

Committee on Research (COR)
Wednesday, October 4, 2017
1:30 – 2:30 PM KL 397

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Research met at 1:30 PM on October 4, 2017 in Room 397 of the Kolligian Library, Chair David Noelle presiding.

- I. Consent Calendar
 - a. **Action:** The September 20, 2017 meeting minutes and the October 4, 2017 meeting agenda were approved as presented.

- II. Consultation on Project 2020 Space

The remainder of the meeting was dedicated to a discussion with Director of Space Planning Maggie Saunders, and Jo Dane and Leslie Ashor from the Woods Bagot firm. This firm has been hired to assist with the design of strategic space plans, re-examining all space allocation on the existing campus, as well as new space becoming available as part of the 2020 project.

Director Saunders announced that she and the firm's representatives have met with many individual faculty members as well as campus Deans, Academic Senate committees, Bylaw 55 Unit Chairs, and representatives of the union representing Unit 18/non-Senate lecturers. She stated that the goal of the discussion with the COR membership was to provide her with an opportunity to briefly summarize initial results from the space survey that was recently issued to the faculty. She cautioned that a deep analysis of the survey results had not yet been completed, indicating that further information would be available at a faculty retreat scheduled for October 30, which will focus on space issues. (Faculty were sent a "save the date" notification concerning this retreat as part of the announcement of the space survey, and Director Saunders intends to issue a formal invitation by Friday, October 6, 2017.) COR members were encouraged to attend this retreat.

Ms. Dane and Director Saunders indicated that they received over 200 responses out of approximately 300 faculty members surveyed. Only a relatively small fraction of respondents stated that their space was inadequate to conduct their research. Some faculty indicated that the space that they had available for their research was appropriate in kind, but they indicated that more space was needed. Director Saunders stated that the campus will try not to move the faculty who are satisfied with their current space, but if faculty must be moved, the campus will attempt to place them near other faculty members with similar research interests and/or research needs. Director Saunders said that she has identified 18-24 faculty members who are already working collaboratively with other research groups and might prefer to be located near collaborators. She was also pleased to note that, according to survey results, a large number of respondents stated that they would be willing to share equipment with others.

Director Saunders indicated that part of the agenda for the October 30 retreat would involve a discussion concerning the nature of interdisciplinary research and what it means in terms of equipment needs, laboratory space, and meeting/collaborative space.

COR members pointed out that there is a lot of variation among interdisciplinary research programs, and some faculty worry that a generic template of interdisciplinary work will be imposed on the faculty from above. It was asserted that productive approaches to supporting interdisciplinary collaborations must be a grassroots endeavor, with faculty members identifying appropriate opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as the best ways to pursue such work. Moreover, interdisciplinary work is sometimes, by nature, temporary. After a group of faculty investigators are finished working on a particular project, their space needs will change. It is therefore important to allow for “swing space”. Flexible space allocation will also be important as the campus hires an additional 100 faculty members, especially since it is unclear what space new faculty will need in order to be productive.

COR members supported the notion that, in some cases, laboratories should be group based on the use of common methods, or even common equipment, rather than by discipline or other topical categorization. For example, a COR member highlighted the need to place certain faculty (e.g. immunologists and infectious disease researchers) in proximity to the specialized facilities planned for the Lab 3A Building, and Director Saunders acknowledged that this recommendation was reflected in the survey responses.

Ms. Dane asked COR members about the biggest challenges they face in seeking to collaborate with colleagues. COR members pointed out that graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are sometimes more open to interdisciplinary collaborations than faculty members, and these populations tend to be transient in their space usage and, therefore, more flexible. One form of collaborative space highlighted by the Committee membership was relatively small conference rooms for which spontaneous access is possible. It was pointed out that such rooms not only support collaborative research, but they are crucial for the training and development of graduate students. Such rooms allow for free-form open discussions, informal and interactive seminars by invited speakers, and the sharing of ideas with faculty and graduate students from other groups. Director Saunders appreciated this feedback, and she suggested that some rooms in the new computational building could be left empty, save for couches and white boards, to create collaborative spaces of this kind. COR members responded positively to this suggestion.

One COR member stated that his research group’s graduate students are currently located in a “cubicle farm” with graduate students from several other research programs. It was suggested that this situation was not at all conducive to productive research, including support for collaborations. Students have reported that spaces of this kind introduce a large amount of disruption and noise, making them difficult to use. Director Saunders confirmed that each new wet laboratory under the 2020 Project will have workstations for four graduate students directly outside, as well as additional space for the corresponding faculty member’s future cohort of graduate students, postdoctoral scholars, and staff scientists. All agreed that flexibility in the use of such space will be critical.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM.

Attest:

David Noelle, COR Chair