsored Projects is nearing completion, and an appointment is expected within a few weeks.

* VP Alfonso introduced David Sadowski, the new Assistant VP for IP Management and Commercialization. His very impressive background includes eleven years with the US Patent and Trademark Office, and eighteen years with NIH, where he served as Deputy Director of NIH Division of Technology Development and Transfer. As a Patent Agent, David is a very important hire who can file patents on our behalf. He fills a position that has been vacant since May, 2006.

Discussion with Provost Dehayes about proposed Vision Statement:

Chairman King began the discussion by stating that there seemed to be contradictions between the vision statement of Academic Affairs, and that of the Division of Research and Economic Development. VP Alfonso responded that he does not consider the Commission report to be the vision statement of the Division of Research and Economic Development, saying that he was the only URI participant on the committee. Rather, he considers it the “Justice Flander’s Commission” report. Although some interviews were conducted across campus, the original intent of the study was to gain more autonomy for research by moving away from control by the Board of Governors toward more local control by a Board of Directors. The VP never dreamed that the report would

propose a \$100 million state bond issue. The report was written by the Clarendon Group, which had experience with business, but little experience with universities.

Provost Dehayes said that he meets frequently with VP Alfonso, and that they both see Research and Academic Affairs missions going hand in hand.

Provost Dehayes said that he has been working closely with the Deans and Vice Provost to draft a vision statement that focuses on academic affairs across the university. Now they are meeting with others for discussion and to gain a sense of direction to reshape ideas and translate them to the culture of the University.

Provost Dehayes felt that the Flander's report was fairly harsh and inconsistent with what he has experienced relative to the productivity and creativity of faculty, who he said are working against all odds despite financial and infrastructure pressures. Some of the report's comparisons didn't seem fair; if medical school research at UVM is removed, URI has nearly double the research that UVM does. Instead, he offered that perhaps a better strategy would be to tell the good stories happening here, and he noted that the recent hires by VP Alfonso have made steps in the right direction. He suggested getting rid of the word "division," as it connotes divided, rather than shared purpose. Chairman King didn't think the commission report was that bad, but suggested that the best vision statements link people together to build and define the future of the University. VP Alfonso had hoped that the commission report might alleviate state regulations that hamper us. Chairman King voiced concern that the Provost Vision Statement may not place enough emphasis on research or graduate education, and stressed the need for consistency between the two "high-profile documents."

Provost Dehayes said that the academic vision statement was group created and has been shared with the Faculty Senate. It purposely does not break out teaching, research, and outreach, but instead, it focuses on cross-cutting themes, e.g. health. Broad goals focus on learning, scholarship, and outreach. He wants to focus on specific expertise that URI can take advantage of to make its mark in the world, in higher education, and to better position ourselves in the marketplace.

Some reviewers wanted research, humanities, and outreach spelled out separately. The question asked was, can these be added or does the statement need to be redone? The Provost spoke of his strong research background and vision of research as a defining piece, not just for discovery, but as our distinctive niche. He sees teaching and research becoming more of a continuum rather than as oppositional forces. For example, we should have the best scholars in the classrooms and the best students in the labs. He reported witnessing firsthand these two areas thriving together with the proper balance. Currently, he sees teaching loads that are too high, and the need to utilize resources more effectively and efficiently, so that research comes into the classroom to enhance teaching.

As for graduate education, he noted that there is a lot of work to do, with the number one challenge to fix the out-of-state tuition clause for graduate assistants. This was his primary priority when he arrived on campus months ago, and then \$12 million in state funding cuts were mandated. Now, he is working with VP Alfonso on ideas to fix the problem, as this policy is hard on faculty and too taxing on grants to support out-of-state graduate tuition levels. We must change this to attract the best graduate students on a national level.

The Provost stated that he didn't come here to manage an enterprise, but rather to build a great institution. When he served as the dean of an interdisciplinary environmental college, they moved to integrate graduate and research education, and an 800% increase in graduate students and research FTEs resulted.

Concerns were voiced about how URI can accomplish such a goal with higher undergraduate teaching loads. Members reported hearing that the Provost thought that the faculty / student ratio was too low, which concerned council members who thought that URI's student/faculty ratio was 21.3 student / faculty ratio, compared to UVM's 15:1 and UConn's 18:1 ratios. The Provost corrected that data, saying that URI data has been found to be inaccurate. He said that URI actually has a 14:1 student/faculty ratio, which surprised everyone. He stressed the importance of getting accurate data, noting that the University would need to add 5,000 students to arrive at the 19:1 student to faculty ratio that is published in the URI manual.

State funding supplies only 11% of the current University budget, so we need to find creative ways to decrease teaching loads and manage our human resources better. Adding more students won't solve the problem. The Provost noted that UConn has four to five thousand more FTE students than we do, but both universities teach the same number of classes. He said we need to look at the low enrollment classes and majors and think carefully about how we can best allocate our resources.

The Provost noted that in the past, the "tyranny of small decisions" seemed to be in vogue, rather than basing decisions on a long-term plan. On a yearly basis, these small decisions looked OK; over time however, they proved not to be the best. Tom Mather said that it is time to set up a new paradigm to force us to think about innovation and focus us on the impact of deeper, more forward thinking approaches. The Provost agreed and said that we may be ahead of other universities, as URI has been struggling for awhile with budget problems and has already made some necessary changes. He said the university needs a resource allocation model based on strategic priorities, productiveness, cost effectiveness and willingness to innovate. Many challenges exist, but many changes are being made to fix them. What we can control we can fix. He said now is the time to develop a paperless system to move forms through the system, and improve workflow so people can feel better.

The Provost said that many telling pieces came out of the branding exercise of the analysis of how URI thinks of itself. We've got to tell our story. Why weren't the five alums who received distinguished achievement awards covered in the newspapers? VP Afonso's new URI Magazine coming out soon will focus on some of the good stories.

The Provost said we must keep moving forward now; we can't wait for a new president to be hired. The Vision can be broad, and then individual steps to move forward can be determined. A January Planning Summit with focus across the university will address how to get there; planks will emerge; task forces will be comprised of undergrads, grad students, research, scholarship, public engagement. For example, with tremendous need in the world, we need to find a way to harness the good work being done here in math and science, and connect the research to economic development. How do we make that transition and pull in other expertise on campus? How do we get teams of students to work with teams of faculty, such as having MBA students working with scientists? How do we make changes to how we educate and how we do research? How do we lead

that world? These same challenges are at every other university. Why not lead that challenge? That piece not fully developed in commission report; we need more thought in this area.

The Provost said he will try to redraft the document at the end of the semester and will take feedback from here on until it is done. He welcomed Council for Research members to write a few bullets now, and then submit additional comments to him over the upcoming weeks. At this time, the Provost left the meeting. The VP for Research reminded the Council of their influential role at the university, and he urged the Council to utilize their power by formally submitting their comments as a group. Then the VP for Research and Economic Development left the meeting.

Council for Research members continued discussion included the following comments:

- * A confining state structure within the university system may be preventing progress... perhaps an approach that considers individual's strengths and utilizes them more flexibly and creatively would be better than a "one size fits all approach," where wonderfully talented people are caught in an inefficient, rigid system that interferes with forward movement.
- * External constraints are an even bigger challenge than financial concerns; moment to moment instability caused by many budget cuts within a short time period
- * Heartened that Provost said decisions must be made locally by department; need to remove barriers between departments; former PCA approach seen as a "paint by numbers" disaster
- * Urgent need for academe to connect; how can we work together to be what we and the students can be?
- * Consider unintended consequences
- * Applaud input and dialogue, nonstructural approach, vertical team teaching; so hard to conduct research here; need budget transparency to level of department
- * Where is the word "marine" in the three areas of strength? Expertise exists across all colleges of the university in all three spheres; have we fully harnessed it? Can we consider function vs. structure?
- * How do we come together in this budget environment to become an "innovative institute"?
- * How does the new president search fit within the vision? Expect it will continue to be shaped by new president.
- * Why not have three or four big screen TV's highlighting the achievements of different aspects of our university, as a constant reminder of the good things that are happening?
- * It's a different world out there for the humanities, which are in the minority. Research in the humanities is being hammered, and words of change are just a smokescreen. We need to move all departments forward, not just some. How can you teach 175 students and write two books at the same time?

- * Hired a theater student with expertise to demonstrate our innovation; think innovatively about how to piece together expertise that works in a new way
- * Challenge is how to get from here to there without heavy teaching loads...new ideas are needed
- * How do we think positively across departments? The discussion needed is not taking place between departments; need more than just words; no two tiered faculty; challenge how each fits
- * Push for a visual...a graphic is essential to communicate to others how things fit together
- * Don't like the current "hierarchy" graphic;
- * What is our body of knowledge? Education, research, practice, policy; What do we produce? Graduates for society, economic compensation
- * There is a deficit of research infrastructure here
- * Ask for directions; faculty recognition for interdisciplinary research
- * Travel policy that supports research; department support with budgets, letters of support, assistance with internal paperwork requirements

As time was at issue, Council for Research Members decided to continue discussion via email, present their collective comments to the Provost, and then invite him back for further discussion.

Please use CORListServ or email jking.uri.edu who will forward for group discussion.

Other Business:

Conflict of Interest Policy and Other Business was postponed until next meeting

The meeting adjourned at 4:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jill Diehl
Grants & Contracts Specialist

Please Note: THERE IS NO JANUARY MEETING.

The next meeting of the Council for Research will be held on **Monday, February 2, 2009** in the URI Library, Conference Room A.