

Minutes*

**Senate Research Committee
Monday, December 6, 2010
2:15 - 4:00
238A Morrill Hall**

- Present: Melissa Anderson (chair), Breanne Byiers, Margaret Catambay, Paul Cleary, Jerry Cohen, Greg Haugstad, Seung-Ho Joo, Frances Lawrenz, Jennifer Linde, Federico Ponce de Leon, April Rose, LaDora Thompson, Karen Williams
- Absent: Mustafa al'Absi, Arlene Carney, Anna Clark, Donald Dengel, Robin Dittman, Marc Dunham, Tucker LeBien, Toni Leeth, Timothy Mulcahy, Kola Okuyemi, Thomas Vaughan, Lynn Zentner
- Guests: Vice President Carol Carrier, Professor Chris Cramer (Faculty Consultative Committee), Associate Vice President Pamela Webb (Sponsored Projects Administration); Dr. Mary Kroetz (Postdoctoral Association)
- Other: none

[In these minutes: (1) effort reporting; (2) postdoc issues]

1. Effort Reporting

Professor Anderson convened the meeting at 2:20 and welcomed Vice President Carrier, Professor Cramer, and Associate Vice President Webb to discuss effort reporting.

Ms. Webb began by recalling that last year, when the policy on summer effort was adopted, those responsible for it agreed to take a broader look at effort policies and procedures in order to identify problems that need to be fixed and things that the University simply could do better. She distributed copies of a list of "effort issues" that were identified last summer, by the normal process of policy review, and by her office. She said that at this meeting she would like to learn of any additional issues the Committee would like to see taken up, which issues the Committee believes are most important, and whether Committee members wish to be part of a working group to work on the issues. She noted that she and Vice President Carrier have met to discuss the issues because there is an overlap between effort reporting and human-resources policies.

The first issue on the list was this: A-term' faculty get paid vacation that in effect counts toward their pro-rata effort commitment while B-term faculty (with or without summer appointments) do not. A-term' appointments include 22 days of paid vacation while B-term appointees receive 0 days (assumes summer = vacation); if a B-term appointee also works 3 months in the summer, then the B-term appointee gets 0 days of paid vacation for 12 months of work and if they take vacation, must exclude that from their effort commitments (take the time as unpaid effort)." Vice President Carrier is looking into this, Ms. Webb said, and perhaps there could be some sort of hybrid appointment for a B-term faculty member who

* These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a meeting of a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represents the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.

can commit at the beginning of the academic year to having three months of summer research funding. But what happens if the funds don't materialize? Is this a conflict with other B-term faculty who are not in this position (e.g., one gets vacation that could be used during the academic year; one does not)?

Committee members discussed with Professor Cramer and Vice President Carrier several aspects of this issue, including the fairness issue; the point that if one converts from a B to an A appointment, the B salary is divided by 9 and multiplied by 11, not 12; the point that faculty work all the time—they are all on 12 months no matter who pays them—because they are always thinking, which is what they are paid to do, and the idea that one can do nothing else while on a grant does not make sense, and any appointment needs to recognize the fact that faculty work 24/7; and the point that while on a grant, one can go canoeing for 4 hours but cannot work on a syllabus. Ms. Webb said the idea is to create a level playing field and not unduly advantage one group over another or provide one group with more options than another. She pointed out that she has to follow federal and audit rules (even though she may not necessarily agree with them), and she would like to be sure that options are not taken away and also be sure that University practices can stand up to audit scrutiny.

Professor Cramer suggested that consideration be given to making B appointees 75% for the entire year—thus preserving their fringe benefits, but allowing them to supplement their income as they are able but still receive vacation. In other words, make everyone A-term appointees.

Professor Anderson inquired about the origins of the A and B appointments. Dr. Carrier explained that there was a time when many faculty members were 9-month appointees who wanted their summers off. Many still do because it provides them flexibility, and it also provides units flexibility. Ms. Webb said they could explore the possibility. Professor Cramer noted that the base salary would change, and would allow someone to earn extra money, but those changes would not be a problem vis-à-vis federal rules.

The second issue on the list was that some B-term faculty members on summer appointments do not earn University contributions to their faculty retirement plan. This problem has been solved, Ms. Webb reported, because it may be that some summer appointments are not being set up correctly. The model already exists to allow the contributions, and departments simply have to be made aware of it. Dr. Carrier said that retirement contributions are paid on many funds, but not all of them. She said they will look into whether contributions can be made for all funds, although given the economic situation, a change may have to be made later.

The third issue was whether the University should change from certifying effort three times per year to certifying effort twice per year. Ms. Webb is looking into this for several reasons. Faculty would like this because it would allow them to blend their summer time into either a January-June or July-December cycle, taking advantage of some limited flexibility for "short-term fluctuations within an academic period" offered in the regulations (A-21, J10). It would also likely decrease audit visibility (because the summer period is an auditor hot button), but at present departmental staff often use the effort cycles to check for labor changes/do historical salary adjustments; this would need to be changed so that effort cycles are not used as the trigger for regular reconciliation. This is a critical issue. Such a change may cause an increase in lost revenue to the University if historical salary adjustments cannot be processed because grants have expired and final financial reports already submitted to sponsors.

The fourth issue was whether the University consulting policy should be updated to specifically include paid or unpaid "study section/peer reviews" as an option? This is already a valid duty for non-sponsored University-paid time, but is not a valid duty for sponsored paid time unless specified in the grant. Currently, the lack of this wording means that faculty working 100% time on sponsored projects (e.g., B terms during the summer) shouldn't participate if these study section meetings take more than de minimus amounts of time, since they don't directly benefit the grant(s) on which they are being paid. This is an unintended consequence. Adding an option to use the one-day-per-week consulting time would allow summer-term faculty to use this time (if they wish) for study section reviews.

The fifth issue is that currently B-term faculty members without a summer appointment often work voluntarily over the summer (e.g., on committees, preparing for fall classes, with students, etc.). Does this pose a problem (e.g., an employee is doing University work but not being paid). Vice President Carrier has indicated that this work is voluntary on the part of the faculty and should not pose a problem. Ms. Webb said that voluntary work is fine but it could not be used as a rationale for "time-shifting" (e.g., "I'm really doing the work in the summer but I'm being paid for it in the winter." Note that moving to 2 effort cycles would be advantageous as it would allow this to be included more in the "short-term work fluctuation" model.

The sixth issue was whether the University should establish a uniform maximum amount of time that PIs and Co-PIs (or faculty more broadly) can charge to sponsored projects (e.g., 95%)? This would ensure that some time is always available for non-sponsored activity, including writing proposals; current University policy provides that B-term appointees with summer appointments must leave open the equivalent of 2 weeks (one pay period)—either stand-alone or pro-rated over the summer appointment, unless an exception to policy is on record. Current University policy also provides that PIs may not charge 100% of their time to sponsored projects (but does not specify what %). Ms. Webb said she will look into these matters. They need to identify what other institutions do in this regard, the percentage of time needed for non-sponsored activities may vary by discipline/college, and large, multi-year projects might legitimately need a PI/Co-PI full-time until near the end of a project.

The auditors say that setting a maximum reduces risk to the institution, but not all disciplines are the same; should there be variations allowed by college, Ms. Webb inquired? And what about interdisciplinary departments? Committee members discussed the impact of a 95% rule.

The seventh issue was that the University needs to re-work its effort re-certification policy. Allowable reasons for re-certifying effort have not been established, nor has the escalation process for such approvals. Someone in her office will be working on this over the next several months, Ms. Webb reported; she said that re-certification is an audit red flag and needs to be carefully thought through.

The final issue on the list was that faculty do not understand effort management concepts and effort certification procedures. Pamela and her office are working on this. The goal in FY11 is to create a faculty effort Responsible Conduct of Research module that can meet continuing-education requirements and "go on the road" to faculty meetings as well as be offered centrally several times a year. The ECRT upgrade will include a new job aid for faculty certifying in the upgraded system starting in January/February 2011, and all departmental effort coordinators are being re-trained in the new system. There will be 2 effort sessions for departmental administrators in the Sponsored Projects Symposium to be held on February 8, 2011. There continues to be confusion about this, Ms. Webb commented, and they are committed to providing voluntary training on effort certification.

Numbers one and three are the big issues, Ms. Webb said. In terms of certifying effort, the University already changed from four times to three. The challenge is that some departments use the effort-certification cycle to reconcile grants; there is a problem if the grant is closed and salary corrections can no longer be charged to it (unless there are overcharges, which the University must pay). Sponsored Financial Reporting is looking at ways to be sure that transfers would be completed in a timely manner if there were only two effort certifications per year. Professor Cohen suggested it is not desirable to have more paperwork because people are not doing what they are supposed to; there should be a conversation with the PI before a grant is closed. There is supposed to be, Ms. Webb said, but some may be skipping the last step of reviewing the totality of what has been spent since the last effort certification. Professor Cohen said the main problem with effort certification is missed assignments; when one closes a grant, one wants to include all necessary information and not have to return money. Effort certification once per year would be desirable because it is a lot of work. One time per year is an option, Ms. Webb said, but there would need to be a change in the payroll practices if this option is selected, as federal rules require that changes in salary distribution be processed at the time the change in effort occurs. This idea leaves out the mysteries of PeopleSoft, Professor Cohen added, which "gets things all screwed up." They are upgrading to a new version of effort-certification software, Ms. Webb responded, which allows PIs and departments to watch their effort statement "build" throughout the effort cycle, pay period by pay period, so there will be fewer opportunities for mistakes. Professor Cleary said he would argue for fewer effort certifications because it would save a lot of time without decreasing accountability. Ms. Webb said the question is how accounts would be reconciled in a timely way; she knows of only one institution that does effort certification once per year, but twice per year is common. They need to inquire of other institutions how they are sure about reconciliation of accounts.

Professor Cramer said that effectively separating the effort certification exercise from budgetary management is the issue. One reason effort certification is used for account reconciliation is that EFS is broken and does not provide the reports that are needed. In principle, there would be a better reporting system so that effort certification would not be needed for reconciliation. The Business Intelligence reports will help, as will the new e-certification system.

What is the primary purpose of effort certification, Professor Cleary asked? To verify that salaries are charged to grants consistent with the amount of work done on the grant, Ms. Webb said. That is a federal requirement and how one must do business with the federal government. Vice President Carrier said that her office would be glad to help in any way in exploring options. Ms. Webb said she is in the process of forming a working group and welcomes ideas from the Committee.

Professor Anderson thanked Professor Cramer, Vice President Carrier, and Ms. Webb for the report.

2. Postdoc Issues

Professor Anderson now welcomed Dr. Mary Kroetz from the Postdoctoral Association and turned to Associate Vice President Lawrenz to begin the discussion of postdoc issues.

Dr. Lawrenz noted that postdoc affairs was shifted from the Graduate School to the Office of the Vice President for Research two years ago, because of the changes in the Graduate School. There is now no "office" and she is the one who provides support, along with other staff, for the Postdoctoral

Association. No one is permanently in charge of postdoc affairs; the strategy has been to integrate postdocs into ongoing University activities, such as Human Resources opportunities for all employees. There are three areas they have worked on the most. One is involving postdocs in the governance system, parallel to the way that P&A staff are involved through CAPA and graduate students are involved. Postdocs and others are in training job classifications; they are on short-term appointments that are different from those of P&A staff and graduate students. Another is related to employee benefits and training; the person in charge of training and education for all employees has indicated she is happy to offer opportunities for postdocs and other employees in a training classification. Third, they are trying to make the Center for Teaching and Learning more aware of postdocs, and the Center has been very gracious in offering opportunities for them. So what they are doing, Dr. Lawrenz concluded, is trying to integrate postdocs into the University mainstream. They also provide a budget for the Postdoctoral Association.

Dr. Kroetz informed the Committee that there are about 1200 postdocs at the University and about 8-10 work on the Postdoctoral Association; she serves as president (for a one-year term). All are volunteers and they serve as a sounding board to promote postdoc issues. They are currently working with other groups to provide services (e.g., in new-employee orientation, there was no session for postdocs; there is now, combined with postdoc orientation, and it helps postdocs see their place in the University and find other postdocs). Stacy Doepner-Hove from Human Resources is planning workshops for postdocs, important for helping postdocs develop themselves, especially given the state of the economy. They have a monthly coffee hour and had a reception at the start of the year with Provost Sullivan and Vice President Mulcahy. They would like to establish a faculty advisory committee that postdocs could meet with once per semester to help mentor and train them; the committee could also provide more institutional memory because postdocs turn over every two years. The committee could show postdocs what works and what doesn't. It has been difficult to find people willing to serve.

Professor Anderson asked what has been lost, given that there is no longer an office of postdoc affairs. Individual attention and nurturing, Dr. Lawrenz said. There was an excellent person providing support and counseling and who constantly paid attention to postdoc affairs. She does that, but has other obligations. It was a significant loss—but because that person was so good, there was no need to integrate postdocs into the University system. There is now a different model.

There were two measures of how well postdocs were taken care of at the University, Professor Anderson recalled. One was that the University was ranked highly in surveys of postdoctoral worklife; the other was that faculty cited the former postdoc office on their grant applications as part of postdoctoral resources and training at the U. Has the University fallen on those two measures? Dr. Kroetz said the University ranked in the top ten in the country for best institutions for postdocs to work, and it does not rank that high now, because having someone to contact is reassurance. Although they are trying to build workshops and so on, that is not her priority—hers is to do research and get a job, so it is a problem for her to build the dedicated support needed for postdocs because of the limited duration of a postdoc appointment and the research demands of her time in the competitive academic market.

Professor Anderson asked what percentage of postdocs is not assigned to an individual faculty member. There are about 1200 postdocs, Dr. Lawrenz noted again, and in Human Resources job codes, about half are Research Associates, not technically postdocs—they are not on temporary appointments and have different benefits. Some of them are paid on training grants. Professor Cleary said that a potential problem with people on training grants is that sometimes they cannot be paid as someone who is

not on them. That is true everywhere, Dr. Kroetz said, and postdocs don't have an issue with it; it is not fair, but it is true.

Also not fair is that the salary ranges are controlled, Dr. Lawrenz said, and they affect graduate-student salaries (which must be below the lowest postdoc salary). Professor Cohen recalled that there used to be a faculty advisory group associated with the postdoc office, with representatives from each college, and it provided workshops for postdocs. A large number of postdocs are in an employment situation that is at risk; it is not easy to find a job because the postdoc position and mentoring are not conducive to the transition to a job. He would recommend creation of a strong faculty group that can focus attention on postdoc issues—because postdocs are one of the most valuable employee groups at a Research 1 university. They are a driving force in research. At one time the University was in the top 20 in compensation, and he would like to see it stay there, which will only happen if the faculty are proactive. The postdoc office also maintained a liaison with the national organization, which was very valuable. Only about 10% of universities have a postdoc office, he said; Dr. Lawrenz commented that, oddly, dues for the national organization are less if one does not have a postdoc office. She also assured Professor Cohen that they continue to run the workshops that the former postdoc office offered. She maintained that postdocs are better off being connected to the existing structure and services.

Professor Anderson asked again if any postdocs are "free agents." Dr. Lawrenz replied that postdocs are mentored by the PIs who hire them. There is a postdoc diversity fellowship program run by the Office of Equity and Diversity that provides funding for a few postdocs who are then assigned faculty mentors in the department they are employed by. Postdocs are appointed for three years and must be mentored; Research Associates have no limit on their appointments and need not be mentored, but they must have a Ph.D. Some are regular employees, Dr. Haugstad observed—and they have much better appointments, Dr. Lawrenz agreed. Committee members discussed the salary rule, job classifications and fringe benefits, the opportunities for postdocs to transfer to other appointments, mentoring, and related issues, and the extent to which postdocs fall in several job categories, making it difficult to identify a particular cohort. Professor Linde noted that there is intent buried underneath the two job categories: the postdoc appointment is purposeful employment training for the individual to obtain a faculty position, while one can argue that the Research Associate position is more like a researcher for hire, not a faculty member, and the position comes with benefits but no training. Those are two very different reasons for coming to the University. Professor Cohen said that in his experience, after two years postdocs transfer to a Research Associate position if things are going well. But they are different positions, Professor Linde maintained, with subtly different needs, whether or not the department treats them the same. Moreover, the Research Associates have governance representation through CAPA while postdocs do not.

Professor Anderson thanked Drs. Kroetz and Lawrenz for the discussion and adjourned the meeting at 3:50.

-- Gary Engstrand