

Committee on Research (CoR)
Minutes of Meeting
April 29, 2020

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Research met at 1:00 pm on April 29, 2020 via Zoom. Chair Michael Scheibner presiding.

I. Chair's Report

A. Division Council meetings April 20 and April 27

EVC/Provost Camfield discussed with Division Council members the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, UC Merced admissions for fall 2020 look positive. More Central Valley students are enrolling at UC Merced than in the past. Statements of Intent to Register are slightly up from this time last year. UC campuses are discussing holding cloud remote instruction for international students who are unable to travel to the U.S.

The Division Council chair shared that UCOP has drafted a working document with a list of indicators to help guide the future reopening of UC campuses.

EVC/Provost Camfield acknowledged that though he has requested the formation of ad hoc committees to address various aspects of the research and teaching mission in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, he hopes to end the proliferation of campus ad hoc committees in the future. He prefers that the campus work within the existing committee structure moving forward.

Academic Council and the University Committee on Educational Policy issued a survey to UC faculty on teaching. The deadline for completing the survey was extended to today, and Chair Scheibner encouraged CoR members to respond.

The LASC chair consulted with Division Council members about a memo sent by LASC to the Senate Chair emphasizing the importance of consulting with the Library when drafting proposals for the approval of new programs and majors. Often, such proposals claim not to require resources; but it becomes apparent after the proposals are approved that new Library resources and services are in fact needed, causing the Library to quickly attempt to secure the needed support.

Chair Scheibner discussed with Division Council members CoR's revised ORU policy which addresses the latest set of comments received from Senate committees and ORU directors. Chair Scheibner will contact the CAPRA chair to clarify CAPRA's comments, specifically, CAPRA's concerns over budgeting and the proliferation of reports from multiple committees included in the ORU policy. Chair Scheibner stated that he will add a note in the FAQ document that faculty workload should be taken into account before the faculty in the proposed ORU decide to create new committees.

Chair Scheibner also discussed CoR's two-part research enhancement proposal with Division Council. A Division Council member suggested removing the requirement pertaining to the participation of multiple Schools on a Senate grant proposal, as it may not be possible for some faculty to enter into such collaborations. Chair Scheibner suggested revising the requirement to state that a campus level proposal must outline how the proposal would benefit the broader campus community. EVC/Provost Camfield asked Chair Scheibner to consult with APAPB Kurt Schnier on developing a per capita funding model for the Senate faculty grants program. Chair Scheibner will also speak with APAPB Schnier on financing the proposed workforce component of the proposal.

B. Research Relaunch Work Group

Chair Scheibner announced that he was asked to serve on a Research Relaunch work group that includes VCORED Traina, VPDGE (and future Interim VCORED) Marjorie Zatz, Associate Graduate Dean Chris Kello, Professor Josh Viers (SoE), and AVC Deborah Motton. The group, who met last week and will reconvene on Monday, May 4, is 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.

Action: CoR members to send Chair Scheibner their input and concerns about relaunching campus research activities by noon on Monday, May 4 and Chair Scheibner will convey the input to the work group.

II. Consent Calendar

A. Today's agenda

B. Draft April 15 meeting minutes

Action: The Consent calendar was approved as presented.

III. Consultation with VCORED Traina

VCORED Traina announced that the systemwide VCOREDs held a meeting this morning with staff members who advise and support the House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space and Technology. The staff were supportive and understanding of the UC's needs, specifically 1) the need for the UC system to receive more money and 2) automatic no-cost extensions to federal grants. The staff were also supportive of the idea of granting a one-year extension, with funds, for graduate student support if the students are close to the end of the grant. The staff will seek guidance from the NSF who has the relevant national data. Finally, the staff members indicated their support of the idea of one additional year of funding for post docs. VCORED Traina pointed out that the UC Senate Bylaw that dictates the length of post doc appointments (five years) would have to be modified temporarily if the UC system does approve a one-year extension. The Science Committee staff members also expressed interest in creating a national COVID-19 testing environment using universities as a testing platform for the current and future pandemics. Funding from the federal government may be provided, and such testing may be a good employment opportunity for graduate students and post docs who are currently awaiting the reopening of the job market.

Chair Scheibner asked for a timeline as to when the aforementioned extensions to grant proposals, and graduate student and post doc appointments will be announced. VCORED Traina indicated that the timeline will be dictated by the availability of aid from the next federal economic stimulus bill. He reminded CoR members that while the House committee staff members were supportive of the UC's needs, the U.S. Senate still has to discuss.

VCORED Traina announced that there is a bill in the U.S. Senate to rename the NSF "National Science and Technology Foundation" with a greater emphasis on outcome-oriented research. The bill is unpopular with many, though it has some bipartisan support in the Senate. Many are skeptical that the bill will pass.

A CoR member inquired about the timeline for campus laboratory moves, as she was informed by the movers that their timeline has not been affected by the pandemic. VCORED Traina stated that the laboratory moves are expected to proceed as normal, however, faculty and moving personnel will have to practice social distancing. The movers will have to disinfect the space, move faculty boxes to their new space, and disinfect again before faculty and graduate students can access the new space. He clarified that faculty will be allowed to box their own items, but have to abide by social distancing rules. Because faculty have to limit the number of people in their laboratories, the moving process will take longer than expected. CoR Chair Scheibner pointed out that some equipment cannot be disinfected with materials commonly used by movers and cleaners. VCORED Traina agreed and encouraged CoR members to direct their questions and concerns to VC Mike McLeod. VCORED Traina added that faculty should work with their departments in regards to accessing their laboratories and allowing access for their graduate students and other research personnel.

IV. Resuming Campus Research Operations

Chair Scheibner stated that Division Council will continue meeting on a monthly basis through the summer given their ongoing discussions on strategies on reopening the campus later this year. As CoR will be consulted on relaunched campus research activities, Chair Scheibner asked CoR members if they are willing to meet via Zoom monthly in June, July, and August. CoR members had no objections.

Action: Committee analyst will schedule summer CoR meetings.

VCORED Traina warned CoR members that the campus will not reopen before county operations resume. The campus is constrained by county rules; the county is constrained by Governor Newsom's orders; and the Governor abides by advice given to him by state health officials. VCORED Traina summarized Governor Newsom's proposed phases for reopening K-12 schools and businesses. There is a chance that campus research operations will begin to resume by the end of July, which includes the reopening of faculty laboratories, assuming there is no surge in the local coronavirus infection rates. A campus announcement will precede any resumption of campus research activities.

A CoR member inquired about the impact of the pandemic on graduate student pay. VCORED Traina replied that the School deans have the appropriate information; also, the SPO website contains a link to additional information on the eligibility to pay graduate students on grants.

Action: VCOED Traina will send the link to the committee analyst who will forward to CoR members.

V. Campus Review Item

Proposal to Establish a Stand-Alone Admissions and Financial Committee (AFAC)

This is a proposal to establish the current Admissions and Financial Aid Subcommittee (AFAS) of UGC as a stand-alone Admissions and Financial Aid Committee effective academic year 2020-2021.

CoR members agreed that this proposal is not under CoR's purview.

Action: The committee analyst will inform the Senate Chair that CoR declines to opine.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 pm.

Attest: Michael Scheibner, CoR chair