

University Research Council
Approved Minutes
September 13, 2013

Present: Jeffrey Arterburn, Matthias Burkardt, Vimal Chaitanya, Rebecca Creamer, Muhammad Dawood, Joanne Esparza, Sam Fernald, Richard Fortin, Stephen Hanson, Shanna Ivey, Jill McDonald, Mary O'Connell, Cindy Pierard (for Susan Beck), James Robinson, Hari Sankaran, Steve Stochaj

Absent: Rani Alexander, O.D. Hadfield, Cathy Kinzer, Robert Smits, Mingjun Wei

1. Welcome Executive Vice President/Provost Dan Howard, Introductions and Presentation

Chair Steve Hanson welcomed Provost Howard and introductions were made. Discussion about research at NMSU commenced and continued throughout the presentation including ways to achieve or expand external funding through research. Provost Howard said there is little possibility that research which has been made up of 10% of the discretionary budget of the United States for the last 40 years, will turn around and it is critical that NMSU look at alternative sources of funding, such as business partnerships, state funding and other areas. He asked URC if researchers at NMSU are capable of writing more competitive grants or what could be done to support them in that effort. Chair Hanson suggested that improving the research process would help and he hopes the formula funding that President Carruthers is working on gets approved. Regardless researchers need to be creative in seeking out other sources of funding. Vice President Chaitanya suggested that the ability to hire new faculty members was very important and spoke about the IPADs report that showed NMSU's number of faculty members has dropped but more specifically, the number of faculty writing proposals has dropped. Provost Howard agreed that there needs to be a steady infusion of new talent into the university. He explained how his five years working at a university with a large medical school relates to new ways to generate research dollars. He said the medical school faculty have 20% of their salary guaranteed so it is essentially a soft-money position. These individuals come in realizing their goal is to obtain research dollars from the start. They start networking as soon as they come in forming and building research teams which allows them to strategically determine where their expertise is and work in those areas. He explained further by giving an example of the university making the decision, and investing in creating "*the*" Down syndrome research center in the United States. They built teams to bring in huge grants. He noted that while NMSU is not a medical school, there are some things that we can learn from this example.

Steve Stochaj said that NMSU numbers look good compared to the low participation rate of proposal submission, but they are in fact skewed by the Physical Science Laboratory (PSL). If PSL is removed from the equation, NMSU isn't as strong as it appears. He takes away two lessons, a) treat PSL better --he's not associated with them, and b) professors have too many classes and can't do the research. This should be a priority on everyone's agenda to put forth

more proposals. Chair Hanson said NMSU should promote research by eliminating some of the procedural roadblocks that we currently are facing and also incentivizing it, helping researchers to decide that it is worth their while. The research processes focus groups found the service units which are the gate keepers, are a risk-adverse culture. The focus groups decided that “no” is not a helpful answer and faculty feel they quite often get this response. They have also said that getting funding at NMSU is not easy and the only thing harder, is spending it. The internal processes make it difficult to use a grant once it is received. Chair Hanson suggested that perhaps facilitated discussions with the service units with the Provost as a mediator would be beneficial.

In his presentation, Chair Hanson stated that researchers find a lack of flexibility using soft money, particularly for hiring. He said faculty are encouraged to see President Carruthers has moved Human Resources under the Deputy Provost. Some help with HR would be distinguishing soft-money hires from I&G hires and allow market driven hires instead of equity governed hires - especially when funded by grants. NMSU should not give money back to NSF because of an internal equity table especially after the budget was approved for the grant. Jeff Arterburn commented that when an employee is supported 100% by a grant and raises are budgeted and awarded in the grant by the agency; HR should not hold back the implementation of the raise just because state funded employees are not given the same. Provost Howard was asked what the procedure was at the medical school where he was at, in these circumstances. He told URC that the medical school uses a different model. The clinical side of the house generates large amounts of money, so even if the academic side of the university didn't receive a raise, the clinical side did.

Mary O'Connell suggested that the main issue was not the raises so much as the delay in hiring. She needs an index number before anything can start and then HR holds the positions to definitions that are not necessary. This costs NMSU large amounts of money because if the grant money is not spent, then the IDC doesn't come back for administration's use. Provost said that complaints from researchers rarely reach his desk, but it would be good to loop him into several over the course of the next few months, so he can familiarize himself with some of the frustrations faced by NMSU researchers. Another topic mentioned was that fringe costs are not included on the accounting sheets on the awards. This exclusion makes determining what has been spent very confusing. The consequences of these events have an effect on faculty researchers. On the opposing side, Sam Fernald said that he has learned that if he writes a detailed justification and includes a market survey, he sometimes gets a fairly quick turn-around on soft-money hires. Dr. Fernald would like more clarity on the processes so that time is saved. Some felt that the researcher shouldn't have to do the market survey that this responsibility should fall under the responsibility of HR. Provost Howard said he can see the concerns that Dr. O'Connell and others have and asked if guidelines with ranges would be helpful. A response included learning the ways around the system helps to circumvent some of the problems. Provost Howard suggested that if there is guidance offered at the front end such as a typical salary range to be considered in putting together the

proposal, and if it falls within the range, HR should guarantee an easy outcome. It was agreed that the URC would provide a few issues to the Provost on a weekly basis that he could focus on to help smooth out the system.

Because Provost Howard had a 4:00 meeting to attend and could not stay past the hour, he wanted to touch base on a few topics. There were a series of recommendations that were made from the research processes report. President Carruthers was very clear in instructing Provost Howard and a variety of others in the President's Academic Council (PAC) that with all the recommendations for the issues, he asked that Provost form a committee to resolve them no later than December of this year. Provost has nearly two months to accomplish this working with the various groups that need to be a part of the conversations. He said he hoped that some of the URC had received invitations to serve and assist with this and he will make sure that they in fact, are.

Chair Hanson said that URC would invite Provost Howard back as he had seven remaining slides. He did want to leave Provost Howard with several thoughts including incentives for researchers would help support research in addition to increasing graduate student enrollment with a demand for high-quality students to make NMSU more competitive. Chair Hanson also suggested that simplifying the lives of the graduate students by combining their services into a single office would benefit them. Support for the VPR office for seed grants and grad students, and support for core facilities that faculty members could take advantage of.

Provost Howard thanked URC for the opportunity to meet with them and said he would be happy to return and that they have his commitment on the importance of enhancing research at NMSU.

Following this suggestions were made that included getting grad students' paychecks moved up two weeks or a pay period earlier; when writing to Provost with the problems a solution should also be included; ability to start research assistants on any date; supplemental compensation; remember to thank Provost Howard as issues get resolved; PSL needs timesheet on a 2-week basis; HR should be invited to URC prior to re-inviting the Provost; perhaps a weekly communication to the Provost; and should Deputy Provost Greg Fant be invited when HR is invited to URC.

2. URC Fair Poster Judges

Mary O'Connell, Shanna Ivey, Steve Stochaj and Muhammed Dawood volunteered to judge.

3. Other

Groups that want to meet with URC include: Human Resources, Arrowhead, Graduate Council Chair, OGC/SPA, and Research Development. These will be prioritized at the next meeting.