University Research Council

Minutes of October 14, 2019 Meeting

Members Present*: Mike Holland, Vice Chancellor for Science Policy and Research Strategy; N. John Cooper, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research; Karen Arndt, Department of Biological Sciences; Velpandi Ayyavoo, Graduate School of Public Health; Debbie Brake, School of Law; Yvette Conley, School of Nursing; Robert B. Gibbs, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences; Kent Harries, School of Engineering; Holger Hoock, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research, School of Arts and Sciences; Neil Hukriede, Department of Developmental Biology; Sean Kelly, School of Education; Kacey Marra, School of Medicine; Frits Pil, Katz Graduate School of Business; Jeremy Somers, Office of Research, Health Sciences; Jennifer Woodward, Vice Chancellor for Research Operations*

Members Absent: *Rob Rutenbar, Senior Vice Chancellor for Research; Mark Anderson, Department of English; Marek Druzdzel, School of Computing and Information; Heidi Ann Scharf Donovan, School of Nursing; William Dunn, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs; Shaun Eack, School of Social Work; Raymond Engel, School of Social Work; Julie Fiez, Department of Psychology; Brian Galla, School of Education; Alexandria Harris, Graduate and Professional Student Government Board; Stephen Hirtle, School of Computing and Information; Matthew Kropf, University of Pittsburgh Bradford; William Layton, Department of Mathematics; Elizabeth Monasterios, Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures; Anne Robertson, School of Engineering; Margaret Rosenzweig, School of Nursing; Susan Sereika, Department of Health and Community Systems; Steven Stern, University of Pittsburgh Johnstown; Alexandre Vieira, School of Dental Medicine; Stephen Weber, Department of Chemistry; Peijun Zhang, Department of Structural Biology*

1. **Welcome and Announcements**

   Dr. John Cooper welcomed the Council members and called the meeting to order at 12:15pm. He presented Dr. Rutenbar's apologies—a conflicting responsibility prevented his attendance.

2. **September 19, 2019 URC Meeting Minutes**

   The September meeting minutes had been circulated to the Council electronically and were approved *nem. con.*

3. **Update on COIR Disclosure Committee**

   Dr. Cooper reported that the COIR Committee is meeting regularly, with at least two more meetings to come. Their charge is to recommend a new process for disclosing commitments outside the University, compensated or uncompensated, related to the individual's University responsibilities or to the University's mission, that are or could be perceived as conflicts of interest or of commitment. The new system will be entirely electronic, and will help protect both faculty and the University. A goal is to ensure that the disclosure tool is easy to navigate, minimizes the burden on users, and is designed to

support users to better understand the requirements and to assist them in satisfying their obligations under the rules. Dr. Rutenbar will bring the report of the Committee to the University Research Council as part of the consultation process once the committee's work is completed.

The target is to be ready for Spring disclosure season.

4. Federal Statistical Research Data Center

As context, Dr. Cooper pointed out that Pitt is the only one out of the top-15 NIH funded research universities that does not have a federal statistical research data center (FSRDC). Pitt joined the consortium that operates the Penn State FSRDC about 18 months ago, and its value to researchers in economics and health policy areas is such that over a dozen faculty and graduate students are already travelling to State College, or plan to make that commitment, to access the data that is available under highly secure conditions in the FSRDC. We are working with CMU on strategies to establish an FSRDC in Pittsburgh, probably as a satellite of the PSU FSRDC. A proposal to this effect was submitted by Penn State on September 30 to the Census Bureau. A secure space will be needed for the FSRDC. If the PSU proposal is not accepted this year, we are confident that follow up next year would be successful.

5. Dirty Animals

Dr. Cooper opened the topic of the increasing interest in using wild-caught ("*dirty*") animals for research, as they can sometimes offer information that "clean" lab-grade animals cannot. Within the area of ecology research there is a strong argument that Pitt needs to do this to stay at the forefront. Other Pitt researchers who depend on the use of colonies of *clean* animals often genetically modified at great expense for specific projects argue that the need to protect these colonies is so extreme absolutely nothing should be done that may threaten the research. The only compromise that has been discussed is building a designated "dirty" animal building.

There was a lively and extensive discussion on the topic.

One committee member commented that he had led the effort to address this topic a decade ago. He went over the background in some depth, and described the challenges of housing is housing clean and dirty populations of mice in the same facility. The conclusion at that time was it was too big an undertaking to isolate these differing types of research, especially given the danger of people going from the dirty mouse facility to the clean mouse facility and introducing cross-contamination. It was mentioned that one idea is to house dirty animals at the facility in Plum, but that people don't want to go out to Plum to conduct experiments. Another option is to install full shower facilities to minimize cross contamination, but this would be very expensive. He concluded that he believes the risks that come along with having dirty rodents are too high and not worth the potential cost to established research programs.

Another committee member pointed out the value of dirty animal research in immunology (as well as in ecology). Lab animals have immune systems similar to those of newborn babies, and work with clean animals often cannot be translated to real world situations. There is a move in the field to the use of dirty animals that have more realistic immune systems, and he suggested that Pitt will be behind if we do not look into working with this.

A third committee member agreed that research is moving towards using real-world dirty animals, and believed that complete separation of clean and dirty colonies is a good option, as researchers using clean mice won't want dirty mice in the same facility, possibly compromising their research.

One comment was from a committee member who was here when the decision was made to centralize animal facilities. He noted that our facility was not designed to be a haven for this kind of research, and if Pitt determines that this is going to be a big thing in research, significant resources are going to need to be allocated to make this happen. He suggested that "dirty animal" research is only done in a few fields, so it would not be of interest to the university as a whole.

A committee member from an unrelated discipline noted the unfortunate communications impact of the phrase "dirty animals". [Note: the phrase "wild caught" is also used, but less commonly—NJC]

Dr. Cooper noted that there has been some partial benchmarking: other institutions treat this a bit more casually, but none of them are top-5 NIH funded institutions.

A committee member pointed out that there are protocols in place on campus regarding dirty animals, and it would be good to look at those. She also noted that we could look at how the regional biocontainment facility is being handled and to reach out to the biohazard committee in EHS.

Dr. Cooper closed the discussion by commenting on how helpful it had been in outlining the complexity of the problem.

6. **Any other business**

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 1:04pm.