The University of Tennessee

Faculty Senate Research Council

Minutes of the Meeting

September 9, 2020

**Elected Members present:**

Dallas Donohoe, Yuri Efremenko, Yanfei Gao, David Icove, Julia Jaekel (Chair), Xueping Li, Brian Long, Vasileios Maroulas, Tore Olsson, Stephen Paddison, Sean Schaeffer, Alisa Schoenbach, and Soren Sorensen

**Ex-Officio Members present:**

Suzie Allard, David Anderson, Ernest Brothers, Doug Coatsworth, Deborah Crawford, Bill Dunne, Michael Higdon, Michael Kilbey, Larry McKay, Jamie McGowan, Holly Mercer, Charlie Noble, Josh Price, Victor Hazelwood, Hollie Raynor, Jon Wall, David White, and Tami Wyatt

**ORE Members present:**

Erin Chapin, Marc Gibson, Jean Mercer, Jon Phipps, Sarah Pruett, and Renee Thomas

**Call to order:**

A regular meeting of the Research Council was held via Zoom and Julia Jaekel called the meeting to order at 3:30 pm.

**Announcements and Reports**

**Introduction of Council Members**

**Goals**

The Council’s goals were developed from the Faculty Senate retreat and circulated for comment. These will be posted on the Research Council’s website once finalized. The Chair’s goal is coordinate speakers and facilitate open discussions between stakeholders.

**ACTION:**  Council members should send any comments to the Chair.

The goals listed under Overarching Aims continue year after year. Goals for RC Sessions and Activities are topics that will be meeting foci for this year’s Council.

**Committee Assignments**

Committee assignments were circulated and are based on the member’s request when possible.

**ACTION:** Council members to notify Chair if they want to change committees. (none requested by 9/22/20)

**New Business**

**Introduction and conversation with our new VCR – Deborah Crawford**

The first month has been getting to know the University, faculty and other stakeholders, understand strengths, identify areas where more investments are needed, and better ways to support the faculty to realize the research aspirations. The next few months will be understanding the bigger picture. This broader understanding will help to combine strengths that represent the unique intellectual personality of the University as well how the University community connects to partners in the external community; near and far. This includes strengthening partnerships in the community, with individuals, and private sector organizations to understand their expectations and how the University can make a difference. There is a strategic importance of the integration of research in the education system and will be working with the Graduate School and college deans about how research and scholarship are reflected in the curriculum and learning outcomes of students. Ultimately, the most important product of the University are the students we help prepare for productive lives.

The Research council plays a critical role to understand how the RC members experience the university, experience the support ORE provides, and how ORE can be better together. Candid feedback is encouraged from everyone about how ORE can be better.

This is the third VCR position and one lesson learned is that communication breaks down between what happens in the senior leadership ranks and the faculty who are the life’s blood of the University. The goal is to bridge the gap between how she sees the University versus how the faculty experience the University. If the job is done well, no one should be surprised by information that flows through email about a new initiative because the RC is aware and has part ownership in that initiative because the RC will have had opportunity to be informed and comment.

She is open to discussing what the RC feels that needs to be discussed and does not mind difficult conversations about difficult issues. That is how we get stronger together. Looks forward to working with everyone, all disciplines. Even though background is in Engineering, will be wholeheartedly commit to every faculty member in every discipline. She wants to make sure that the support ORE provides is felt by each and every RC member and colleagues. She expects the RC to hold her accountable for that.

She plans to be at every meeting and looks forward to learning more through RC members’ experiences. Very delighted to be at the University and sees lots of talent among faculty and opportunity at the University. One of the topics Julia discussed was team approach of research scholarship creating the ‘whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. Collaboration that takes root and flourishes is something that she truly enjoys.

Q: F&A Rates, budget model

A: Current F&A rate is typical for a public intuition. No idea how the integration of UTIA will affect the rate. The Feds determine the rate working with the University. Oak Ridge has a higher F&A rate because they live off what they bring in. Very excited about UTIA integration and the research opportunities it will create. OneHealth is a good example of that collaboration. Recognizes the turnover in the VCR position at the University and sensitive to the fact that the turnover has affected the research enterprise. Plans to be a long time VCR to provide continuity of leadership and rely on the VCR and ORE team.

Q: Recruiting foreign students which are a lifeline in research. COVID long-term impact on research?

A: Near term (1 to 2 years), Federal government will use Research as a recovery mechanism as it did in 2008. Rs & Ds – how can universities play a part in economic recovery and how research be a part of that recovery process? Need to prepare to respond to the opportunities. Longer term, 3 to 5 years out is where some of the trauma of 2020 will play out. Most institutions are on a hiring freeze, some have medical facilities with tremendous losses and those losses impact the academic programs. How that shakes out on how the federal administration will support Universities is unclear. It may be quite different based on who is elected in November. Looking at shovel ready projects – What can we do immediately that would have immediate impact? Wants to hear RC ideas on translational research; research that shows up in society. Where are the best areas to make investments and be competitive for Federal projects? International relationships will be a challenge since universities relied on other countries for graduate students. Every university is worried. Because of the international travel ban, international students could find opportunities closer to home with intuitions that are just as competitive as US institutions. One current effect of COVID is that enrollment increased at UT with in-state students but decreased in out-of-state and international students.

Q: AI and Quantum, and 5G

A: Data Science and Engineering, Machine-Learning very excited and opportunity for new research across many disciplines. Faculty that have that expertise and to apply in so many different areas of application is very much in demand. ORI allows investment in AI Machine Learning expertise. Last 4 to 5 years, those with that expertise are showing up in departments that are not Statistics, Business Analytics, or Computer Science Departments but they are showing up in departments of other disciplines too bringing tools that allow researchers and scholars to use those tools in interesting ways to further their own disciplinary or multi-disciplinary interests. A goal is to foster a sense of community, a community of scholars interested in AI and Machine Learning as an area of study itself. NSF AI call was released and ORE Research Development, under the leadership of Jennifer Webster is working on the development which includes limited submission competition, identifying the faculty interested in putting together this large projects with multi institutional teams. The University needs to be more deliberate about preparing for those opportunities before the release of the solicitation or funding opportunity announcement. Coupling the University and ORNL expertise provides real strategic advantage if we can find a way to leverage the expertise.

**Initial planning - How can we assess the impact of the COVID-19 on research procedures and productivity?**

This is not a short-term look at the data currently available but brainstorm what can be implemented now to track institutional and external data throughout the year and moving forward in the next few years. Implement procedures that will help answer the questions about long term impact of COVID. Brainstorm on how we can go in the right directions to collect data available. There has been increase in submissions since COVID but this is a short term impact, what we are expecting to see long-term is different. Discussion of potential software to track data. Impact on certain groups of faculty: people of color, women, care-givers, etc. and how that can impact productivity. Guest: Anna Banks, Director of Research Informatics.

Discussion included:

* Should data currently tracked not also be considered in what is tracked in the future?
* International research will be impacted even though funding will be available
* Productivity is an important indicator but measured differently in different disciplines.
  + Grant submission should not be the only indicator of productivity.
* Drs. Babu, Dunne, and McKay were asked by Dr. Crawford to investigate how COVID access restrictions on the Oak Ridge reservation has impacted research especially the graduate students.
* Potentially track IRB submissions, contract submissions
* Speed of contract submissions and billing to funding agencies may be impacted
* Working with the Graduate School - Progress to graduation: short-term (May or August) and long-term (later)
* Ability for graduates to be employed after graduation
* Do all departments have indicators for past years? It varies by college: PhD placement in Engineering May want to track longer – 5 to 6 years
* Caution on using publications as an indicator because time to publish varies from discipline to discipline
* Publications of students
* Data Central – data.utk.edu/graduateblueprint
* Research Council’s role is to initiate conversation and activities that could have synergetic effects across campus

It was suggested to create these broad categories:

1. Access to Facilities, Labs, International Travel to do field work
2. Staffing & Billing / Human Resources
3. Personal Impact (caregiver responsibilities, illness, etc.)
4. Students’ Graduation and Employment Success

Adjournment: The Chair adjourned the meeting at 4:57 pm.

Minutes submitted by: Paula Brown

Next Meeting: October 14, 2020