

University Research Council

Minutes of December 15, 2020 Meeting

Members Present: *Rob Rutenbar, Senior Vice Chancellor for Research; N. John Cooper, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Research; Mark Lynn Anderson, Department of English; Karen Arndt, Department of Biological Sciences; Velpandi Ayyavoo, Graduate School of Public Health; Ipsita Banarjee, School of Engineering; Dominic Bordelon, University Library System; Debbie Brake, School of Law; Ryan Champagne, Assistant Director for Research Development, Office of Sponsored Programs; Yvette Conley, School of Nursing; Mary Crossley, School of Law; Julie Fiez, Department of Psychology; Brian Galla, School of Education; Robert B. Gibbs, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences; Shelome Gooden, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research in the Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences and Related Fields; Kent Harries, School of Engineering; Alexandria Harris, Graduate and Professional Student Government Board; Michael Holland, Vice Chancellor for Science Policy and Research Strategy; Heng Huang, School of Engineering; Neil Hukriede, Department of Developmental Biology; Sean Kelly, School of Education; William Layton, Department of Mathematics; Jeremy Levy, Department of Physics & Astronomy; Yu-Ru Lin, School of Computing and Information; Diane Litman, School of Computing and Information; Elizabeth Monasterios, Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures; Nadine McQuarrie, Department of Geology & Environmental Science; Erica Owen, Department of Political Science; Frits Pil, Katz Graduate School of Business; Anne Robertson, School of Engineering; Rachel Robertson, School of Education; Margaret Rosenzweig, School of Nursing; Shilpa Sant, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences; Jeremy Somers, Office of Research, Health Sciences; Steven Stern, University of Pittsburgh Johnstown; Alexandre Vieira, School of Dental Medicine; Christian Wildberg, Department of Classics; Jennifer Woodward, Vice Chancellor for Sponsored Programs & Research Operations*

Members Absent: *William Dunn, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs; Shaun Eack, School of Social Work; Ray Engel, School of Social Work; Holger Hooch, Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research, School of Arts and Sciences; Matthew Kropf, University of Pittsburgh Bradford; Kacey Marra, School of Medicine; Ravi Shankar, School of Engineering*

1. Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Rob Rutenbar welcomed the Council members and called the meeting to order at 12:07 pm.

2. Nov. 2020 URC Meeting Minutes

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

3. Welcome to new members

Dr. Rob Rutenbar welcomed the new members joining the committee for the first time: Nadine McQuarrie, Peg Rosenzweig, and Mary Crossley.

4. Updates

Dr. Rutenbar discussed the OSVCR message sent a few days ago regarding what might happen if the University were to move to the “High” risk posture. He commented that everyone in the research community had learned a lot about working safely with COVID in the region, and it is unlikely that research operations would be shut down as tightly as in the Spring/Summer. More granular guidelines will come out as we get more information from the Commonwealth.

The Chancellor has approved the new IP Policy and an announcement will be forthcoming when implementation details are resolved.

The current policy on outside engagements and consulting was written in 1988, and Dr. Rutenbar explained that the process is underway to develop a new policy that will center on conflict of commitment – identifying what work individuals do outside Pitt and how much time that takes, and then setting up guidelines for identifying when that may become an issue. Another focus is the nature of outside work and how to articulate what is OK, what would need approval, etc. Amy Wildermuth (Dean of the Law School) and Aman Mahajan (Chair of Anesthesiology) will be leading the committee working on this.

5. URC Feedback on the pandemic response of the University

Mike Holland discussed the feedback that was sent to him prior to the meeting, noting that Coordination and Communication were key areas of concern. Other noted concerns were knowing where to find information and how to get correct types of PPE.

Dr. Holland noted that Deliveries were another concern that was brought up and that he and Michelle Amato have been speaking with Purchasing and that they are aware this is an issue. Mailing Services had directed delivery services to re-route all deliveries to the Thomas Blvd facility, and he asked for feedback from the group regarding whether this is good or if it should be changed back again.

There was a comment from a committee member that some have been experiencing issues with IT computer support/research computing, noting issues with Box (logouts, inability to read items, sync issues) and well as big issues with licensed servers. Dr. Rutenbar asked that any lists of issues be sent to him/Mike Holland so they can raise them up to figure out who needs to fix these things.

Some committee members noted that messages regarding how things should be done often conflicted with other messages. (Example: different messages from SOM, Engineering, etc.)

Another issue brought up was undergrads who were sent away from campus at Thanksgiving and not allowed to come back, but are working on senior research projects, live locally, and are committed to being safe/taking precautions in order to continue their research work. Dr. Rutenbar stated that we can reopen this issue with the Provost, who ultimately determines rules on this. It was noted that whether the student is working for pay or credit determines whether it is the Provost or HR who will determine these rules.

Another committee member raised the issue of departmental libraries reopening and the disconnect between who controls operation and their location – ULS vs. departments.

Regarding a timeline for fully reopening, Dr. Holland noted that we are still at the stage of figuring out how many vaccine doses will come, when, where, and who get shots first, etc. Once we have more info on how the vaccine rollout will work, we can start forming a better idea of a timeline of when we can move back to “normal”.

There was a request from a committee member that travel restrictions/guidelines should be looked at ASAP.

Finally, there was a note that we will need to have clear direction regarding when masks will be required or not as people start getting vaccinated.

6. Any other business

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:43 pm.