

Minutes*

Senate Research Committee
Monday, April 3, 2006
1:15 - 3:00
238 Morrill Hall

Present: Steven Ruggles (chair), Dianne Bartels, Richard Bianco, Kathy Bowlin, James Cotter, Christopher Cramer, Dan Dahlberg, J. Stephen Gantt, Jake Granholm, James Klaas, Mark Paller, Brian Reilly, Thomas Schumacher, Charles Spetland, Jean Witson

Absent: Mark Ascerno, Lyn Bearinger, Arlene Carney, Sharon Danes, Robin Dittman, Penny Edgell, Genevieve Escure, Paul Johnson, James Luby, Tim Mulcahy, Maria Sera, Virginia Seybold, George Trachte, Barbara VanDrasek, Michael Volna

Guests: Steve Campbell, Marc Jenkins, Frank Cerra, Jeffrey Kahn

Other:

[In these minutes: (1) Research Infrastructure Task Force Report; (2) Stem Cell Research Standards]

Professor Ruggles convened the meeting at 1:20 pm.

1. Research Infrastructure Task Force Report

Professor Ruggles welcomed Professors Marc Jenkins and Steve Campbell of the Research Infrastructure Task Force. Professor Jenkins gave an overview of the report and cited the mission and deliverables as noted on the materials previously distributed. He said that they had met with faculty and different groups to discern the strengths and weaknesses of the current infrastructures. The task force looked at funding agencies and opportunities to couple with the University's strengths. Professor Jenkins pointed out five areas that had been identified as major funding opportunities that the University is positioned to take advantage of. He also noted the challenges. The current infrastructure is designed along collegiate lines and bringing together relevant faculty is challenging. Many core facilities and internal service organizations (ISOs) are duplicated across campus, but not overseen at college levels, and they are critical. Professor Jenkins said that the task force had recommended that Office of the Vice President for Research assume that role. Professors Jenkins and Campbell said that they were interested in feedback from the committee about the report.

Ms. Witson asked how the new budget model affected the ability to do collaborative research. The task force members said that there was some concern that ISOs will be stuck with the costs. A question arose about who owns what space and what the current practice was regarding space. Professor Jenkins said building space was driven by donors, and said that one of the task force recommendations is that there needs to be more planning and oversight with space issues, and that it needed to be a transparent process. Professor Johnson cited specific examples of space issues, and Professor Jenkins concurred that it was a major issue. He added that the task force felt there needed to be a higher authority overseeing the process. Professor

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Johnson agreed, saying that it needed to be known who the final authority in such matters was. Professor Ruggles asked if this was similar to the ideas proposed in the Collaborative Research Task Force report. The task force said their purview was infrastructure and that they felt that both were in alignment. Professor Jenkins said that the task force was recommending there be a facilitator for faculty to work through hindrances in the process.

Professor Dahlberg said that he had looked for some kind of best practices guidelines in the report, and that it appeared to be brainstorming with no data supplied. He would like to see some data where what was being proposed was successful. Professor Jenkins referred to deliverable #9, which read "Recommendations derived from an analysis of the practices of our peers and aspirational peers with regard to seeing, supporting and sustaining a robust research infrastructure." Professor Dahlberg acknowledged this but said he wanted to know how other institutions accomplished this. The task force cited the Arizona State model, emphasizing that it might demonstrate a way to get better. The committee discussed models at other institutions, and the task force said that they had done an analysis of the top 25 institutions. Professor Dahlberg noted it was important to compare the task force recommendations to the success stories. Professor Johnson said that the issue was on the process side and learning how other institutions accomplished this.

The task force went on to discuss the identification of emerging research opportunities anticipated across the research spectrum, and which ones the University was positioned for and those which represent opportunities where Minnesota can become a world leader. The task force identified nanotechnology; infectious disease and cancer; neuroscience, cognition and behavior; climatology, ecology and renewable energy; and cyber infrastructure. Professor Ruggles said that there was some controversy on his task force regarding these as well, and that they felt that it best that these come from the "bottom up." Professor Campbell added that the task force was essentially operating "without teeth." Mr. Schumacher brought up the importance of administrative support: he said that administrative resources would be needed in dealing with complex regulations that are imposed and this needed to be considered. Professor Dahlberg said that no one has asked any task force how to pay for anything, they were just asked to make recommendations, but that the funding part was fundamental to moving forward. Professor Jenkins said that one of their primary recommendations was the support of the Office of the Vice President of Research, and noted that some faculty felt that the task force had over-corrected. The committee discussed funding, and how the budget model is at odds with some of the directives of the task forces. Ms. Witson asked if that could be stated in the task force document, noting that that is another infrastructure issue. Professor Ruggles asked how the committee felt about the five research areas designated by the task force. Ms. Bartels noted that it was courageous to identify the five areas, even if they only serve as examples. Professor Ruggles that it was difficult to narrow to five and that other fields may have a significant impact on rankings, and that fields with the most infrastructure usually are the best.

Professor Gantt asked for the committee's thoughts on how the private sector figured into the recommendations. The task force members noted that they did not feel that the University had done a good job in taking advantage of partnering opportunities with businesses. They acknowledged that they had no solutions but had identified the problem. It was noted that part of the process was changing the scale of the investment that was being discussed. The committee cited other institutions and levels of investment in research. The disposition of the task force reports was discussed and how they would be moving forward. Professor Ruggles encouraged the committee to give feedback to the task force.

Professor Ruggles thanked the task force for meeting with the committee to discuss its work.

2. Stem Cell Research Standards

Professor Ruggles welcomed Senior Vice President Frank Cerra and Dr. Jeffrey Kahn to the meeting to discuss stem cell research standards. Dr. Cerra gave an overview, saying that stem cell research is alive

and well at the University. He stated that about five hundred faculty at the University are involved in stem cell research and many human subjects protocols. Vice President Cerra said that the University was operating within current policy, and that research is well-funded. Some of the research is funded with National Institute of Health (NIH) monies, and that there was a separate accounting mechanism to demonstrate that no federal funding is used in certain stem cell research. Senior Vice President Cerra cited policy restraints, which includes no public money. Embryos must be donated and only private money used for research. Dr. Cerra cited the disposition of embryos: owners of the embryos can chose to destroy them or donate them, and, if donated, they can only be in the cellular phase. He said that they were also recruiting a new director for the Stem Cell Institute. Senior Vice President Cerra said that he had also asked the Stem Cell Ethics Advisory Committee, which is chaired by Dr. Kahn, to convene. He said that Harvard would soon announce its guidelines for somatic nuclear cell transfer, and that he had asked the Advisory Committee to write a white paper on it. Dr. Cerra stressed that since the University is a public research institution, that was a discussion that needed to take place.

Professor Johnson asked about the University's goals in the current national and international landscape. Dr. Cerra said that this was a question for faculty to answer and that was what the Advisory Committee was about. Dr. Kahn said that the National Academy of Science had issued voluntary guidelines, which included recommending that institutes establish committees and maintain databases. He said that they had been working with the Office of the Vice President of Research to establish guidelines. Senior Vice President Cerra stressed that the University's policies do not directly prohibit cloning; rather, they are not permissible under current policy.

Professor Dahlberg asked about the areas of research that were separated by federal and private funding, and asked if they were in separate facilities. Dr. Cerra said it was not required that they be in separate buildings but that they had isolated sections of a research building whose areas had been strictly defined and costs isolated to each area. These were well within the federal and regulatory mandates. The committee discussed potential research crossover, for example, one lab borrowing equipment from another. Senior Vice President Cerra said that they did not know of any issues arising from this thus far, and would not know until the first audit. He stressed that the separation had been well planned and executed. Professor Johnson asked if there was a separate research infrastructure task force in the Academic Health Center, as this was a major focus of the University, which the committee discussed. Dr. Cerra said that he didn't expect there to be the levels of funding for stem cell research that there was for cancer research for a long time. Mr. Schumacher asked Senior Vice President Cerra where he thought stem cell research was headed. Dr. Cerra said that survey data indicated that 70 percent of the public supports stem cell research, and Dr Kahn added that a clinical breakthrough in stem cell research would shift the tide. Dr. Cerra said that Britain and the rest of the European community were already ahead of the United States in their investments in stem cell research. Professor Johnson asked what the major issues were on the ethics side, and asked if the advisory committee played a watchdog role. Dr. Kahn emphasized that it was not an oversight committee, rather that it had an advisory role, and that he expected the committee to be responsive to issues that investigators have. He cited a new member to the committee who was personally against stem cell research, so there would be much discussion about what constitutes embryonic viability, and other attendant issues. Dr. Cerra added that as a public research institution, the University needed to be ahead of the issues. Dr. Kahn said that the government had largely been silent on the issue, and that they were operating in a vacuum. Senior Vice President Cerra said that the questions are also being looked at by other research institutions.

Professor Ruggles thanked Senior Vice President Cerra and Dr. Kahn for the informative discussion.

Professor Ruggles adjourned the meeting at 2:55.

-- Mary Jo Pehl

University of Minnesota