

**COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE & ACADEMIC FREEDOM (FWAF)**

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Monday, January 27, 2025**  
**3:00pm – 4:10pm**

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom met at 3:00pm on January 27, 2025. Chair Beaster-Jones presiding.

**I. Consent Calendar – Chair Beaster-Jones**

- A. Approval of Today's Agenda
- B. Approval of the [December 5 Meeting Minutes](#)

**Action:**

- The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

**II. Chair's Report – Chair Beaster-Jones****A. December 16 Divisional Council Meeting**

- CAPRA recommended that the Temporary Academic Staffing (TAS) budget remain unchanged at this time.
- The university is facing a potential state budget cut of 5-8%. The administration is hopeful for only 3-5% at UC Merced. The Chancellor is meeting with the EVC/Provost to discuss the campus budget reduction exercises, which are being conducted at all institutions.
- The Library Committee on Scholarly Communications (LASC) gave a presentation on Open Access publishing.

**B. Identify alternate for May 21 UCAF Meeting**

Member Farid mentioned that she may be able to attend the May 21 UCAF meeting on member Lu's behalf but will know more once the date approaches. Chair Beaster-Jones noted that he may be able to attend half of the meeting if member Farid is willing to attend the other half.

**Action:**

- This item will be revisited at a future FWAF meeting.

**III. December 19 [UCAF](#) Update – Jennifer Lu**

Discussions were held regarding DEI statements in faculty hiring. UCAF members emphasized the importance of academic freedom, particularly regarding how faculty present their work and contributions in the hiring process. Members believe that these decisions should be made by the faculty themselves, in a way that aligns with their academic values and the department's needs, rather than being dictated by administrators. Faculty should have the freedom to express their

contributions in ways that make sense within their own fields and departmental context. There is concern that administrators are potentially overstepping by imposing specific language or requirements that do not align with how faculty want to present their work.

A member mentioned that providing a DEI statement is currently a requirement in UC Merced's hiring process. A member questioned whether this requirement was imposed by the administration. Member Lu noted that UCAF plans to write a memo to advocate for faculty autonomy in the hiring process, particularly in regard to DEI statements. This would help preserve academic freedom and uphold faculty governance.

A member requested that FWAF revisit this issue in the future, as they feel strongly that a DEI statement should be required in the hiring process, regardless of who is imposing the requirement. Chair Beaster-Jones would like to see UCAF's memo, once available, to determine the next steps.

**Action:**

- Once received, member Lu will share a memo from UCAF with FWAF members regarding DEI statements in faculty hiring.

**IV. Discussion: Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) Issues**

At the December 5, 2024 FWAF meeting, Chair Beaster-Jones provided an update on the November 22 Meeting re: SPO issues, and members discussed [FWAF's May 20, 2024 memo to CoR re: Grant Proposal Submissions](#) and [FWAF's July 19, 2024 memo to CoR re: Grant Proposal Submissions](#).

Following the meeting, FWAF members were asked to consult with their respective department faculty to inquire about any financial hardships they have encountered, specifically with SPO. Two responses have been received, available [here](#).

Several individuals from the Physics Department have voiced complaints, which primarily center around SPO's interpretation of rules or constraints, often differing from what is required by the parent funding organization. One example provided was SPO insisting on a Graduate Student Researcher's (GSR) salary being at a higher pay step than what the funding agency required, which led to a delay in the student getting paid. The general feedback from the Physics faculty highlighted the need for more institutional memory when interacting with funding agencies.

Chair Beaster-Jones noted that similar frustrations were shared last year, including SPO asking for unnecessary documentation during the early stages of grant applications, such as detailed budgets that were not required at the time of the pre-application process. Another issue raised was SPO requiring the applicant to move funds from one budget category to another in ways that did not align with the guidelines set by the funding organizations.

Another member mentioned the faculty's frustration with the length of time it takes for SPO to resolve certain issues. It was noted that the process does not seem to be streamlined, and the high turnover within SPO only adds to the problem.

Chair Beaster-Jones inquired about the memos that FWAF had sent to SPO. Executive Director

Paul stated that no responses have been received but she will follow up with the Committee on Research (CoR) for any updates on the matter.

**Action:**

- FWAF will consult with CoR for updates on the SPO issue and the next steps.

V. **October 30 Governance Retreat Priorities** – All

At the conclusion of the October 30 session, participants shared their top priorities and key takeaways, highlighting areas of focus for future action. In alignment with the request from Senate leadership, Senate Committees are encouraged to review these priorities and identify those they wish to address this academic year.

Chair Beaster-Jones recommended FWAF prioritize issues related to Sponsored Projects (SPO) and post-award management.

Members reviewed the list of priorities from the October 30 Governance Retreat, linked above, and identified ‘faculty support in managing their research portfolios’ as an additional priority for FWAF to prioritize.

A member wondered if other members are being asked to engage more in undergraduate recruitment efforts, beyond BobCat Day. There seems to be more pressure from the administration for faculty involvement in undergraduate recruitment. Questions were raised about whether the push for faculty involvement in undergraduate recruitment is a broader trend or specific to UC Merced. There was also concern about whether faculty should be expected to take on this role, given that recruitment has traditionally been managed by the administration. It was noted that the push for faculty involvement in recruitment is unusual, particularly for a research institution. Chair Beaster-Jones stated that he will raise this issue at the next DivCo meeting, specifically for the AFAC and UGC Chairs, and report back to FWAF.

Another member expressed concerns regarding the CBS2 financial system, specifically the reimbursement process. The member hosted a group dinner with graduate students and was asked to provide a detailed itemized list of expenses, along with facing several constraints on which specific funds could be used. Chair Beaster-Jones confirmed that he will also raise this issue at the next DivCo meeting and report back to FWAF.

**Action:**

- Members agreed to prioritize the following items:
  - Sponsored Projects (SPO) issues
  - Accounting and financial management
  - Faculty support in managing their research portfolios
- Chair Beaster-Jones will raise the issue regarding recruitment efforts at the January 28 DivCo meeting and share with FWAF members the feedback he receives from the AFAC and UGC chairs.
- Chair Beaster-Jones will raise the concern about CBS2 at the January 28 DivCo meeting and report back to FWAF.

**VI. Campus and Systemwide Review Items**

- A. [Presidential Policy on the Use of Animals in Research, Teaching, and Testing](#) (Systemwide)  
The proposed revised policy would update and replace UC's current policy ""[Use of Animals in Research and Teaching](#)".

**Lead Reviewer:** Kinjal Dasbiswas

Lead reviewer's draft memo is available [here](#).

The lead reviewer summarized his assessment, emphasizing the need for the following points of clarification.

- The definition of "animals" raised concerns because it categorizes vertebrates as animals but only considers invertebrates as animals under certain conditions. This distinction seems unclear and could benefit from more precise definitions or additional context. A member recommended adding language to FWAF's memo to clarify that including a link to a webpage that leads to a list of Regulations would suffice rather than listing them all in the policy.
- Regarding "Replacement", computer simulations are not typically a substitute in Biology research. A member clarified that if cells or tissues are extracted directly from animals, an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) protocol is required because the extraction process involves working with animals. However, if cell lines are purchased, no protocol is needed. It was suggested that if there is already clear documentation in place for cell and tissue cultures, it might be unnecessary to address it further in the memo.
- There were concerns regarding the frequency of IACUC meetings to avoid bureaucratic delays in the research process. A member, who previously chaired the IACUC, explained that this cannot be addressed in a systemwide memo because the meeting frequency varies depending on the size of the research community. UC Merced, with fewer faculty involved in animal research, holds monthly meetings, while larger campuses like UC Davis, with several hundred researchers, require more frequent meetings.

**Action:**

- Members agreed to the following updates to the memo:
  - Include in the first point that a direct link to the referenced Regulations will suffice.
  - Remove the last sentence under "Replacement" – "What about cell and tissue cultures?"
  - Remove language regarding frequency of meetings – "Specifically, how frequently will this committee convene to ensure timely and consistent oversight?"
- The FWAF Analyst shared an updated memo with Chair Beaster-Jones for his review and approval.
- The FWAF Analyst transmitted the final memo to the Senate Chair.

B. [Proposed Revisions to Academic Personnel Manual \(APM\) Section 675, Veterinary Medicine Salary Administration](#) (Systemwide)

Summary of proposed revisions:

- Clarification that faculty members paid on the Veterinary Medicine Salary Scale are not permitted to participate in the Health Sciences Compensation Plan ([APM - 670](#)).
- Clarification that participation by faculty members paid on the Veterinary Medicine Salary Scale in the Negotiated Salary Program ([APM - 672](#)) or any future compensation or salary plan is predicated on the requirement that faculty first fully meet the minimum contribution requirements specified in APM - 675-8.d, 675 - 8.e, and 675 - 8.

*FWAF is a lead reviewer.*

**Action:**

- Chair Beaster-Jones agreed to serve as the lead reviewer.
- The lead reviewer will send his comments to Melanie and Fatima **by Monday, February 3, 2025.**
- Members will review the lead reviewer's draft memo at the February 10 FWAF meeting.
- **Comments are due to the Senate Chair by February 14, 2025.**

C. [Proposed Revisions to APM 036 – Employment](#) (Systemwide)

The policy revisions respond to the need to address a new bill signed into California state law that adds section 66284 to the California Education Code, effective January 1, 2025 (reference [AB 1905](#) “Public postsecondary education: employment: settlements, informal resolutions, and retreat rights”), and requires the University to adopt a written policy regarding official letters of recommendation, among other requirements, as a condition of receiving state funding. The proposed technical revisions are intended to bring the University into compliance with section 66284 of the California Education Code.

*FWAF is a lead reviewer.*

VPAP Hansford joined the meeting and reported that a new legislation was signed, effective January 1, 2025, that requires faculty members at the University of California to check with the Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) before writing an official letter of recommendation for someone employed at UC. This law mandates that if the person being recommended is the respondent in a sexual harassment complaint, and certain conditions are met, OPHD may prohibit the faculty member from writing an official letter of recommendation. However, the UC clarified that a "personal letter of recommendation," where the faculty member speaks on their own behalf rather than the institution's, does not require this check with OPHD. The key difference is that official letters are those where the faculty member represents the university, whereas personal letters are considered to be written on behalf of the individual faculty member. If a faculty member uses university letterhead or their university email for a personal letter, they must include a specific sentence in the letter to clarify that it is their personal opinion, not that of the University of California (or UC Merced). The email previously sent by VPAP Hansford provides further details and includes the exact language required, as well as a FAQ page on the university's website.

**Action:**

- Member Farid agreed to serve as the lead reviewer.
- The lead reviewer will send her comments to Melanie, Fatima, and Chair Beaster-Jones by **Monday, February 17, 2025.**
- Members will review the lead reviewer's draft memo via email.
- **Comments are due to the Senate Chair by Friday, February 28, 2025.**

D. [Interim Policy on Consensual Relationships](#) (Campus wide)

The policy is intended to clarify expectations and support faculty and staff in avoiding professional conflicts of interest related to consensual relationships.

*FWAF is not a lead reviewer, but all standing Senate committees are encouraged to opine.*

VPAP Hansford reported that [APM 015](#) (page 5, number 7): “Entering into a romantic or sexual relationship with any student for whom a faculty member has, or should reasonably expect to have in the future, academic responsibility (instructional, evaluative, or supervisory)” is listed as inappropriate.

**Action:**

- Chair Beaster-Jones and member Nowadnick agreed to serve as the lead reviewer.
- They will send their comments to Melanie and Fatima **by Monday, February 17, 2025.**
- Members will be invited to review the lead reviewer's draft memo via email.
- **Comments are due to the Senate Chair by Monday, March 3, 2025.**

**VII. Other Business**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30pm.

Attest: Jayson Beaster-Jones, FWAF Chair