

COMMITTEE ON FACULTY WELFARE & ACADEMIC FREEDOM (FWAF)**Friday, April 21, 2023****Minutes of Meeting**

Pursuant to call, the Committee on Faculty Welfare and Academic Freedom met at 10:30 am on April 21, via Zoom. Chair David Jennings presiding.

I. Consultation with Interim VC/CFO Schnier

Interim VC/CFO Schnier attended today's FWAF meeting to discuss the ongoing issues with the campus financial systems. He confirmed that he has read the document prepared by a FWAF member that contains anecdotes from faculty and staff about their challenges with procurement and grants accounting. Interim VC/CFO Schnier added that he has been investigating the issues. He pointed out that there are two different workstreams: contracts and grants (managed through ORED) and non-contract and grants (Schools).

A FWAF member stated that there appears to be a disconnect between what Oracle users are experiencing and the information coming from the administration. Also, when faculty receive their grant balances, the balance sometimes fluctuates by tens of thousands of dollars without any activity. Staff are working with tools that do not work: they are working off the general ledger which is updated infrequently thereby preventing them from having up to date information. Interim VC/CFO Schnier inquired what tools and trainings have been provided to staff. He went on to state that the campus held "reboot camps" for Oracle users and the Division of Finance and Administration's website contains trainings and templates. It has been a struggle to forge a partnership between the two domains (contracts and grants workstream and non-contract and grants workstream). He emphasized that his office does not generate financial reports – they just curate the data. Interim VC/CFO Schnier acknowledged that it has taken time for users to become familiar with the system but the campus has provided templates and tools to help users gain proficiency with Oracle. The trainings have not gone as well as he hoped. Going forward, his office is looking into certification programs.

FWAF Chair Jennings suggested that inaccurate grant accounting may make the university liable to audits which is a serious problem. Inaccurate grant accounting interferes with our success as a university. Interim VC/CFO Schnier responded that there have only been two or three cases of overages that he is aware of – all of them were investigated by himself and former VCR Zatz and one of them was not Oracle related. The campus did offer \$10,000 to faculty to fill in the gaps. Interim VC/CFO Schnier suggested that the problem is not as widespread as stated in the FWAF member's document of anecdotes. FWAF members disagreed. One FWAF member stated that faculty need to be able to make decisions on their grants every day and decide whether to apply for more grants in the future. Some faculty are considering changing their research direction because they cannot deal with the financial systems' problems. The challenges around Oracle and grants management are endangering the university's partnerships with external and community partners and causing a great deal of stress on faculty.

Interim VC/CFO Schnier stated that he is aware of all the challenges in the past but wants to know whether the system is working for faculty at the present time. He added that he has received positive emails from faculty. He also inquired why faculty are focusing on their grant fund balances and procurement when that should be the role of staff who are supporting them. A FWAF member replied that this is a systems problem, not a people problem. Interim VC/CFO Schnier responded that the system is in a place now where the campus just needs all the people in place to make it work. He added that his data integrity project cleaned up a lot of issues last year. He asked what additional training he needs to do with staff. His office already meets with School staff weekly to ask them what they need. He stated that the software is working – what is not working is the campus's use of the system and the lack of partnerships between the relevant parties on campus.

A FWAF member pointed out that another UC campus established an advisory committee to address Oracle-related issues and asked if UC Merced could create a similar committee. Interim VC/CFO Schnier replied that UC Merced does have a Senate-Administration Oracle Advisory Committee. Members of that committee agreed that its task needs to be repurposed to address services in general and not solely Oracle, but progress has not yet been made on the repurposing.

Interim VC/CFO Schnier ended his consultation by emphasizing that he understands all the information contained in the FWAF member's document that details Oracle challenges but finding solutions requires the appropriate partnerships across campus.

- II. Chair's Report – *David Jennings*
 - A. Divisional Council meetings April 3 and April 17
 - B. UCAF meeting March 23
 - C. UCFW meeting April 14

Action: Due to time constraints, the committee chair will provide a written report after this meeting.

- III. Consultation with VPAP Tom Hansford

VPAP Hansford informed FWAF members that a communication will be issued next week regarding faculty and staff raises.

- IV. Consent Calendar
 - A. Today's agenda
 - B. Draft March 17 meeting minutes

Action: The Consent Calendar was approved as presented.

- V. Memo from Molecular & Cell Biology Department Space Committee
On April 5, the MCB department space committee submitted a memo (linked on today's agenda) to CoR and FWAF on Research Impediments from Increasing Costs, and Disparities in Costs, of Renovating Research Spaces on Campus.

Action: Due to time constraints, FWAF was unable to discuss the memo. The CoR Chair and Senate Executive Director will be informed.

- VI. COVID Mitigation Funds – *Chair Jennings*

Linked on today's agenda were the following: CoR's proposal, VPAP Hansford's input on CoR's proposal, and FWAF's revised draft Call for Proposals for COVID Mitigation.

Background: EVC/Provost Camfield and Vice Provost for Academic Personnel (VPAP) Hansford invited a proposal from the Senate Committee on Research (CoR) on the allocation of potential COVID mitigation funds that would be awarded to the Senate. CoR submitted its proposal to the VPAP which was ultimately reviewed favorably by the EVC/Provost. The EVC/Provost informed CoR that he will award the Senate \$50,000 to allocate to the faculty to mitigate COVID impacts.

At the February 17 FWAF meeting, members discussed the potential costs of buying out a course and discussed whether faculty could use this funding for that purpose. On March 2, 2023, FWAF Chair Jennings contacted the School Deans to inquire about the cost of buying out a course.

At today's meeting, FWAF was asked to review FWAF Chair Jennings' revised call for proposals. Upon FWAF's approval, the draft call will be submitted to CoR for review and approval. The final draft will be submitted to Divisional Council before being issued to Senate faculty.

Action: Due to time constraints, FWAF will discuss the revised call for proposals at the May 5th meeting. VPAP Hansford will be asked to consult with EVC/Provost Camfield on whether he would allow the funds to be rolled over to AY 23-24.

- VII. Executive Session (voting members only, no minutes taken)

Recusal: FWAF Member Beth Scaffidi

- A. Review of faculty professional development grant proposals

Action: FWAF members agreed on the list of awardees. The committee analyst will issue award and decline letters to faculty no later than Tuesday, April 25.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 pm.

Attest: David Jennings, FWAF Chair