Minutes[•]

Senate Research Committee
March 20, 2000
1:30 - 3:00
Room 238 Morrill Hall

Present: Leonard Kuhi (chair), Victor Bloomfield, Bianca Conti-Fine, John Finnegan, Jerry
               Flattum, Lorraine Francis, Patricia Gladchild, Eric Klinger, Scott McConnell, Mark
               Paller, Richard Poppele, Barbara VanDrasek

Regrets: Daniel Brewer

Absent: Robin Dittman, Phillip Larsen, Amy Levine

Guests: Professor David Hamilton, Ms. Moira Keane, Ms. Win Ann Schumi, Professor Virginia
               Seybold, Associate Vice President Ed Wink; Associate Vice President Steve Cawley

[In these minutes: program on education in the responsible conduct of research; use of human subjects in
research; networking and telecommunications charges]

1.   **Education in the Responsible Conduct of Research**

        Professor Kuhi convened the meeting at 1:40 and began by observing that the training sessions on
the responsible conduct of research, established as part of the University's effort to have the NIH
sanctions lifted, have been put in place; he inquired if Committee members had had any experience with
them or if they had any general observations to make. Since Principal Investigators must take the
sessions, it is important that faculty feel they are valuable and that they conducted in a reasonable and
timely manner. He welcomed Professor Virginia Seybold, coordinator of the training effort, to the
meeting, who was present to provide a summary of the reactions. A number of points were made in the
discussion that followed.

--   Some faculty have said the training sessions are not offered at good times and that faculty must
go out of their way to get their grant funding. It might be useful to send a letter to faculty on why the
University requires these sessions; some have been at the University a number of years and feel they
already knew what was being presented. Ms. Schumi said that the requirement that PIs have the training
before they can obtain the grant funds has not yet been implemented, but there will be a letter to faculty
informing them of the requirement when it does go into effect.

--   Some think they know what is being presented, but in reality some do and some don't. The
discussion at the sessions brings out a number of points that are not well understood. The schedule IS a
problem, but the discussions are impressive.

--   Presenters may be providing facts that faculty already know, but the University has an obligation to restate the facts. There should be more interactive sessions, however, but the facts must be presented so that no one can later say they were not told. There need to be substantive discussions--but not about how Sponsored Projects Administration should do its work faster.

--   One faculty member said that written materials could be made available for reading and the sessions could be less than three hours long. If the discussions are only to disseminate information, however, and people think they already know it, there should be a web-based testing option with a high bar for passing. Some may know all the information and the sessions truly are a waste of time.

Professor Seybold said that these sessions are a work in progress and that they need to be meaningful. Rote materials can be web-based; the problem is how to verify that faculty have read them: there needs to be a way to attest that they have been read. There is also a strong feeling, however, that there must be a discussion component so that materials are reinforced and there are shared values. That component must also be interesting; one objective is to increase discussion time and reduce the lecture time.

The responses to Part II of the sessions, which all must take, have not been as good as the responses to Part I, which is for new faculty or those who have not gone through training before.

--   One suggestion made at the last meeting is that presentations could be made to departments or groups of departments that have shared interests. Doing so could reduce the concern that people must listen to discussions about something that will NEVER be of relevance to them. Professor Seybold said that colleges can group units together; they do, however, want at least 50 people at each session.

One Committee member offered compliments on the perseverance of those running the sessions in the face of repeated complaints that they are not right or at inconvenient times. There is a lot of "me" involved in these complaints and everyone wants their own session. It was urged that they stay the course because the University must do this and imposed this training on itself. Appreciation was expressed also for the responsiveness of those conducting the program. Another Committee member agreed, and added that to get commendation for this program "is like expecting high marks for a remedial drunk driving course." Professor Kuhi also urged that the University stay the course and expressed support for the goal that every PI have taken the courses by the end of the year. Once all current PIs have been through the process, he observed, it will be easier to run the program.

2.   Use of Human Subjects

The Committee began the item with a lengthy discussion of whether or not it should be off the record. The Committee finally voted 7-3 (with one abstention) to close the meeting because legal issues were the subject of discussion. (One Committee member later changed his vote, in light of the subsequent discussion of the issues, so it became 8-2 in favor of closing the meeting.)

The discussion of the human-subjects approval process was placed on the agenda in reaction to PI complaints that the present execution of IRB procedures inflicted damage on their research programs and the education of their students. The Committee engaged in a long, passionate discussion of these matters.

The Committee then talked with Ms. Keane about the process for approving the use of human subjects in research and the various constraints with which her office must deal.

What emerged from the discussion is that the Committee supports increased resources for the process and increasing the number of faculty who serve on the review committees. There was no criticism of those on the currently on the staff.

3.   Networking and Telecommunications Charges

Professor Kuhi now welcomed Associate Vice President Cawley to the meeting to discuss the rationale behind Networking and Telecommunications Services (NTS) charges. There have been vociferous complaints, he observed, about the alleged unfairness of the charges; it will be helpful to hear from Mr. Cawley how the charges are established and possible changes that might be made.

Mr. Cawley explained how the rates were established and that current rates are not considered allowable charges on research grants. He noted that there has been a significant increase in data transmission charges, which hit supply budgets that are not increasing at the same rate. In the future, moreover, if the University is to maintain a first-rate network for a Research I university, the system will need to be upgraded again to a gigabyte backbone. The plans are on the drawing board. Capacity drives cost, he observed.

He has worked with the Committee on Finance and Planning and with the Committee on Information Technology in appointing an ad hoc group that spent the fall talking about the impact of trends and the fairness issue. He said he would like a reaction to one recommendation that came from the group. At present the NTS charges are per connected device (whether that device uses the network a little or a lot, the charge is the same), a practice that many see as fundamentally unfair. The way to deal with that problem is to measure usage and charge accordingly.

One Committee member maintained that these costs should be a direct charge against a grant. Mr. Cawley said that it is not now permissible to charge grants for these expenses, but one can do so for long-distance telephone expenses; this should be no different if usage is measured. The concern, it was said, is that technology infrastructure expenses are built into the indirect cost rate but the dollars do not get back to the principal investigators. It may be necessary to renegotiate some of these expenses out of the indirect cost rate, Mr. Cawley agreed, so that part of the charges are in and part can be a direct charge--as is the case with telephones now. That would be seen as more fair, it was said.

The Committee discussed the relationship between indirect cost rates and the University's technological infrastructure (i.e., the University receives indirect cost funds but spends the money on unrelated items) and the relationship between NTS charges and devices (e.g., a printer on a LAN does not consume funds needed for the backbone but are nonetheless counted, but even addressing this will not get at the fairness issue). Mr. Wink explained that the University actually only recovers about half of what it should in indirect costs (because a number of funding agencies pay less than the University's negotiated rate) and the money goes into the University's coffers and is divided 49% to the administration and 51% to the colleges that generated the money. There is never enough money to cover costs, he concluded. The negotiated rate would be adequate if the University actually received that much money.

The funds are used to pay for a lot of things, Dr. Bloomfield pointed out. It is an unfortunate truth about the University's budget that every year it is about $30 million short of the funds it needs for buildings, computers, technology, and so on. The University does not generate enough money to pay all its bills and the legislature does not provide what is needed, so people patch holes here and there. This has been the practice for decades.

Mr. Cawley then reported that his office is looking at instruments that measure usage; one question is whether the cost of the instruments will be justified by the result. One benefit of measuring usage might be to help determine if the indirect cost rate should be renegotiated. Other institutions are also looking at measuring usage; only Harvard does so, and it has not changed its billing practices as a result. Mr. Cawley cautioned that for some colleges that rely heavily on technology and the backbone the charges could increase substantially.

Professor Kuhi thanked Mr. Cawley for joining the meeting and adjourned it at 3:05.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota