
RESEARCH POLICIES COUNCIL

Minutes of 11 January 2024

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 11 January 2024, Bertha Davis Room 111W by Andre Venter, chair.

Members in Attendance: Onur Arugaslan, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Lofton Durham (substitute for Paul Solomon), Regina Garza Mitchell (substitute for Wanda Hadley), Angela Groves, Daria Orłowska, Selim Ozyurek, Alessander Santos, Remzi Seker, Jesse Smith, Leslie Solares, Julian Vasquez Heilig, Kevin Wanner, Andre Venter

Members Absent: Kristina Lemmer, Bilinda Straight

Ex Officio in Attendance: Anthony DeFulio, Christine Stamper (substitute for Mark Hurwitz)

Guests: None

Quorum

A quorum was present with 16 members in attendance, of the 10 needed to establish a quorum.

Agenda

An amendment was made to add Support for the Faculty Scholars Award (SFSA) Application Review under New Business.

[MOTION] It was moved by DeFulio, seconded by Arugaslan, to accept the agenda as amended. The motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by DeFulio, seconded by Durham, to approve the 30 November 2023 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Officers

Chair Venter announced that Orłowska will be RPC secretary for the remainder of the 2023-24 academic year.

Ex Officio DeFulio did not provide a report.

Reports of the University Representative

Vasquez Heilig joined the meeting at 2:33 p.m.

Seker reported that 104 Faculty Research Travel Fund (FRTF) applications have been received, with a \$110,557.04 balance remaining. Eighteen Preparation and Publication of Papers and Exhibition (PPP&E) applications have been received, with a \$36,488.95 balance remaining. A total remaining balance of \$310,845.99 remains for fiscal year 2024, including Faculty Research and Creative Actives Award (FRACAA).

Vasquez Heilig did not provide a report.

Byrd-Jacobs reported the following:

1. Graduate College Research and Travel grants are open until February 20, along with a few fellowships with a similar deadline:
 - a. Graduate College Dissertation Completion Fellowship, 21 February
 - b. WMU Graduate Education and Professoriate Fellowship, 21 February
 - c. Thurgood Marshall Fellowship, 14 February.

2. The College is holding a welcome event for graduate students on 16-18 January at Waldo Library in the Graduate Student Commons and a luncheon on 27 January in the Student Center.
3. The three-minute thesis competition is taking place on 7 February, with email invitations for judging going out soon. The winner of the competition will compete in St. Louis, Missouri, in April.

Reports of Council/Committee Standing Committees

Stamper reported that the Faculty Research and Creative Activities (FRACAA) Award Screening Committee is accepting applications until 9 February. One application has been submitted so far. There were 19 applications in 2023.

Charge 1: FRACAA Policy: Chair Venter reported that the subcommittee focused on FRTF, with a draft Memorandum of Action (MOA) distributed for comment and discussion.

Charge 2: FRACAA Effects: Ozyurek reported that graphs are under the Teams folder. From an external funding perspective, a 1:15 ratio return on investment. Work is complete. Discussion on the topic will occur at the February meeting.

Charge 3: Strategic Information Distribution: Arugaslan will combine member efforts and prepare a report for February.

Charge 4a: Microbiology safety: Work is now complete. Santos reported that he will share the report. Santos reviewed MOA 0210 (policy #17055), no policy change suggested. MOA is up for review in 2024. However, suggested approval for a shorter amount of time, and a dedicated committee to check the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines against the MOA, which is based on CDC guidelines from 1999 (second edition). For context, the 6th edition of the CDC guidelines was released in 2020. Several points could be added to the MOA to be more up-to-date. Seker recommended that the RPC view the biosafety policy on the website, which is current. Ex Officio DeFulio will consult with Faculty Senate President Summy to see if this MOA is required.

Charge 4b: Export Control: Work is complete.

Charge 4c: Work is complete.

Unfinished Business

None.

New Business

Chair Venter presented the revised draft of the Memorandum of Action (MOA) 24/02 for the Faculty Research Travel Fund (FRTF). Comment was made that the following issues were not addressed by the draft: equity (early claiming of two trips, as well as rank), prevention of gross overspending, and the procedures used to address both of these. Currently, it is unclear how these issues are being addressed in the MOA. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) contract stipulates that faculty are eligible for up to two trips, although this funding is not guaranteed. After discussion, it became apparent that the proposed MOA would address equity and also prevent overspending.

RPC does not have the disciplinary expertise to make the determination of whether a research trip has merit. It was suggested that the funds be routed to colleges/departments, so that determination can be made by disciplinary experts, with monetary distribution divided by eligible faculty. Counterpoint: dividing by eligible faculty does not take into account who travels, and gives colleges with lower travel an advantage. Currently, FRTF is determined by trip number and rank. The suggestion to determine funding by merit transfers the labor onto deans and chairs across campus (instead of in one place), which can lead to inconsistency. Chairs are currently required to approve travel, but there is uncertainty when travel is approved whether it will be funded. The MOA requires pre-approval, so that the faculty knows they have the money to spend.

Byrd-Jacobs left the meeting at 3:20 p.m.

The current MOA draft splits funds initially by 50% for each semester (spring and summer I, summer II, and fall). Another method would be to look at historical data and make a different split determination.

1. Under this plan, how do two trips work? This plan guarantees assistant professors traveling once. The second trip is only possible if there are less applications than anticipated. Late applications are only eligible for surplus, if any is present. Suggestion to keep track of travel that is not funded.
2. What is the return on investment, in terms of grant proposals and publications? Currently, no data is being collected, but we can implement the required post-surveys.
3. Does the data look at those who travel frequently or combine FRTF with other funding sources? Given the number of historical applicants, could we fund everyone? Taking into account only untenured travelers and tenured travelers with no travel in the previous year, the funding ends up at 140k.
4. How much more funding would we need to fund meritorious second trips? An additional 80k, given no change in applicants. Merit would have to be determined retrospectively, with a suggestion to charge RPC to look at unfunded applications next year.
5. Could there be more stringent criteria for a second trip? Applying different criteria for second trips would be difficult to determine when these travelers could apply. 165k would give applicants a first trip, and 20 applicants a second trip.

Charge 1 subgroup will rewrite the MOA to clarify language and solicit feedback by email. This will allow RPC to vote on the MOA in February to allow it to make it to the Faculty Senate floor at the 29 February meeting.

Chair Venter reported that SFSA currently has 12 applications. Committee members will be assigned three to four applications to review.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by DeFulio, seconded by Durham, to adjourn the meeting at 4:22 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Research Policies Council will meet next on 8 February 2024 at 2:30 p.m. via Webex video conferencing.

Approval

Submitted by Daria Orłowska, Secretary

Minutes approved on 8 February 2024.