

Committee on Research (COR)
Minutes of Meeting
Tuesday, October 4, 2016

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Research met at 2:00 PM on October 4, 2016 in Room 238 of the Student Services Building, Chair David Noelle presiding.

I. Meeting with Arthur Ellis, VP for Research and Graduate Studies, UCOP

Chair Noelle provided historical background on UC Merced, with its aspiration to quickly become a modern research campus and the challenges faced for funding this effort. Chair Noelle also discussed how resource constraints had motivated central control of funds supporting research, distributing very little into discretionary budgets that might support faculty research while extramural grants were pursued, such as bridge funding between awards. The campus is growing faster than any other UC campus in history, causing tension with the distribution of physical space, with allocations to faculty often failing to meet what was promised or planned for. Additional growth-related concerns were discussed, including pressures on the ratio of faculty to students that the 2020 Project will introduce.

COR members shared examples of hardships they have experienced, either directly or through their graduate students, with space being the most prominent. Other concerns raised dealt with the geographic isolation of campus and the effect this has had on graduate students, with some faculty reporting that a large number of graduate students are facing mental health issues, such as depression. The faculty speculated that this situation could be improved by providing more attention to campus features that might facilitate social support. For example, many buildings lack designated areas within buildings for kitchens, making it difficult for students to interact informally over meals and potentially contributing to poor dietary practices. Young faculty are facing isolation issues, as well. A suggestion was made that these issues might be partially addressed by having new faculty regularly visit other campuses, for their own enrichment.

Committee members discussed the possibilities for increased collaborations between campuses and national labs, as well as investment from community or private organizations, and the consideration of international collaborations to provide graduate students with greater exposure. VP Ellis said he would speak with the leadership of the national labs regarding these collaboration opportunities.

VP Ellis expressed his gratitude in meeting COR members and hearing about these concerns. He recommended thinking about how the campus works as a whole, and how we can promote collective excellence. With regard to furthering collaboration, including joint programs and degrees with international partners, he stated that this would need to be discussed with the Senate, but there should be no trouble with finding interested partner universities. VP Ellis believes that, with the 2020 Project, now is an excellent time to “reboot” some of the current processes, and he encouraged the committee to work with the administration to get these issues addressed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:45 PM.

Attest:

David Noelle, COR Chair