

COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH (COR)
ANNUAL REPORT
AY 2019-2020

To the Merced Division of the Academic Senate:

During the 2019-2020 academic year, the Committee on Research (COR) held a total of 16 meetings in order to conduct business with respect to its duties as outlined in UC Merced's Academic Senate [Bylaw II.III.7](#). Beyond these in-person meetings, some additional business was completed via electronic mail discussions.

Areas of Focus

Administering the Academic Senate Annual Faculty Research Grants Program

One of the main recurring responsibilities of COR is administering the Academic Senate faculty research grants program. As in the previous year, \$175,000 was made available for the program by the EVC/Provost. Ultimately, the call for proposals remained largely unchanged from last year's version. A call for proposals was electronically issued to all Academic Senate faculty members on November 13, 2019 with a deadline for submissions of January 24, 2020. COR members ranked the 35 received grant proposals and selected 25 awardees according to the stated criteria in the call for proposals. All of the funds (\$175,000) that were allocated to the Senate for the grants program were used. Grant recipients, together with their deans, EVC/Provost, and appropriate School staff, were notified electronically with award letters on February 13.

As detailed in the section below "Research Enhancement", COR is requesting that the administration increase the funding for the Senate faculty grants program next year.

Revision of Academic Senate Policy on the Establishment and Review of Organized Research Units

This year, COR successfully finalized its two-year effort to revise the Senate policy on the establishment, disestablishment, and review of organized research units (ORUs).

In response to feedback provided to COR at the end of the last academic year by Senate committees, School Executive Committees, and ORU directors, COR revised the policy and re-submitted it to Division Council on March 4, 2020. The revised policy was then issued for a second campus review by Division Council on March 9, 2020. Additional feedback was provided to COR by Senate committees and ORU directors in April 2020. The final version of the policy, which took into account the most recent set of comments, was submitted to Division

Council on May 13, 2020. Division Council approved the policy on May 28, 2020. The approved policy, which also includes a Frequently Asked Questions section, was widely distributed to the campus and posted on the Academic Senate website.

Research Enhancement Proposal

One of COR's main efforts this year was drafting a two-part initiative for restructuring and enriching campus-wide research support. The first of the two-part initiative concerned the Senate faculty grants program. In addition to requesting additional funding for the program, COR proposed to create two components of the research awards program; one that supports the faculty research activity at the local scale (in the schools/departments) and one that supports campus-wide research activities. COR suggested an annual funding level of \$2,000 per Senate faculty which would be equivalent to restoring the existing faculty grants program to \$1,000 per Senate faculty and provide another \$1,000 per Senate faculty for campus-wide projects, such as shared instrumentation, conceptualization grants for larger scale centers, or programs that serve the broader campus community.

The proposal was reviewed and endorsed by the Deans of SNS, SoE, and SSHA, as well as Graduate Council, and VPDGE Zatz. COR submitted the proposal to Division Council on April 7, 2020.

In a memo to Division Council in July 2020, COR emphasized that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on research make an increase of intramural research funding critical. The memo pointed out that faculty have been spending start-up, grant and other funds to keep their students, postdocs and research staff employed during the pandemic lock-down. Federal, state and private funding levels are at risk to decrease due to the economic impacts of the pandemic; funding has been directed to eliminating COVID-19, diminishing funds for other research areas. The restrictions in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 slow down research, in some cases they may force faculty to switch research directions completely. The additional intramural funding requested by COR could be part of a broader strategy that enables the UC Merced research community to leverage its creativity and potential for innovation for emerging from this crisis strong and competitive and with the thrust needed to continue on the trajectory to becoming a R1 institution.

The second of the two-part initiative addressed research workforce development, specifically graduate students. COR proposed that graduate students – under the existing title Graduate Student Assistant Researcher – may support their research by taking on functions that address critical needs the campus currently has or cannot fulfill. These functions include serving as instrument/facility custodians and taking on departmental/research program support positions.

Division Council endorsed CoR's memo and CoR transmitted it to the Chancellor and EVC/Provost in July 2020. The research enhancement proposal will be a carry over item for the next academic year.

Senate Awards for Distinguished and Early Career Research

COR is responsible for the review of nominations for the annual Academic Senate awards for Distinguished Research (tenured) and Distinguished Early Career Research (untenured). In order to execute this duty, COR formed two subcommittees, one for each award, and these subcommittees each selected one nominated individual for receipt of the corresponding award. As in previous academic years, COR was struck by the outstanding nominees in both categories. The awardees were recognized at the May 7, 2020 Meeting of the Division of the Academic Senate which was held via Zoom.

Research Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

One of the many committees that was empaneled in spring semester 2020 to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was the Research Relaunch Work Group. The work group, whose membership included COR Chair Scheibner, VCORED Traina, and VPDGE (and future, interim VCORED) Zatz, was tasked with focusing on restarting campus research activities for all fields: laboratory-based STEM fields, field work, the social sciences, and the humanities and the arts. The work group conducted a research webinar for all campus faculty in April 2020, and COR benefited from updates provided by the work group in early summer.

In May 2020, the Research Relaunch Work Group shared with COR its draft plan for the reopening of campus research activities by late summer 2020. The draft plan, which shared several similar elements to the plans from other UC campuses, required faculty PIs to craft work plans dictating the work flow of their research groups with special attention to abiding by density and other health and safety rules. The faculty's plans must be submitted for approval to department chairs and deans, then the VCORED, and ultimately the Chancellor (unless the Chancellor designates the VCORED as final authority). Faculty will be responsible for managing their research plans.

In a memo to Division Council in July 2020, COR outlined the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted the research community. Various campus work groups have been working to enable the campus to start the process of re-opening research buildings and providing researchers the opportunity to slowly and safely ramp up their operations. The campus shut-down has caused issues for, if not damage to, the research capabilities of research groups. In order to help the campus research community through this difficult time and emerge as competitive as possible from this crisis, COR highlighted various issues for Division Council and urged the administration to consider COR's corresponding recommendations for action:

- Issues
 - Depletion of research funds to ensure continued employment for students, postdoc and/or staff during shut-down.
 - Reduction and redirection of research funding.
 - Access restrictions to research facilities, labs and offices (on-campus and off).
 - Research training.
 - Inequity of measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- Recommendations
 - Additional funding streams. This includes internal research funding; lobbying for federal and state programs that provide research funds to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the research productivity and careers of researchers; and providing additional avenues for graduate students, postdocs and research staff to remain on the job.
 - Research training and access to research resources.
 - Inequity of measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Division Council endorsed the memo and CoR transmitted it to the Chancellor and EVC/Provost in July 2020.

Consultation and Monitoring

Consultation with VCORED

Throughout the academic year, COR members benefited from updates on various research-related issues from ex-officio committee member, VCORED Traina.

- Sponsored Projects Services Redesign initiative. (The COR chair served on the Sponsored Project Services Redesign Advisory Board.)
- Continuing scrutiny by the federal government on faculty international interactions and the negative impact on faculty research and on the competitiveness of the US.
- MRPI competition updates.
- Implementation of the reduction of the composite benefit rates for postdoctoral researchers, which was initiated by COR in AY 18-19.
- Impact of COVID-19 on research enterprise
 - updates on the multi-phase relaunching of campus research activities in summer 2020.
 - updates from the federal government's efforts to support the UC's needs during the pandemic, including additional funds and potential, automatic no-cost extensions to federal grants.

Consultation with Associate VCORED Deborah Motton

AVC Motton kept COR members updated during the academic year on the efforts to restructure the Sponsored Projects Office (SPO), specifically the training of staff, improved pre-award processes, and a revamped website. After consultations with AVC Motton, in spring 2020, COR issued a memo to VCORED Traina requesting the establishment of a working group of COR members, SPO staff, and departmental research administrators to convene on a quarterly basis for the purpose of creating a forum that encourages constructive discussions on the pre-award process. COR suggested that the working group begin its activities at the beginning of the 2020 fall semester.

AVC Motton, in conjunction with VCORED Traina, also kept COR members informed of complications surrounding the research enterprise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. One major complication is faculty who sought to hire international graduate students or international research staff with extramural funds.

Consultation with VPDGE (Interim VCORED) Zatz

In June 2020, VPDGE (and future, interim VCORED) Zatz updated COR members on the efforts to restructure the Sponsored Projects Office and the future of the pre-award process.

Consultation with Committee on Research Computing

In spring 2020, the campus Committee on Research Computing, which is comprised of computational faculty members from various disciplines, shared with COR a draft proposal for to establish a COVID-19 Emergency Research Software and Cyberinfrastructure Support Fund. The proposal suggested that a Research Software and Cyberinfrastructure Support Board would be created to develop a faculty proposal/request process, review such requests, and make final funding recommendations to the Director of Cyberinfrastructure and Research Technologies. CoRC intended to submit their draft proposal to the administration.

Consultation with Director of Sponsored Research Services

The Director of the Sponsored Projects Office Jue Sun updated COR members in fall 2019 on the multi-phase sponsored projects redesign process.

Consultation with Interim Chancellor Brostrom, EVC/Provost Camfield, and APAPB Schnier

One of COR's main interests is indirect cost return. The committee invited Interim Chancellor Brostrom, EVC/Provost Camfield, and Associate Provost for Academic Planning & Budget

(APAPB) Schnier to a meeting in early spring 2020 to discuss their proposed, indirect cost return policy. They agreed with COR that if the campus wants to encourage faculty to apply for large, significant grants, the campus must support the faculty with more indirect cost return funding. Another motivation for revising the indirect cost return policy is the realization that much of indirect cost return is currently used for capital planning. While this is an important area for campus growth, the campus also needs to ensure that more money is returned to faculty, deans, and the EVC/Provost. The Interim Chancellor informed COR that the new indirect cost rate proposal from HHS is anticipated in 2021-22.

Representation on Campus Committees

COR was represented on the Senate Library and Scholarly Communications (LASC) Committee, Export Control Work Group (empaneled by VCORED Traina), Sponsored Projects Office Redesign Advisory Board, and the Research Relaunch Work Group.

University Committee on Research Policy Updates

The COR Chair represented UC Merced on the systemwide University Committee On Research Policy (UCORP). He kept the COR membership informed of UCORP's main topics of discussion throughout the academic year, including:

- UC Lab Fees program.
- Periodic review of two MRUs.
- Guidelines on managing and streamlining the use of research data across the UC system.
- Updates from the UC Office of Research and Innovation and the Associate Director of UCOP Research Policy Analysis and Coordination.
- White House OSTP request for information on open access and availability of research. (COR collaborated with LASC on a joint memo to Division Council supporting open access.)
- Impact of COVID-19 on UC research
 - Support of graduate students.
 - Discussion of non-resident tuition waivers for international graduate students.
 - Federal economic stimulus relief for the UC system.
 - Relaunching research activities on the UC campuses.
 - Discussion of each campus allowing an exception to the APM by granting additional tenure clock stoppages due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Campus Review Items

- COR reviewed and endorsed:
 - Proposed Name Change for Chemistry Major and Minor

- Proposed Revisions to Merced Division Bylaws – LASC Membership
- Proposed M.S. Degree in Cognitive and Information Sciences
- COR reviewed and commented on:
 - Structural Questions from VCORED Traina on the Sponsored Research Services Redesign
 - Draft Charge for Proposed Faculty Advisory Committee for IT
 - Phase II – Faculty Advisory Committee on Sustainability
 - Senate Chair’s request for input on the Senate’s potential role in addressing anti-Black racism and the mistreatment of minoritized populations.

Systemwide Review Items

- COR reviewed and commented on:
 - Proposed Revisions to APM 230 (Visiting Appointments)
 - Proposed Revised Presidential Policy on Native American Cultural Affiliation and Repatriation
 - Revised Presidential Policy on Copyright Ownership
 - Resolution to Address Climate Change
 - White Paper on Recognizing International Activities as Part of the Merit, Tenure, and Promotion Process at the University of California
 - Proposed Revisions to Presidential Policy on Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Respectfully submitted:

COR members:

Michael Scheibner, Chair (SNS) – UCORP representative

Kara McCloskey, Vice Chair (SoE) – fall 2019

Roummel Marcia, Vice Chair (SNS) – spring 2020

Anand Subramaniam (SOE)

Stephen Wooding (SSHA)

Miguel Carreira-Perpiñán (SOE)

Brad LeVeck (SSHA)

Shilpa Khatri (SNS)

Xuecai (Susan) Ge (SNS)

Ex officio, non-voting member:

Samuel J. Traina, Vice Chancellor for Research and Economic Development

Staff:

Simrin Takhar