

University Research Committee Annual Report to the Faculty Senate

2008-2009 Academic Year

May 13th, 2009

Members

Carl Klarner, Chair (Political Science), Shelley Arvin, Secretary (Library), Aruna Chandrasekaran (Management), Lisa Cutter (College of Education), Richard Fitch (Chemistry), Marsha Miller (Library), Tom Nesser (Physical Education), Nancy Nichols-Pethick (Art), David Polizzi (Criminology), Dawn Underwood (ex officio, Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP)), Julia Fine (Faculty Senate Executive Committee ex officio)

Meetings

September 11, 2008, October 9, 2008, November 6, 2008, February 17, 2009, and April 14, 2009. Much work of the committee was done using a discussion board on the Blackboard Web site as well as circulating e-mails.

Charges for 2008-2009

1. Recommend nominee to Theodore Dreiser Award Committee (On-going charge).

We recommended David Polizzi to the Dreiser Award Committee.

2. Review proposals to support faculty research and scholarship (On-going charge).

We received 13 grant proposals for the Fall 2008 round of applications, requesting a total of around \$67,000. We granted six for funding or partial for the total of our budget of around \$24,000. We received eight for the Spring 2009 for a total amount of \$34,880, and funded five of these, for a total of \$18,448.

3. Report on how URC guidelines relate to collaborative proposals (New charge).

This was discussed but no changes in URC guidelines were suggested.

4. Review funding guidelines for inconsistencies and also the rubric for evaluations of proposals; initiate changes as appropriate (URC recommended new charge).

The method of evaluating scores was extensively discussed. It was agreed that the past practice of averaging the scores to the subcategories of the score sheet was problematic. Such averaging assumes that all subcategories have the same importance. Members of the committee might disagree about the relative weights assigned to the different criteria. It would also not be unreasonable for an evaluator to assign scores to the subcategories with an eye toward the overall score they wanted an application to have. This is not faithful to the process of evaluating the grants. To solve these problems, it was agreed that URC members would still assign scores to subcategories, but provide one overall evaluation to one individual who would aggregate the scores for the overall group score. It was also agreed that these scores should be “z-scored” (an evaluator’s scores would be subtracted by their overall average and divided by their standard deviations). Not doing so means that different evaluators will not have an equal impact on the overall scores applicants receive (evaluators with more variance in their scores will have a greater impact). This may sound trivial, but becomes extremely problematic when URC members must recuse themselves from making evaluations of someone in their department, something which happens frequently. From these initial scores, discussion would determine the final decisions on grants. The motion implementing this change in the standard operating procedure of the URC passed unanimously (October 9, 2008). OSP will alter the score sheets for evaluators accordingly.

The following change to the grant application instructions was passed by the URC 8-0-0 (February 17, 2009). “In the section "Nature of the Grants" in the UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE GRANTS INFORMATION AND APPLICATION GUIDELINES after the wording "The Committee will not consider proposals for," insert the wording "Projects submitted by faculty members who have resigned from the URC in the academic year of the grant application" at the end of the bulleted list.” This will prevent people from quitting the URC mid-year in order to submit a grant. This would disrupt the operations of the URC.

URC Guidelines state that the OSP should send a copy of the Annual Report to the Office of Academic Affairs. Underwood stated that this procedure has not been performed for years. A motion was presented to allow the Secretary to make appropriate changes to the wording of the Guidelines. (8-0-0, February 17, 2009)

A motion altering the grant application instructions was passed on April 14, 2009. “In the instructions of “What to Submit” in the information and application guidelines document, under “VII. Resume of Principal Investigator” the number “10” shall be replaced with the number “2.”” (Approved 7-0-0).

Another motion altering the grant application instructions was passed on April 14, 2009. “Add a place on the application for the chair’s signature for URC applications. This would not be for the chair’s approval, but merely to indicate that the Department chair had looked at the proposal.” (Approved 7-0-0) The reasoning behind this motion is to keep chairs informed of grant applications in their department.

A motion altering how the OSP sends grant applications was passed on April 14, 2009. "All URC members will continue to receive electronic PDFs of proposals, but will only receive hardcopies if the URC member requested." (Approved 7-0-0)

On April 14, it was also agreed that a move toward anonymity be experimented with in a pilot project. "Perform a pilot project in Fall 2009 in which the CV is submitted separately from the proposal and the rubric is incorporated. Applications will be submitted in two parts: 1) the application itself and 2) the PI's CV. The first part will be totally anonymous, with no references to the PI's name. Evaluators will first fill out the part of the scoring sheet that pertains to the application itself. Second, evaluators will then look at the CV associated with the application." (Approved 6-1-0)

Another motion pertaining to the issue of anonymity was voted on and passed via e-mail between April 15th and April 28th. "That in the pilot project, the two sets of documents referred to above (i.e., the application with all personal references removed, and secondly the CV) be sent out in two waves, the latter date specified by the URC." (Approved 8-0-0)

Although not formally voted on, OSP will alter the grant application instructions on their Web site to fully implement the two motions pertaining to anonymity voted on above.

Another motion was voted on and passed via e-mail between April 15th and April 28th. "The score sheet used by the URC should be provided in the application instructions." (Approved 7-1-0)

5. Make recommendations regarding the domain of responsibility held by URC. For instance, are the duties too narrow to warrant status as a separate committee or should these responsibilities be tasked to a standing committee with broader responsibilities? (NOTE: A SIMILAR CHARGE IS BEING DEVELOPED FOR EVERY STANDING COMMITTEE).

We unanimously agreed as a committee that the only possible change in the domain of responsibility for the URC was a merger with the University Arts Endowment Committee (UAEC). The URC decided as a group that this would not be a beneficial change to committee structure. A document detailing our reasons for this was submitted to the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate on March 5, 2009.