

Committee on Research (CoR)
Minutes of Meeting
November 13, 2024

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Research met at 1:30 pm on November 13, 2024 via Zoom, Chair Tao Ye presiding.

I. Chair's Report – *Chair Ye*

- Chair Ye previously debriefed CoR on the October 30 Shared Governance Retreat. The notes from that retreat, together with the list of campus priorities that were agreed upon by the attendees, were recently finalized.

Action: The committee staff member will share the retreat notes and priorities with CoR and will add them to the December 4 meeting agenda for a discussion.

- Chair Ye informed CoR that he and Vice Chair Saha will attend the November 18 CAPRA meeting where VCR Wilson will consult with CAPRA on pre-award spending.
- CoR Chair Ye spoke with staff in Physical Operations, Planning and Development about the significant delays in lab renovations. Some faculty have experienced delays as long as 18 months which severely affects their research and careers. The new capital projects (e.g. COB 3 and Promise Housing) are proceeding which partially explains the delay in lab renovations. Renovation construction must go through a rigorous process and there are several construction projects in the pipeline. CoR Chair Ye informed Senate Chair Mitchell of the bottleneck.

II. Consent Calendar

- A. Today's agenda
- B. Draft November 6, 2024 meeting minutes

Action: The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

III. Consultation with VPDGE Hrant Hratchian

The following questions were submitted to VPDGE Hratchian two weeks in advance of today's meeting:

- What are the incentives to graduate students and their advisors to submit F31/F32 and equivalent grant proposals? Are there any plans to invest more in this area? How could CoR help in this regard?

- What strategies is the Graduate Division employing to promote expansion/maintenance of enrollment on graduate programs in the wake of the current and upcoming contract changes (i.e., increases in costs for TA/GSRs)? What implications will this have on faculty research and how can the CoR help with the Graduate Division's strategies?
- To prevent a steep decline in graduate enrollment, it may be important to incentivize PIs to support GSRs through research grants. What are the main uses of the tuition dollars from research grants? Can a portion of these funds be redirected to partially offset the impacts of escalating costs of GSRs?
- Is there any set aside funding, or could there one be, for undocumented graduate students?

A few minutes before today's meeting, VPDGE Hratchian submitted his answers in writing. He summarized his responses with CoR members during the meeting.

VPDGE Hratchian explained that undocumented student support has been, and continues to be, a challenging situation. The number of undocumented student applicants and admits has been declining and the campus notes that DACA is essentially phasing out. VPDGE Hratchian shared that there is one account that is earmarked for undocumented student support with an available balance of almost \$11,000. VPDGE Hratchian plans to expand the usefulness of the general gift fund to include undocumented student support to enhance fundraising ability. He added that he plans to speak with his counterparts at other UC campuses and can update CoR in the future. A CoR member inquired whether there are external grants or fellowships that are accessible to undocumented graduate students. VPDGE Hratchian replied that the Graduate Division is aware of occasional programs that offer these opportunities and forwards the information to appropriate offices.

With regard to CoR's question about the decline in graduate enrollment, VPDGE Hratchian asserted that real-time data reviewed in the Graduate Division shows the opposite. However, the campus has concerns about a few specific graduate programs that have historical and continued low success with graduate student outcomes and extramural funding. In addition, there is the issue of what the campus can do to support the social sciences and humanities which have less extramural funding opportunities than STEM. Graduate Division is providing staff support for training and other large multi-PI grants. Compared to the other UC campuses, UC Merced is paying GSRs lower on the contract scale. VPDGE Hratchian also pointed out the UC mandate on graduate tuition revenue which includes a return to aid component in which 50% of the tuition is returned students in the form of financial aid (e.g. fellowships). The Graduate Division has funds for block grants that are allocated to the graduate groups.

In the document that VPDGE Hratchian shared shortly before today's meeting, he provided the following breakdown on where a portion of graduate student tuition funds go:

- Graduate Division receives a large portion (~50%, \$5.7M+\$1M [TAS Augmentation that will be phased over to TAS starting FY26]).
 - Block grants (\$1.6M)
 - Campus fellowships (\$1.4M)
 - NRST (\$2.4M + central budget coverage for the remainder, which is an additional \$527,061)
 - Emergency funds and hardship fellowships
 - Grant/fellowship matching support
 - 25% tuition/fee reduction plan (> \$600,000) for current grants
- New Master’s Incentive Program.
- Student fee allocation to Graduate Division has remained flat for several years.

VPDGE Hratchian informed CoR members that he would like to allocate block grants to the graduate groups so they can do their own incentive programs. However, incentive planning is complicated and impossible to do in “real time”, i.e. it requires planning in one year, and then allocating the funding the next year.

VPDGE Hratchian stated that he spoke with faculty who are the most impacted by the removal of the 25% tuition/fee reduction plan. The cost will increase beyond \$600,000 which requires difficult conversations about how to provide the funding and what other areas will get reduced funding.

With regard to CoR’s question about incentives to graduate students and their advisors to submit F31/F32 and equivalent grant proposals, VPDGE Hratchian provided the following information:

- F31/F32 are pre/post-doctoral fellowships. For R1 campuses, they only pay 60% of tuition and fees. These are part of the GSR bargaining unit.
- T31/T32 are the NIH graduate student training grants. These are part of the GSR bargaining unit. These are GRISE. T32 are for R2s and T31s are for R1s. T31 requires matching funds from the institution, including a shortage in tuition and fees. VPDGE Hratchian is researching additional information on this, and pay partner with ORED.
- F31 institutional costs are the same per fellow as for T31/T32. F32 institutional costs are not known by Graduate Division

IV. Consultation with VC/CFO Kurt Schnier

The following questions were submitted to VC/CFO Schnier in advance of today’s meeting:

- The composite benefit rate for postdocs was 15.8% in FY 23, increasing to 34.4% in FY 24, and dropping back to 15.9% in FY 25. Such large fluctuations make it

difficult to budget for postdocs. What can be done to mitigate the impacts of such large swings?

VC/CFO Schnier explained that the campus employs a low number of postdocs and that is the root cause of the CBR rate being variable. Per UCOP rules, the university has to build rates in accordance with benefits accrued two years prior. Other campus CBR rates are more stable because they employ a larger number of postdocs.

VC/CFO Schnier inquired with UCOP as to whether a smoothing algorithm could be applied and he was told it was not possible. When campus research expenditures increase in the future, the variability in the CBR rate should cease.

- In CoR's last Core Research Facilities and Instrumentation survey, faculty expressed frustration that when a piece of equipment in a facility breaks down, often there is no money to fix it, impeding research productivity for many months. There is a desire for setting up a reserve fund that allows a facility to build up a pool of money from a portion of recharge incomes. The reserve fund can be used to pay for unexpected repairs or equipment upgrades. This would also provide facilities more incentive to increase revenues. What would it take to establish such reserve funds?

VC/CFO Schnier asked if CoR is referring to a separate set of funds that would be set aside for equipment or if CoR is asking about recharge rates. He explained that the campus cannot add money to a recharge unless it involves a depreciated cost that is not currently calculated into the recharge. He added that faculty are welcome to submit an existing recharge to the recharge review committee who can review for compliance against the recharge policy. VC/CFO Schnier also pointed out another option which is to lower the indirect cost return distribution and allocate some funding to another pool.

- The current indirect cost return model provides generous support for faculty seeking large grants over \$5 million. However, multi-investigator awards between \$2 million and \$5 million fall into a gap. On one hand, such awards are notably more complex and costly to support than single PI awards, as mentioned in the Shared Governance retreat. On the other hand, the ICDR is too low to provide adequate support. What can be done to bridge this gap?

VC/CFO Schnier replied that the campus needs to do an analysis of super awards. The purpose was to stimulate growth in the accrual of large grants but it is unclear whether this objective was met. VC/CFO Schnier added that the campus needs to analyze the efficacy of the indirect cost return policy and consult with VCR Wilson.

- CoR is pleased to know that the research expenditure of UC Merced has exceeded \$ 60 million. Are there more details, e.g. a breakdown by departments?

Action: Due to time constraints, VC/CFO Schnier submitted his response to this question via email after the meeting. The response was as follows:
The school's financial staff can pull research expenditures within the financial system that align with the function 44 coding to determine the department level research expenditures. The financial system also has a field within the CoA that records the individuals' HR home (i.e. department) and that combined with the function 44 can be used to find the department level breakdown. This is going to miss one extra component of the reporting which is captured in the supplement that we submit to cover additional research related expenses. To capture this the financial staff in the schools would have to cross reference the supplemental report that we submit to UCOP to add the remaining information at the department level (VC/CFO Schnier could provide that report to them as well). The largest portion of the expenditures can be captured directly with the function 44 coding by the school's financial staff.

V. Consultation with Office of Research Development
Guest: Kelly Bolcavage, Senior Research Development Officer

Officer Bolcavage was VCR Wilson's alternate for this meeting. She offered the below updates to CoR:

A. Faculty Success Initiative

This is a successful program that has been in existence for five years. An announcement was issued to faculty today that the application period for the January workshop is now open. Applications are accepted through early December. The program is aimed at helping junior faculty think strategically about the grant funding landscape, e.g. how to get funding, where to get it, and how to apply for seed funding before seeking a large grant. Part of the workshop includes asking participants to craft a grant proposal. CITRIS, the ORUs, and School deans collaborate to provide stipends for the faculty who are selected to participate in the workshop. This year, some of the stipend money will be given to the workshop participants with successful grant proposals. Approximately 12-15 faculty participate in the program each year. This year's cohort will be known by December.

B. Limited Submission process

In the past, the campus had a standing committee to review UC Merced's limited submission proposals. The committee was comprised of tenured faculty who served a one-year term on the committee. Officer Bolcavage asked CoR members if they believe this standing committee should be reestablished. In the past, CoR assisted the Office of Research Development in locating potential faculty members to serve. Officer Bolcavage clarified that the number of

proposals each year are not significant (usually fewer than five) so the committee's workload will not be substantial. The goal is to appointment 10 – 12 faculty members to the committee with a balanced representation across the Schools. The proposals are two-page white papers and the review time would be approximately two weeks depending on the sponsors' timelines. Officer Bolcavage also asked CoR if untenured faculty should be invited to serve on this committee.

CoR members agreed that this standing committee should be empaneled again and that advanced assistant professors (i.e. those nearing tenure) should be invited to serve along with tenured faculty. CoR does not need to review the potential names in advance. Officer Bolcavage stated that her office will proceed with issuing an email to faculty inviting them to serve on the limited submissions committee and will inform CoR of the committee's membership.

C. Funded proposal library initiative

Officer Bolcavage aims to launch this initiative early in 2025. The goal is to establish a repository of 40-50 successful grant proposals from various funding agencies (including micro programs) that faculty can use as a reference when crafting their own grant proposals. She asked CoR members for any proposals that may be good additions to the repository. A CoR member offered to share his past proposals and will work with Officer Bolcavage offline.

A CoR member raised the issue of the compressed timeline between when notifications for funding opportunities come out and the deadline for proposal submission. It is difficult for faculty to be nimble in their response as it takes time to develop a grant proposal. He asked if the Office of Research Development has a strategy to issue these notifications earlier, while acknowledging that it is dependent on the sponsors' timelines. Office Bolcavage replied that her office is aware of this. The Office of Research Development's website is being revised but currently includes a link to the limited submission recurring calendar. ORED's newsletter also includes information on current and forecasted funding opportunities as well as funding agencies' requests for information that will likely lead to proposal solicitations. Officer Bolcavage also suggested that her office can create a new calendar with links to the regular funding opportunities that reoccur each year. CoR members agreed with this idea. (After today's meeting, Officer Bolcavage shared the following, additional information: the Office of Research Development is creating three separate funding opportunity lists to be available on their website for early career programs, HSI/MSI/ERI funding opportunities, and instrumentation grant

funding. These lists will include deadline links for some of the most common and recurring solicitations to help PIs anticipate future deadlines.)

A CoR member also asked if the Office of Research Development could match new funding opportunities with potential faculty members with the relevant research expertise. Officer Bolcavage replied that she currently forwards funding opportunities to particular faculty and shares them with department chairs to distribute to faculty. She also encouraged faculty to schedule consultations with her and the Office of Research Development.

VI. AY 24-25 Senate Faculty Grants Annual Call for Proposals

Linked on today's agenda was the draft AY 24-25 call for proposals and last year's rubric for evaluating proposals.

Campus leadership is still discussing the recommendation to allocate the remaining \$100K MacKenzie Scott funds to an endowment. A decision should be reached at the Divisional Council meeting on Monday, November 18.

At the November 6 meeting, some CoR members were in favor of \$5,000 in order to fund more proposals. A CoR member suggested placing language in the call for proposals that if PIs have a need for more funding beyond \$5,000 for items such as a significant piece of equipment or a collaborative project that requires more money, they should contact CoR and CoR may decide to award additional funds. If CoR were to do this, it would have to be only under exceptional circumstances and the PIs' special project must be fully explained. The additional rationale would be due to CoR before the grant submission deadline.

Given that the EVC/Provost's office has stated that it can no longer provide funding for extensions, CoR members agreed at the November 6 meeting that the call for proposals will clearly state that there will be no extensions, and no exceptions. The award letters will also include this language as well as the Senate analyst's award notification emails. The Senate analyst will also send periodic email reminders to PIs and School financial staff of the funding deadline and reiterate that no extensions will be allowed.

Last year, CoR members suggested the following revisions for the AY 24-25 call:

- Should CoR add language to the call that summarizes its evaluation rubric?
- Should CoR add a table of last year's winners with the number of years since they were last awarded so potential applicants can see the likelihood of being funded?
- Should CoR revise the evaluation rubric to rank the "reasonableness" of the proposals' budgets? Last year's CoR suggested there is a difference between "need" and the "reasonable" nature of budget requests.

- Should the application form on the last page of the call for proposals include checkboxes for seed funding and bridge funding and should PIs be required to check one?

In today's meeting, CoR members agreed on the following revisions to the call for proposals:

- Assuming that the total pot of money available for this year's program is \$175,000, then the cap on individual awards will be \$5,000.
- CoR members will provide specific language in the call for proposals about the option for PIs to request additional funds beyond \$5,000 if they have an extraordinary reason.
- The evaluation criterion of time since last award is already specified in the call for proposals. In this year's call, CoR will insert the sliding scale it used in last year's evaluation rubric.
- Language will be added to the call for proposals that specifies that CoR will use one evaluation rubric for bridge funding and a separate rubric for seed funding. On the application form, PIs will be asked to mark which option they are applying for.
- The call for proposals will reiterate that no extensions to the funding deadline will be allowed and there will be no exceptions. The call will also state that PIs and their schools will be issued with periodic reminders about the spending deadline.

Action: The committee staff member will incorporate the above revisions into the draft AY 24-25 call for proposals and distribute to CoR for further editing and approval. The final call will be issued to faculty in November or December.

CoR members were reminded that Vice Chancellor Klotzbier from External Relations and his staff will attend the December 4 CoR meeting to discuss research fundraising.

Action: CoR members are asked to submit specific questions or topics for VC Klotzbier to the committee staff member by November 27. The final list of questions will be submitted to VC Klotzbier on that day to prepare for the December 4 CoR meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

Attest: Tao Ye, CoR Chair