

**University Research Council**  
**Approved Minutes**  
**December 11, 2008**

**Present:** Vimal Chaitanya, Abbas Ghassemi, Mohammed Hussain, Linda Lacey, Steve Leask (Shaun Cooper), Kevin Melendrez, John Mexal, Azadeh Osanloo, Igor Sevostianov, Meghan Starbuck, Myriam Torres, April Ulery, Enedina Vazquez, Patricia Wojahn, Karl Wood

**Absent:** Sam Fernald, Everett Egginton, Rachel Navarro, Michele Nishiguchi, Elizabeth Titus, David Voelz, Michael Young

1. Minutes for November 12, 2008 were approved with correction. Enedina Vazquez attended the meeting but was inadvertently listed as absent.
2. Due to technical difficulties, agenda item 2 (Research Accomplishments Presentation) was not presented. The meeting moved on to item 3 to save time and due to length of discussion, there was not enough time to cover item 2. This will be presented at a future meeting.
3. Research Environment (Centralization)

Vice President Vimal Chaitanya spoke to URC about the Research Environment Survey that took place several years ago saying that the results indicated faculty were displeased with upper administration. They were fairly pleased with the dean level and department level administration. The survey did not mention specific issues but Dr. Kuehn said the following were most frustrating:

1. The length of time (2 to 3 months) to receive an index number after getting an award.
2. Even when you have an award, you cannot spend the money with all the people approving the process.
3. If you have a multiple year contract, you cannot purchase any equipment at the end of the first year because you have to make capital type purchases 30 to 45 days prior to the end of the year as they do not recognize it as a multiple year contract.
4. Invoicing is not timely or accurate, so it does not clearly reflect the amount of activity. An example was given of a funding agency that felt the research was not taking place so they did not pay for the second year as only a small percentage of the contract was invoiced for during the first year.
5. Human Resources did not allow hiring of students or technicians in a timely manner.

Dr. Chaitanya asked that URC recognize most of these issues mentioned by Dr. Kuehn are strictly a function of Sponsored Projects Accounting (SPA) which is a unit under Business and Finance.

In a recent meeting with Interim President Cruzado, Dr. Chaitanya has been asked to take bold steps and come up with a solution that will address most issues that researchers and faculty members have. He has made a recommendation, working with Associate Vice

President for Research Administration Robert Czerniak, to centralize the process of research proposal submission. It is currently set up to have proposals submitted through the respective college research center that assists with Cost Accounting Standard (CAS) templates. The research center helps write the proposal (not the technical content but rather confirming items such as the page limit and CV size). The proposal then goes to OGC who reviews it to see if it follows the RFP. It may go back to the college research center if it needs corrections or changes.

To avoid this loss of time, it is being proposed that the college research center staff become part of OGC. The other component of Dr. Chaitanya's proposal to centralize is to utilize the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI). This group used to be known as the PSL Business Office. Dr. Chaitanya has charged this unit to help faculty members write proposals, provide advice, and provide letters from the Vice President in cases of match commitments. The OSI office will also be available to assist with multi-disciplinary opportunities that cross colleges. The third component of the proposal would be for the VPRGI office to work with SPA to create account numbers in a timely manner.

Another issue that he shared is that once the award is received, OGC goes into a negotiation process. The same staff who worked on the proposal submission, work on the award negotiation. A researcher may think that because they have received an email from the program manager saying they are going to fund the proposal that the funds are in. However, Dr. Chaitanya said only when both parties agree, the award document is signed. The funding agency will not release the funds until then. This process can take up to a month. When the award comes in it goes to SPA who create the account number, give the number to OGC, who then inform the college research center staff. He hopes to cut through this process as well so the account number goes straight to the faculty member.

A suggestion was made that the account number be made as soon as the negotiations start but not activate the account until the negotiations are final. Dr. Chaitanya said that an account could be set up to get started - such as hiring a student and getting supplies. A question posed was why, in this time of automated processes, does NMSU have such cumbersome procedures?

Dr. Chaitanya told URC that the VPRGI office has automated the proposal submission process by purchasing software (ARGIS) for this purpose. Dr. Chaitanya said the ARGIS software system was demonstrated several times prior to purchase. It is used at the institution where Dr. Chaitanya worked before coming to NMSU. The software which is on your PC will tell you how much money you have spent, how much you have encumbered, how much is left and what category it is left in. The software tells you how you proposed to use the funds (from your proposal), how far you are off, are you overspending or under spending. It gives a warning 30 days before a report is due and then one more warning around seven days before it is due. It is an automated process and has already been implemented for the proposal submission portion. The other component to track/monitor the finances on individual accounts has not been implemented because Dr. Chaitanya still working on getting a read-only link to Banner.

A suggestion was made to have additional demonstrations on the ARGIS system to help overcome possible insecurities with the system. Another was to invite a representative to URC from the Business and Finance office to assist the council with issues faced. Dr. Chaitanya responded that the ARGIS system has been demonstrated at least four to five times with specific training for SPA and OGC. The Deans were invited along with College Research Centers and the Business and Finance office.

Dr. Chaitanya said funding agencies prefer a centralization process and the strength of the ARGIS software is the expense/finance component. Another impediment to the complete implementation of the ARGIS system is the Banner update taking place next December. It would be best to add the finance component after the update.

A question was asked as to whether the software is available to faculty members to load on their computers to evaluate the software. Dr. Chaitanya said the software is available centrally so you can log into it and start using it. He said he would get Bill Hardy, the new Executive Director over OGC, to get with URC to show them how to access the software.

Dr. Chaitanya has concerns for research on campus and suggested that a collective effort and consensus would help support research. The research voices are URC, CORC, and Academic Deans Council. These are the three bodies where he hopes there is an understanding of what research is and what it takes to do research.

One URC member said that the issues mentioned have been issues at NMSU for at least 25 years that he is aware of. He spoke about a faculty member who had a proposal for a summer program. He did not get the account number until the summer was over and had to journal entry all the charges from another fund. Another member suggested that the five issues derived from the Research Environment Survey need to be documented.

Dr. Chaitanya told URC that he was charged with three tasks when he was hired, that was to centralize the process for proposal submission, activate the clusters by transforming some into institutes and centers which would report to VPR so they would be campus centers and not connected to any one college. The third was to increase interdisciplinary research.

#### 4. VPR Visits to Colleges with Faculty Members

Sam Fernald who was not able to attend this meeting would like to organize a committee to work with the colleges in providing information to faculty members with what the Vice President for Research office can provide. This topic will be covered at the next meeting.

#### 5. Other

URC requests the VPR provide feedback when review panels select certain proposals for funding (such as the Interdisciplinary Research Grants) for those **not** funded so the P.I.'s may learn what is needed to improve their chances with future opportunities.

Minutes by Frances Schumacher