

**Committee on Research (CoR)**  
**Minutes of Meeting**  
**September 27, 2021**

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Research met at 2:30 – 4:00 pm on September 27, 2021 via Zoom. Chair Jason Sexton presiding.

- I. Consultation with Interim CFO Kurt Schnier
  - A. Alpha Financials updates

Interim CFO Schnier acknowledged that there are significant pain points around key areas of the Alpha Financials system and Oracle. Service Now has a backlog of approximately 21-22 days which his staff is working to address. However, on a positive note, orders made through the self-service option are now being processed in approximately two days which is an improvement over the previous 12-day delay. Interim CFO Schnier also informed CoR members that CBS2 is hiring eight more staff members which will hopefully improve the delays around purchasing and reimbursements. One of the reasons for the delays in order processing is the email traffic between faculty and purchasing staff because faculty or their designee did not enter the COA or POET. Due to the various delays, some faculty are purchasing items with their own funding and seeking reimbursement later. Interim CFO Schnier also shared that six CBS2 staff members will soon be on campus to help the Schools with their purchasing and reimbursement issues. This is being done in response to faculty feedback that they require a closer connection with purchasing staff.

Interim CFO Schnier also acknowledged the current problems with invoicing and data access. (Data issues stem from the beginning of the system's implementation caused by problems with data conversion.) He is now granting access to Research Administrators (RAs) and Chief Administrative Officers (CAO). He is also restructuring the workflow of the Division of Finance and Administration (DFA). These are some of the changes that are being made in response to comments raised in recent faculty town halls.

A CoR member raised the issue of confusing messaging from the campus that informed faculty that they can submit their orders through Service Now if they do not wish to use self-service. However, Service Now is now backlogged. Interim CFO Schnier responded that he will rectify that messaging. Another CoR member disagreed with the Interim CFO Schnier's suggestion that both faculty and staff need more training to use the Alpha Financials system. She stated that ordering and entering information such as COA and POET should be the job of staff members as faculty members do not have the time or capacity to do these tasks. Interim CFO

Schnier acknowledged that the system was designed to be self-service and that the campus would have to allocate a significant amount of resources to hire more staff.

Interim VCORED Zatz asked CoR members for ideas on how to revise the system so that COA and POET are automatically filled when faculty make orders. A CoR member asked why there was no faculty input on the implementation of Alpha Financials and why there was no pilot project. The lack of shared governance is concerning. He asked whether IT can build a database where faculty's COA are housed thereby eliminating the need for staff or faculty to have to keep re-entering them into orders. Another CoR member stated that unbeknownst to her, her urgent orders were sitting idle at CBS2, but the tickets were closed. She had to contact CBS2 staff to reopen the tickets and complete her urgent orders. She asked whether a dashboard could be built so faculty can track their orders in the workflow system. Interim CFO Schnier acknowledged that faculty input was not sought before the campus implemented the Alpha Financials system. He emphasized that UCLA made it clear that they could no longer support UC Merced on their financial system, so UC Merced had to find another option quickly. He agreed with the CoR member on the dashboard idea and will speak to the IT staff who are currently helping to enhance the system.

**Action:** Interim CFO Schnier will attend a future CoR meeting to update the committee on purchasing and reimbursement improvements.

II. September 16 Divisional Council meeting

CoR Chair Sexton informed CoR members that the main topics were a discussion with Interim CFO Schnier on the Alpha Financials system and a consultation with SNS Dean Dumont on a potential unit 18 lecturer strike.

III. Consent Calendar

- A. Today's agenda
- B. Draft September 13 meeting minutes

**Action:** the Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

IV. Consultation with Interim VCORED Zatz

- A. Draft charge for campus lab safety committee (co-written by Chair Sexton)

Interim VCORED Zatz and CoR Chair Sexton are working on the charge. They are proposing a joint Senate/Administration committee that will focus on lab safety writ large and will provide suggestions, advice, and oversight. The goal of empaneling this committee is to address problems before they become crises.

Interim VCORED Zatz stated that there is now a dotted line of reporting from EH&S to her. A CoR member asked if there is a plan for Interim VCORED Zatz to contact faculty members who are in crisis mode with regard to their dealings with EH&S. Interim VCORED Zatz responded that she is discussing this issue with some faculty now. She suggested that with the approval of the VPDGE, graduate students could be hired to help EH&S with their workload. However, some faculty are concerned that graduate students would fall behind on their research. Interim VCORED Zatz asked CoR members for recommendations for graduate students to work with EH&S for about a month and the campus will provide the funds to compensate them for their work. A CoR member asked why EH&S has to go through every order. Interim VCORED Zatz replied that EH&S has to ensure that quantity is not exceeded. Once the campus acquires a stockroom and more cabinets, the situation will improve. She also stated that additional staff hiring is in the works, but this could take months. A CoR member asked whether the operational processes between EH&S and purchasing can be streamlined and connected. A computational infrastructure is needed.

B. MacKenzie Scott gift funds

The Chancellor is deciding how to allocate the Scott gift funds and Interim VCORED Zatz has no information at this time. A CoR member inquired whether some of the funds can be used to fix the current research infrastructure crises. Another CoR member pointed out that the funds are probably best used to boost UC Merced's research competitiveness rather than fixing specific infrastructure problems. Interim VCORED Zatz informed CoR members that a campus communication will be issued soon regarding the research infrastructure problems.

C. Updates on advances in the area of innovation and technology transfer.

The campus has made two new hires in these areas. The Regents have approved Proof of Concept funding for each campus. For UC Merced, the Regents will provide a 90/10 match for the first three years, then 70/30 for the next three years, then 50/50 into the foreseeable future. UC Riverside and UC Santa Cruz will also receive this funding. The three campuses are also receiving "reaching readiness" funding to help develop staffing and other infrastructure to support technology transfer and other forms of commercializing faculty inventions and small businesses. A Regents Special Committee is developing implementation plans for these and other means of supporting innovation on UC campuses.

V. Campus Infrastructure Draft Memo – *Chair Sexton & Vice Chair Ye*

At the last meeting, Chair Sexton and Vice Chair Ye agreed to draft a memo to the administration regarding campus research infrastructure difficulties with procurement, reimbursements, and research grant administration.

Prior to this meeting, a draft memo was provided to CoR members for review. The memo articulates the main research obstacles, the cost of these obstacles, and various recommendations for moving forward. CoR members then discussed possible edits and agreed to finalize their review by 10:00 pm tonight.

CoR members agreed that the next steps are to forward the memo to the chairs of GC and FWAFF for their input. The revised memo will then be transmitted to Divisional Council for their review and endorsement.

**Action:** The committee analyst will send the memo to the chairs of GC and FWAFF tomorrow morning, September 28.

VI. CoR Membership on Campus Committees

A. CoR/SPO Working Group

Per the working group's charge, two members of CoR are needed to serve. Vice Chair Ye is a continuing member so one more CoR member is needed.

B. Export Controls Work Group

One member of CoR is asked to serve.

Information on the Export Controls Work Group:

- Chaired by the Export Control Officer
- Includes staff and faculty representatives from applicable campus departments
- Meets at least quarterly to provide high level oversight on export compliance
- Evaluates and recommends potential solutions for implementing, maintaining and tracking export control compliance
- Reviews suspected violations and recommends corrective actions
- Advises on complicated or special export control matters

**Action:** Due to time constraints, the committee analyst will seek volunteers for both committees over email.

VII. Annual Senate Faculty Grants Program

The EVC/Provost has allocated \$175,000 for the AY 21-22 Senate faculty grants. Last year's Call for Proposals was hyperlinked on today's agenda.

The timeline is:

- CoR issues the AY 21-22 Call for Proposals by early-to-mid November 2021
- The deadline for submissions is the end of January 2022
- CoR will select awardees by mid-February

Professor Mike Dawson, who is the chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee on Sustainability (FACS) attended today's CoR meeting. He informed CoR members that the EVC/Provost has provided FACS with \$10,000 in seed funding. FACS has the option to create a grant competition to disburse the funds, but Professor Dawson suggested a CoR/FACS collaboration in which the \$10,000 from FACS could be rolled into the annual Senate faculty grants program. The \$10,000 would be allocated to sustainability-oriented proposals. CoR members suggested issuing a single Call for Proposals that asks PIs to check a box that affirms they wish to be considered for the sustainability funding. CoR members also discussed possible methods of review, for example, whether CoR and FACS will conduct separate reviews, or whether some FACS members can be assigned to help CoR review all the proposals, or whether FACS simply selects their winning proposals and notifies CoR.

**Action:** CoR members will continue this discussion over email and will notify FACS of the committee's preference.

VIII. Systemwide Review Item

A. Proposed Revisions to Presidential Policy on Sustainable Practices

The systemwide Sustainability Steering Committee is the governing body for the Sustainable Practices Policy and reviews the policy annually for required updates and revisions. This year, the Sustainability Steering Committee approved several policy updates to the Green Building Design, Climate Protection, Sustainable Transportation, Sustainable Water Systems, and Sustainability at UC Health sections. These changes included updating specific targets and adding additional requirements.

A summary of the proposed revisions, together with a redline and clean copy of the revised policy, were hyperlinked on today's agenda.

**Action:** Committee analyst will seek a lead reviewer via email after today's meeting. CoR's comments are due to the Senate Chair by Friday, October 22.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:55 pm.

Attest: Jason Sexton, CoR Chair