
RESEARCH POLICIES COUNCIL

Minutes of 14 September 2023

Call to Order

The regular meeting of the Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Research Policies Council was called to order at 2:30 p.m. on 14 September 2023 in Walwood Hall Room 112E by Andre Venter, chair.

Members in Attendance: Onur Arugaslan, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Christopher Cheatham (substitute for Julian Vasquez Heilig), Lofton Durham, Angela Groves, Wanda Hadley, Kristina Lemmer, Daria Orłowska, Selim Ozyurek, Alessandro Santos, Remzi Seker, Leslie Solares, Andre Venter, Kevin Wanner

Ex Officio in Attendance: Anthony DeFulio, Mark Hurwitz

Guests: Sarah Summy, Faculty Senate President; Christine Stamper, Research Program Officer; Office of Research and Innovation; Joanne Mih, Coordinator Data Research, Office of Research and Innovation; Bilinda Straight, Gender and Women's Studies, Bonnie Gabriel, Business Manager Associate, Office of Research and Innovation

Quorum

A quorum was present with 16 members in attendance, of the 11 needed to establish a quorum.

Agenda

[MOTION] It was moved by Byrd-Jacobs, seconded by Santos, to accept the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by DeFulio, seconded by Byrd-Jacobs, to approve the minutes of 11 May 2023 as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Officers

Chair Venter welcomed members.

Ex Officio DeFulio reported on the vacancy in Social Sciences, which has been vacant for two years.

President Summy presented RPC 2023-24 charges.

Reports of the University Representative

Cheatham reported that the provost initiated a post-doctoral research program. Five post-doctoral positions are available; three have been appointed as ad-hoc. This program is geared towards increasing minority populations' participation in studies. It is intended to be a pathway to faculty positions.

Seker reported on the closing of the fiscal year with 24% (\$35.3 million) increase in research expenditure, the highest in 21 years. There were \$41.9 million in new awards, an 18% increase. There were five patents in the last fiscal year, and one was recently received. Research Enterprise productivity is good. Accommodated most faculty hire startup requests; most equipment refresh requests and allocated a budget of \$300,000.

Byrd-Jacobs reported that there was a 7.2% increase in graduate enrollment over last year. The College of Education and Human Development had a large increase. Graduate College had a retreat to work on a strategic plan, which will be finalized in the fall of 2023. The Graduate College is continuing to offer research and travel grants, offering a writing circle, and supporting four doctoral scholars this fall semester. There will be a welcome event on Saturday, 30 September, from noon to 3 p.m.

President Summy left the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Reports of Council/Committee Standing Committees

Ex Officio Hurwitz provided the report of the Research Screening Committee that included a successful year for the Faculty Research and Creative Activities Award (FRACAA). There was an issue reviewing budgets and requesting assistance to review and mentors for FRACAA.

Unfinished Business

Lemmer was appointed RPC secretary for 2023-24.

New Business

Ex Officio DeFulio discussed RPC member vacancies. The Social Sciences vacancy will be filled by Bilinda Straight. There is still one graduate student vacancy.

Ex Officio DeFulio expressed the need to plan to effectively address charges. Procedures in a Memorandum of Action (MOA) for Faculty Research Travel Fund (FRTF) have not been followed in over 10 years. Ex Officio DeFulio discussed operating in the manner specified by MOA 0310. Article 34 must be considered in the faculty contract when writing a new MOA for FRTF.

Gabriel discussed amounts in research funds. It was over budget by \$87,135 at the end of June. Applications for FRTF for July and August continued to be accepted. There is currently \$63,391.50 in applications that have come through but have not been paid. Therefore, if there is a total of \$300,000 this year, only \$147,073.06 remains for this fiscal year. The number of FRTF applications is still below pre-COVID. Publication of Papers and Exhibition (PPP&E) is funded more than pre-COVID.

[MOTION] It was moved by Hurwitz, seconded by Lemmer, to allocate the money in the research account as follows: FRACAA: \$100,000; FRTF: \$100,208.47, PPP&E: \$10,000; Support for Scholars Award (SFSA): \$14,000; FRACAA Reviewer: \$10,000. With one abstention, the motion carried.

[MOTION] It was moved by Lemmer, seconded by DeFulio, for the distribution as follows: FRACAA: \$10,000 each; SFSA: \$2000 each; FRACAA reviewer: \$500 each, FRTF: Follow MOA 0310; PPP&E: follow MOA 0310. The motion carried unanimously.

Announcements

In-person meeting location change to the Bertha Davis Room 111W in Walwood Hall.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by Lemmer, seconded by DeFulio, to adjourn the meeting at 4:26 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Research Policies Council will meet next on 12 October 2023 at 2:30 p.m. via Webex.

Approval

Submitted by Kristina Lemmer, secretary

Minutes approved 12 October 2023.

****Actions taken were subsequently reviewed and revised by the Faculty Senate Executive Board and WMU Administration. (see attachment)***

The following was distributed via WMU email to all WMU faculty on 22 September 2023 at 9:30 a.m.:

Dear colleagues,

Thank you to those who have shared your perspective and concerns about the Faculty Research Travel Fund (FRTF). We have heard you. University and Faculty Senate leadership have been listening and working toward mutually agreeable solutions this week. Effective immediately, **the maximum award for eligible travel from the FRTF for the remainder of the 2023-24 fiscal year will be \$800 per eligible faculty member**, which is the same rate that was set in fiscal years 2017-18 through 2020-21. The trip maximum will be one per year, as has been the custom. The last two fiscal years were exceptional in terms of historical norms, which we detail below.

The Publication of Papers and Exhibition of Creative Works (PPP&E) budget will be set at \$35,249, which is equal to the five-year average of expenditures in fiscal years 2018-19 to 2022-23.

These responsive changes have been made possible through discretionary funds from the offices of the President, Vice President for Research and Innovation, and Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. We believe the listening, communication, and problem-solving among University leadership and the Faculty Senate Executive Board demonstrate strong shared governance. While we would have preferred to entirely avoid the consternation this issue has caused, we have found strength in working together.

While the University's customary maximum travel award has been \$800 and average budget for PPP&E has been approximately \$35,000, two circumstances came together this year to create the situation we are ameliorating today. First, a review of minutes and Memorandums of Action (MOAs) under the purview of the Faculty Senate Research Policy Council surfaced [MOA 3/10](#), which requires a complicated formula and process to establish the per-eligible-faculty-member figure that was published on **Friday, Sept. 15**. It divides the FRTF budget by the total number of bargaining unit faculty. This has not been done in our long-held practice, since at least 2008, and is an entirely theoretical number. The total percentage of bargaining unit faculty traveling on FRTF ranges from approximately 25% to 34%, not 100%. If you read the MOA in detail, you'll find that this figure was never intended to be a maximum, nor the entire budget, but rather an initial amount provided to colleges at the beginning of the year.

The second development is that the University, for the first time, would have experienced the impact of a decision from the 2020-21 budget cut that was made in the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. This was early in the pandemic, so travel was largely prohibited and many academic gatherings were canceled. Entering 2021-22, the FTRF fund had a sizable carryover, so the Faculty Senate Research Policy Council (RPC) doubled the traditional maximum award to \$1,600 and added an allowance for a second trip. That year travel picked up but remained a fraction of pre-pandemic levels. Last fiscal year began with another large carryover. The RPC increased the maximum to \$2,500 and continued the allowance for a second trip.

The response is clear that the 2003 MOA does not work for us in today's world. And the impact of a three-year-old decision was surprising and unsettling. We've also come to believe that our current processes can be greatly improved. The steps we are taking today put us on even footing with our historical norms and give us time over the coming year to work together to improve the process, clarify roles and develop an approach worthy of this strong R2 research University.

Sincerely,

Dr. Remzi Seker

Vice President for Research and Innovation

Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Dr. Sarah Summy

Faculty Senate President, on behalf of the Executive Board