

Minutes*

**Senate Research Committee
Monday, September 17, 2001
1:30 - 3:00
238A Morrill Hall**

Present: Scott McConnell (chair), Melissa Anderson, Gary Balas, James Cotter, Victor Bloomfield, Robin Dittman, David Hamilton, Leonard Kuhi, Mark Paller, Sharon Neet, Diane Winn

Regrets: Phillip Larsen, Susan Miller

Absent: Esam El-Fakahany

Guests: Cynthia Gillett, Charles Moldow, Beth Nunnally, Rob Super (Academic Health Center)

Other:

[In these minutes: (1) review of the charge and membership, including the research infrastructure, Sponsored Projects Administration, ICR funds, and others; (2) Research Animal Resources charges for upcoming years; (3) meeting time/duration; (4) corporate sponsorship of research]

Professor McConnell convened the meeting at 1:30 and explained that he had been selected to serve as chair after Professor Hamilton resigned in order to accept appointment as an assistant vice president for research under Vice President Maziar. Professor McConnell expressed thanks to Professor Hamilton (now present at the meeting representing Vice President Maziar) on behalf of the entire University for the time he spent as chair of the Committee.

1. Review of the Charge and Membership: Research Infrastructure, SPA, ICR Funds, and Others

The Committee then reviewed its meeting schedule, bylaw charge, and issues pending. Last year, Professor McConnell recalled, Professor Hamilton had suggested the Committee take a look at the research infrastructure; he asked Dr. Hamilton to enlarge on his thoughts.

Although the University seems to be able to respond to research infrastructure needs, sometimes with a great deal of money, Dr. Hamilton said, there has not been an assessment across the institution of what is needed for research productivity and what is needed to obtain grants. This is especially true for areas that do not receive media attention. Everyone knows about genomics and so on; there are a lot of other smaller things that do not get what they need in support if there is no University policy.

Another aspect of this issue is exemplified by the fact that one can apply for funds for an electron microscope if one is part of a large consortium, obtain and install the equipment, and then after the grant

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funds expire the University must provide support for the microscope. There is no University policy on how to fund these activities. The University believes they should be self-supporting but that is not possible in all cases.

The faculty need to look at this issue and decide to recommend how the University develop policies so it can remain strong in all areas of research, not just those in the news. He proposed a year-long evaluation, after which the Committee could come to a conclusion.

Dr. Bloomfield said he supported Dr. Hamilton's proposal. The topic is key. Three things have occurred to him: (1) how to coordinate the instrumentation people want, (2) staff support is crucial (and involves trade-offs with other University expenditures), and (3) the main research infrastructure is probably the libraries; they must be part of this effort and it is necessary both to spend more dollars and to spend dollars more wisely.

The libraries are a perfect example of infrastructure: it is very broad and touches everyone. Electron microscopy is also very important and touches many. There are many common needs; without a University policy, some will not be funded.

What is the work of the Committee on this issue, Professor McConnell asked? He said he has given some Responsible Conduct of Research talks and the groups often want to discuss Indirect Cost Recovery funds. They understand that investigators cannot charge grants for indirect costs but they do not necessarily have other funds that can pay for these important, but "indirect," expenses. There have been repeated questions about how ICR funds are allocated and why they are not available for these types of expenses. This relates to all three of Dr. Bloomfield's points: there are items that are too expensive but there is a presumption they will be provided.

The Committee advises the President, Professor Neet commented; it could ask him where he thinks funding is going. The University wants more entrepreneurship; will it support the research infrastructure? The University will not make money without spending money to support grants. Dr. Hamilton agreed. Under IMG guidelines, 51% of ICR funds go to the units--but there are no guidelines on how the money should be spent. The Committee needs to provide the President something to say about that.

The Committee agreed that this is an agenda item it should spend time on.

What should the agenda be, Professor McConnell asked? Dr. Bloomfield suggested that first the Committee might hold hearings to learn what is currently done, both in terms of policy and procedures.

The institution makes huge investments in specialized equipment, Dr. Hamilton said—it finds the money somehow. But there is no rhyme or reason that determines how it does so. The idea of hearings is a good one; they should also be investigative, he suggested. That is one reason he wanted the Committee expanded to be more inclusive; this is a research university yet the Committee does not have representation from large parts of the research environment. The investigation should go beyond the University, to find out how other institutions more successful than Minnesota deal with these questions. There is no reason to re-invent the wheel if other institutions have developed good practices.

Professor McConnell said that the Committee should learn what is versus what is supposed to be happening. There is great variability across colleges in the use of ICR funds, and these differences are something the faculty feel strongly about. It is too simple an analysis to say that more money would make the situation better. Dr. Hamilton agreed and said the Committee should look both at the ICR funds that go to the units as well as how the administration spends the ICR funds at its disposal. There may be economies to be achieved.

Professor McConnell said he would try to develop a list of the tasks for the Committee.

Professor Balas said that Sponsored Projects Administration and organizations responsible for the management of grants and subcontracts have seen a high turnover and high workload; he knows of a number of problems with invoices and contracts. The University is not doing the best it can in these areas. Dr. Hamilton responded that that is part of the misconceptions; processing invoices is part of Sponsored Financial Reporting, not SPA. Ms. Goldberg said it is understandable that faculty cannot keep straight the complexities of research administration (Sponsored Projects Administration, Sponsored Financial Reporting, Internal Review Boards, and so on) and who is responsible for what. Professor Balas said he knew a number of faculty who have issues about grant and contract administration; often the problems have nothing to do with incompetence but rather with new people doing the job. Ms. Goldberg agreed that there are “fragile personnel issues”; they are trying to create career ladders and challenging work environments so people want to stay in the jobs.

Professor McConnell next asked Dr. Hamilton what other issues, from the perspective of the Vice President for Research, will need to come before the Committee for its views.

One issue, Professor Kuhi said, is how some research facilities work their way onto the capital request list. He said he has been in administration and served as a faculty member and still cannot understand the process. Buildings are part of the capital request process, Dr. Bloomfield observed, while funding for equipment is decided quite differently.

Professor McConnell said that if Committee members have ideas for future agendas they should let him know.

Dr. Bloomfield said that with respect to the proposal from Dr. Scheman, it should be discussed in the context of civic engagement and it needs the proper follow-up.

Later in the meeting, Dr. Bloomfield also reported that progress has been made with respect to post-docs: a health care policy has been developed for post-docs with their own funding. Human Resources is revamping the post-doc appointment categories, which the Committee should hear about. It should also discuss post-doc working conditions and whether there should be a post-doc office, he said.

Professor Kuhi said that with respect to corporate funding for research, he was surprised to learn that the tradition in the Academic Health Center is not to publish negative results. The Committee should talk about that. Dr. Hamilton agreed that it is almost impossible to get negative results published.

In terms of the membership on the Committee, the Committee can recommend a change in the bylaws to the Senate Consultative Committee, which can in turn forward them to the Senate. The aim is to expand the Committee from 8 faculty to about 15 and to identify the areas of research from which they

should be appointed. The benefit would be broader representation. Right now, he observed, Committee discussion of issues can be influenced by who is on the Committee; the proposed bylaw change would seek representation from the full sweep of the University.

The Committee spent some time discussing the categories of research fields that the bylaw might identify for representation. It was agreed that the membership should be expanded and that various areas should be identified. In terms of identifying people to serve, Dr. Hamilton said that Committee members themselves need to help the Committee on Committee; there are people who will serve if presented with the opportunity.

2. Research Animal Resources

Professor McConnell now welcomed Drs. Gillett and Moldow, Ms. Nunnally, and Mr. Super to the meeting to talk about increases in charges for research animals levied by Research Animal Resources (RAR). Dr. Gillett explained that she is the veterinarian in charge of RAR, a University-wide program responsible for vertebrate animals; they also provide animal care and facilities for most of the Twin Cities campus (although not agricultural animals or wildlife) and they advise other units as well.

Dr. Moldow asked what information the Committee needed. As part of a plan to stabilize the budget of the Medical School, they have looked at recurring funds directed to RAR (about \$1 million per year) and are exploring a proposal to bring research animal charges to the mean of the Big Ten with a goal of eliminating the subsidy now provided to RAR.

Do they want the Committee's reaction, Professor McConnell asked? This is the start of information sessions, Dr. Gillett said; they want to roll out the increased charges next year with about a 20% increase (the amount varies with the species) each of the next two years and then return to more normal levels of increases. Ms. Nunnally explained that they had reviewed rates at other institutions and propose rate increases for the next five years to bring the University's rates into line.

Dr. Hamilton noted that he was the only one in the room who works with animals and reported that in the life sciences, if one uses animals and applies for a grant, the cost of animals can be included in the grant. The University's cost is a gift; because the rates are so low, many believe it helps them get grants (he said he has never seen any evidence that the low rates are an advantage). Minnesota's rates for animals are WAY out of line, on the low side, compared to other institutions. The rate increases are long overdue, especially since they are recoverable. The recovery will not be immediate, however, and there needs to be a mechanism to accommodate non-competitive grant renewals, because these grants cannot absorb an increase in animal charges. With increases of 20% or more, the result would be not to do as many experiments or to get rid of a technician; the University should look at grandfathering existing grants.

Dr. Moldow said he was not sure that the University could, legally, have two separate rates. It would be nice, Professor McConnell observed, if some entity that gained money could fund the shortfall that existing grant-holders might face. Could the Medical School create a fund so existing grants would not have to pay more? Dr. Paller took issue with Dr. Hamilton, saying that with fewer funds a researcher might use 11 animals instead of 12; this proposal would not stop research or they would not be making it. Dr. Gillett added that she believed the Medical School would entertain "worst case" appeals from PIs.

Professor Davidson asked if there is any way to learn what the cost would be to subsidize existing grants; Ms. Nunnally said she would find out.

One fear, Dr. Gillett said, is that researchers will keep animals in their laboratories in order to avoid fees. That problem exists now, Dr. Hamilton pointed out.

Do the faculty know about these increases, Professor Balas asked? Dr. Gillett said they are being alerted but the rate increases are not yet general knowledge. The Medical School budget is not hidden, Dr. Moldow added.

This is a general problem that arises with other research facilities (e.g., electron microscopes) as well, Dr. Bloomfield said. The University must subsidize them; in some cases, it can sell time to outside users. Is it possible to sell RAR services outside the University? They do so to some extent, Dr. Gillett said, but they are not a contract service and any service to outside organizations must be linked to a faculty member. RAR has space, equipment, and labor limitations and does not want to be in the position where service to outside businesses will compete for service to faculty researchers.

Professor McConnell said it would be a good idea to publicize the increases to faculty. He thanked the AHC representatives for joining the Committee.

3. Meeting Time/Frequency/Duration

Professor McConnell asked about the frequency and duration of Committee meetings. If the Committee is expanded, could it use working groups, Dr. Paller asked? Adding more people will add more opinions, Professor Balas pointed out, so make discussions longer.

It was agreed after brief additional discussion to begin meetings at 1:15 rather than 1:30.

4. Corporate Sponsorship of Research

The Committee now turned to a review of its Principles Governing Private Support of Research and the comments made by FCC members when it reviewed the document. Professor McConnell noted that FCC had not decided to send the statement back so it was not asking for changes.

The Committee discussed the language and structure of the statement. Professor Davidson asked why the language “faculty, departments, and colleges should be encouraged to seek private support for their research endeavors” was included. Dr. Bloomfield recalled that after the articles about “The Kept University” appeared in The Atlantic Monthly, there was a question about whether it was a good idea for universities to obtain research funds from private sources. The Committee concluded that if care is taken, it is a good idea; any GOOD source is acceptable in order to keep up the University’s research infrastructure.

The statement responded to the view of the administration that the University is part of the economy of Minnesota and is obligated to work with Minnesota companies, Dr. Paller said. If the Committee (“we as faculty”) believes this is something that should not be done, the Senate can so advise the President.

People often have colored views about the source of funds, Professor Balas maintained. If there is nothing that says private funds are as good as NSF or NIH funds, using private funds will carry a stigma. He said he did not like that; people in different areas of research compete in different ways for funds and they should be able to do so; the statement says that private funds are on an equal footing with other sources. There were also supportive statements from FCC members, Professor McConnell noted, but there was a sense the statement about encouraging faculty to seek private funds was seen as too abrupt. The statement does not say faculty should give up other things in order to seek private funds, only that they are equal to public support. He suggested that an expanded preamble might be helpful.

Enhanced external support for research is important for the University if it is to continue as a major research institution, Dr. Bloomfield said; colleges and departments are encouraged to seek both public and private funds.

This has been approved by the Committee once, Professor Cotter pointed out; questions of semantics can be dealt with on the Senate floor. It can also be withdrawn, Professor Neet observed, and suggested leaving that decision to Professor McConnell.

It was agreed that Professor McConnell would redraft the initial parts of the statement, circulate the draft to Committee members for approval, and if approved bring a substitute version to the Senate. [A revised version was approved by the Committee and then by the Senate on September 20.]

Professor McConnell adjourned the meeting at 2:50.

-- Gary Engstrand

University of Minnesota