
RESEARCH POLICIES COUNCIL

Minutes of 9 May 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 9 May 2024 via Webex teleconferencing by Andre Venter, chair.

Members in Attendance: Mert Atilhan, Carrie Barrett (substitute for Alessandro Santos), Patrick Bennett, Amy Bocko, Christine Byrd-Jacobs, Angela Groves, Michael Harner (substitute for Wanda Hadley), Daria Orłowska, Selim Ozyurek, Jesse Smith, Bilinda Straight, Remzi Seker, Julian Vasquez Heilig, Andre Venter, Kevin Wanner

Members Absent: Onur Arugaslan, Paul Solomon, Kristina Lemmer, Leslie Solares

Ex Officio in Attendance: Anthony DeFulio, Mark Hurwitz

Guest: Christine Stamper, Office of Research and Innovation

Quorum

A quorum was present with 17 members in attendance, of the 10 needed to establish a quorum.

Agenda

An amendment was made to move Reports of University Representatives and Memorandum of Action (MOA) Faculty Research Travel Fund to follow Reports of Officers.

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

Minutes

[MOTION] It was moved by Atilhan, seconded by Ozyurek, to approve the 11 April 2024 minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

Reports of Officers

Chair Venter reported that the annual RPC report to be presented at the 9 May Faculty Senate meeting was removed due to a lack of availability on the schedule.

Ex Officio DeFulio did not provide a report.

Reports of University Representatives

Seker reported the following on FY2024 funds:

1. 185 FRTF applications have been funded, resulting in \$195,683.62 spent (\$1,316.38 remaining);
2. 44 Preparation and Publication of Papers and Exhibition (PPP&E) applications have been funded, resulting in \$29,307.01 spent (\$20,941.99 remaining);
3. Nine Support for Faculty Scholars Awards (SFSA) awards have been funded, resulting in \$17,148.00 spent (\$15,452.00 remaining);
4. Ten Faculty Research and Creative Activities Award (FRACAA) awards have been funded, resulting in \$98,683.62 spent (\$1,316.38 remaining).
5. Remaining balance \$113,529.47.

Seker congratulated the 2024 Presidential Innovation Professorship winners, Dr. Daniela Schröeter, Associate Professor, School of Public Affairs and Administration and Dr. Devin Bloom, Associate Professor, Biological Sciences.

Vasquez Heilig joined the meeting at 2:34 p.m.

Byrd-Jacobs reported the following:

1. Spring Commencement included the graduation of 73 doctoral students - 30 doctoral students were hooded, and 43 professional doctors were awarded. The Graduate College is anticipating the hooding of 30 additional doctoral students during the June Commencement.
2. This summer, the Graduate College is working on conducting a survey of current graduate student experiences at WMU. Of the 3,600 graduate students contacted, 567 responded (16% response rate). Results will be shared at a future presentation, which will include areas where improvements can be implemented.
3. Dr. Scott Slawinski, Associate Professor of English, has been appointed Graduate Fellow and will be working with Byrd-Jacobs on graduate student professional development.
4. Summer enrollment efforts are ongoing. Two hundred applications were received for the Fall Welcome Scholarship for newly admitted and self-funded students. Thirty-one applicants were awarded \$2,000 each.

Vasquez Heilig did not provide a report.

Reports of Council/Committee Standing Committees

Ex Officio Hurwitz presented the annual report on FRACAA. During the past year, FRACAA funding decreased from \$15k to \$10k per award, and the overall budget also decreased to a limit of 100k (from 180k), so 10 FRACAA projects could be funded this year. Twenty-one faculty member reviewers were assembled into seven panels and reviewed 39 proposals, with each panel reviewing four to seven proposals. Panels engaged in collective panel recommendations (do not fund; fund with reservations; fund without reservations) and ranked proposals within their panels. Panels recommended 20 proposals to fund without reservations, and RPC agreed on ten of them to be funded. The decision to fund was based on each panel's highest-ranked proposals, followed by proposals submitted by assistant professors without prior FRACAA funding. The overall success rate of proposal funding was 26% (down from traditional levels). The program benefits assistant professors, who submitted the most proposals, received the most awards, and had the highest success rate (38%) by faculty rank. A surplus balance of \$1,316.38 remains, due to some proposals requesting below \$10k, and Hurwitz recommends that these funds be moved to FRTF, or that RPC come up with another option, else they will remain unallocated until next year's FRACAA cycle. Hurwitz summarized that the number of proposals was roughly up to pre-COVID levels, that the mentor program was successful, and recommended retaining the panel rating/ranking system. It was noted that the FRACAA return on investment is high, and therefore limiting the funding per proposal to \$10k and funding just ten proposals will negatively impact faculty and WMU, so we can expect to see fewer external proposals/awards in the future if the allocated budget remains the same. Hurwitz also announced that he will be unable to continue his role as FRACAA chair next year due to a shift in position. Per FRACAA Guidelines, RPC will need to consult with Seker, Vice President Research and Innovation, regarding appointment of a new chair for 2024-25.

Groves left the meeting at 4:20 p.m.

A question was posed whether the report could be shared with faculty outside the RPC, which hasn't been the practice. A comment was made about surplus fund allocation being used to supplement one of the proposals using outdated helium pricing that has since increased.

[MOTION] It was moved by Byrd-Jacobs, seconded by Ozyurek, to shift part of the surplus funding to the proposal requiring additional funding, approximately \$300 to \$400 and the remaining amount to the FRTF fund. The motion carried unanimously.

Unfinished Business

Memorandum of Action 24/02 Faculty Research Travel Fund

MOA 24/02 *Faculty Research Travel Fund* remains unfinished. Chair Venter reported that a few changes were made to the MOA 24/012 by the subcommittee. A major change included using merit as the primary consideration for first trips (in line with the contract), followed by equity in the form of priority based on rank that singles out both assistant and associate professors. Second trips do not have a rank restriction.

The subcommittee hopes that this award will still use an application process, with awards being made based on fund availability. There was a discussion regarding MOA changes. The following comments were made:

1. The number of second trips is low compared to first trips, and how priority for second trips could be considered was made.
2. About preference for assistant professors, followed by associates, and then full professors. Should there be reasoning for why associate professors should be included in priority for funding? Would this requirement make it more difficult for ORI staff to process the awards? It is possible that this might be automated, but it needs to be looked at. Driving force should be considered and not the difficulty of implementation. Including associates and assistants might result in greater support on the Faculty Senate floor. Associate professors can get trapped at the rank. It is a valid concern that should be included in the MOA because it shows responsiveness.
3. Equity language might contradict the contract; this is why merit is the primary consideration. Question: Why do deans not weigh into the merit consideration (in addition to chairs)? Deans might not have the subject expertise that chairs do, and it is unclear what deans would add to the conversation. Comment about getting additional information from chairs beyond just approving or disapproving, since there are very few disapprovals historically, which makes almost all applications meritorious. Question if RPC should create a merit criterion—group is reluctant to establish rubric since it varies so much between disciplines. This would also create the problem of tying travel to a specific conference and would require reapproval if funds are used for different conference travel than the proposal indicated.

A discussion was held about the overarching goal, administratively, of awarding faculty travel. Is it furthering the goal of the university by funding the best scholarly and creative activity? Or is it too far all scholarly and creative products? The contract stipulates an MOA, and there is currently no MOA. Secondly, the budget is limited, so a distribution mechanism is essential. Both reasons for funding travel are equally important. It is important to consider need, but even if money is placed in one fund, it is not enough since costs are going up disproportionately. Is the subcommittee approaching the problem correctly? This does not seem to be a question about merit, but resources are scarce, and we need to adjust our approach. The complexity of this situation is that the faculty body is responsible for allocating a budget that the administration maintains, which is not the case for other universities. Suggestion that the history of these funds should be explained at the Faculty Senate in the future to provide more context for voting members. Question about timeline for this MOA—the soonest that this MOA can be presented to the Faculty Senate is October. If RPC votes this MOA today, then the Faculty Senate Executive Board can review it during the summer. Depending on changes that need to be made, the Faculty Senate Executive Board can either pass the MOA during the summer or return it to RPC if large changes need to be made, which will need to wait until Fall 2024.

Atilhan left the meeting at 3:14 p.m.

Seker left the meeting at 3:22 p.m.

Harner left the meeting at 3:51 p.m.

RPC voted informally about the idea of budget-limited ranking. The majority of the body voted for assistant and associate professor priority (60%), followed by assistant professor priority (33%), and no tenure status priority (7%). Comment about faculty specialist position not appearing in these categories—not simplifying to tenure vs non-tenured might result in a potential issue.

Revision suggestions:

1. Funding Schedule 3c—removed to avoid restricting RPC's autonomy of distribution. This decision can be made based on historical travel information.
2. Funding activities 2a—move " and/or in conjunction with students" into its own item; 2d should not be a list item, since it is examples of what is not fundable;
3. 4b Second Trips, unclear why prioritization is not factored in;

4. 4 changes from “previous funding year” to “years since travel”.

A request to the Faculty Senate Executive Board to assess the language and wordsmith can be made later.

[MOTION] It was moved by DeFulio, seconded by Ozyurek, to approve the MOA with the suggested revisions. The motion carried unanimously.

New Business

Review of Research Policies Council 2023-24 Annual Report: Chair Venter facilitated discussion around revisions. Ozyurek and Ex Officio DeFulio provided feedback on their sections.

Bocko left the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

[MOTION] It was moved by Ozyurek, seconded by Smith, to accept the report as revised. The motion carried unanimously.

Election of 2024-25 Research Policy Council Officers: Ex Officio DeFulio reported that Hadley accepted nomination as vice-chair prior to the meeting. Ex Officio DeFulio also mentioned that Venter is eligible to continue as chair, given his transition to member-at-large.

Ex Officio DeFulio nominated Venter as chair and Hadley as vice chair. Chair Venter nominated Smith as secretary.

[MOTION] It was moved by Ex Officio DeFulio, seconded by Chair Venter to elect Venter as chair, Hadley as vice chair, and Smith as secretary. The motion passed unanimously.

2024-25 RPC Meeting Modality: Meetings to be held in-person during the year, except for the final May meeting.

[MOTION] It was moved by Ozyurek, seconded by Smith, to hold FY24-25 RPC meetings in-person, save for the final one. With one abstention, the motion passed.

Announcements

None.

Adjournment

[MOTION] It was moved by Bennett, seconded by Barrett, to adjourn the meeting at 4:35 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. The Research Policies Council will meet next on 12 September 2024 at 2:30 p.m. in person at the Bertha Davis Room 111W.

Approval

Submitted by Daria Orlowska, Secretary

Minutes approved on 12 September 2024.