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# The University Senate

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

## Senate Research Committee (SRC)

April 14, 2025

### Minutes of the Meeting

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**[In these minutes:** Update on the AI Task Force; Consultation: Using Controlled Substances for Research Policy; Consultation: Research Misconduct Administrative Policy; Review Committee Charge; Student Members of the Openness in Research Subcommittee]

**PRESENT:** Shashi Shekhar, chair, Kathleen Boris-Lawrie, Darin Erickson, Jon Guden, Joleen Hadrich, Daniel Harki, Boyen Huang, Fang (Alice) Lei, Emma Molls, Nicole Pilman, Shashank Priya, Courtney Roberts, Jayanthi Sasisekaran, JB Shank, Shaker Zahra

**REGRETS:** Beth Lewis, Jimmy Schryver

**ABSENT:** Courtney Aldrich, Jovany Betancourt, Liam Chen, Hatley Christensen, Stephen Contag, Peter Crawford, Jody Gray, Kateryna Kostenkova, Vinal Menon, Abhvaith Sridhar, Jaideep Srivastava, Gavin Wilson

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** Joanne Billings, associate professor of medicine, Department of Medicine, Eric Derrah, manager, Lab and Research Safety, Sabine Fritz, safety professional, Lab & Research Safety, Kaley Klanica, senior associate general counsel, OGC, Adam Krajicek, director, Environmental Health & Safety, John Loff, senate associate, University Senate Office, Danielle Rintala, director, Research Integrity and Compliance, James Wilgenbusch, chair, AI Task Force

## 1. Call to Order

Professor Shashi Shekhar, chair, called the meeting to order.

## 2. Update on the AI Task Force

Jim Wilgenbusch, chair, AI Task Force, then gave an [update to the committee on the progress and structure of the task force](#). The task force is divided into three groups—research, education, and administrative operations—with initial recommendations expected in May and a detailed plan by August. The task force is evaluating AI strategies of peer institutions and considering legal compliance, stakeholder needs, and financial implications. They are focusing on six main areas: enhancing research administration with AI, supporting interdisciplinary research, advancing core AI methods, strengthening infrastructure, promoting ethical AI use, and building partnerships across sectors to grow a statewide AI ecosystem.

Wilgenbusch highlighted that the University of Minnesota is already making strides in AI across medicine, agriculture, forestry, environmental science, materials, and increasingly in national security. Foundational research, such as knowledge-guided machine learning, enables integration of varied data with physical models and is seen as a core strength of the institution. In terms of education, there is momentum toward integrating AI research into teaching through new courses, micro-credentials, and broader access to AI training across disciplines, with a goal of coordination rather than isolated departmental efforts.

Emma Molls raised issues around the university's dependence on vendor-controlled data, much of which originates within the institution but is bound by restrictive contracts. Wilgenbusch agreed this is a significant concern and discussed ongoing work to treat

data as a university asset, improve licensing approaches, and better manage proprietary data. Daniel Harki brought up the importance of hiring faculty with AI expertise, particularly in drug discovery. Wilgenbusch confirmed that faculty recruitment aligned with interdisciplinary AI research is a key focus and asked for direct input to help shape recommendations.

### **3. Consultation: Using Controlled Substances for Research Policy**

Sabine Fritz, safety professional, Lab & Research Safety, then shared a presentation with the committee entitled, "[Controlled Substances Policy: 2025 Changes](#)." Fritz explained that while controlled substances have long been regulated in research settings, there was previously no formal policy covering their use in clinical environments. A 2023 risk assessment revealed inconsistent processes, lack of oversight, and unclear responsibilities for DEA compliance in clinical areas like Boynton, dentistry, and veterinary medicine.

To address these gaps, the policy was revised to cover both clinical and research settings. Changes included renaming the policy to "Controlled Substances Management," removing exclusions for clinics and teaching, and relocating specific responsibilities to the website for easier updates. A new section was added to define roles for leadership in compliance oversight, and the associated procedures on purchasing, using, and disposing of controlled substances are now solely available on the website. Fritz noted that while peer institutions vary in their approach—some integrating clinical and research oversight, others keeping them separate—the University of Minnesota's model reflects its broad scope of clinical areas. She emphasized that no action was required from the committee beyond being informed of the changes.

### **4. Consultation: Research Misconduct Administrative Policy**

Danielle Rintala, director, Research Integrity and Compliance, then discussed proposed updates to the University of Minnesota's research misconduct policy in response to revised federal regulations that must be met by January 1, 2026, to maintain federal funding eligibility. These changes involve reclassifying the policy from a human resources to an academic domain, renaming it to "research misconduct" to prevent

confusion with student conduct, and clarifying definitions for terms like fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and researcher. The policy's scope now explicitly covers university employees, students involved in federally funded research, and others engaged in university research activities.

Updated guiding principles stress zero tolerance for misconduct and differentiate research misconduct from honest errors or differing opinions. New elements include recognition of detrimental research practices and other integrity concerns that may not meet the misconduct threshold but still require attention. Roles such as the Institutional Certifying Official and Research Integrity Officer are now clearly defined, along with new procedures for handling confidentiality, conflicts of interest, data sequestration, record keeping, and multi-institutional allegations. The policy also replaces outdated materials with simplified online resources.

Rintala also explained that while the university tracks misconduct cases, most allegations—about 95%—are resolved at an early stage without escalating to inquiry or investigation. Many of these involve non-misconduct issues like collaboration or authorship disputes. Actual research misconduct cases are extremely rare, representing less than 1% of the research population. However, they tend to draw outsized attention. Resources like the CITI training are broadly accessible, and the university is working to improve the availability of integrity-related materials, encouraging collaboration with departments to support research ethics and compliance.

## **5. Review Committee Charge**

Shekhar then reviewed the [items SRC completed this year](#) with the committee.

Shashank Priya raised two key proposals: (1) that the committee should regularly discuss new funding strategies and adapting to emerging research policies and regulations due to rapid changes in the federal landscape; and (2) that the committee should initiate an annual or biannual survey of faculty to identify their challenges and concerns. This would help inform future discussions and policy responses, ideally relieving stress within the research community. He also offered staff support to conduct such a survey if needed.

Shekhar agreed that Priya's suggestions align with the committee's charge and could be incorporated more formally. He noted that their accomplishments, goals, and the impact of executive orders would need to be summarized in a short report, which these suggestions could help inform. The discussion then opened to other members, who supported the idea of a faculty survey. Courtney Roberts emphasized the value of understanding both long-standing and rapidly evolving barriers to research, especially under shifting federal policies. Kathleen Boris-Lawrie stressed the importance of institutional messaging that balances realism and reassurance, reinforcing that the committee's work should be guided by strong principles while remaining adaptable and prepared for uncertainty.

Boris-Lawrie also highlighted the negative impact of current funding challenges on graduate education, noting that fewer graduate students are being admitted, which disrupts future career paths for aspiring researchers. Priya added that immigration policy changes will reduce the number of international students and postdocs, which many programs heavily rely on. Without these individuals, even if funding exists, there may be no personnel to carry out research, and enrollment numbers could fall.

Daniel Harki shared his experience with an NIH grant that was abruptly halted, creating anxiety among his students and postdocs about their future, and emphasized the absence of a clear university-wide plan for managing sudden funding losses. He suggested the need for a centralized mechanism to offer temporary support during such periods. In response, Priya outlined efforts to create a bridge funding process involving faculty requests submitted through college leadership to the central research and CFO offices. However, this has been delayed due to multiple concurrent crises and budget limitations. Priya also explained that a stagnant state budget equates to a real-term funding cut due to inflation, adding pressure to university finances. Roberts suggested the committee consider continuing discussions over the summer due to the urgency of the situation.

Shekhar proposed using end-of-year reporting opportunities to raise concerns and potentially revising the committee's charge to meet more often or include crisis planning. He also suggested holding a workshop or town hall to gather input and

discuss strategies, to which Priya responded positively, indicating it could be a useful format for engagement.

Fang Lei suggested compiling the discussed questions and answers into a document to distribute across the university so faculty who cannot attend meetings still receive valuable information. She noted that while she often receives resources about managing uncertainty and funding strategies, she has not seen anything similar specifically focused on paper writing. Priya agreed and mentioned that notes from the upcoming town hall would be shared with the research community. Shekhar proposed that the town hall could also produce a summary of best practices. Jayanthi Sasisekaran supported the idea of a workshop, emphasizing its usefulness in addressing current concerns and serving as outreach. She mentioned difficulty in connecting past discussions with community communication and welcomed the chance to help plan a workshop. Shekhar appreciated this and said he would follow up, with plans to organize a town hall featuring a panel and possibly invited speakers, with support from Priya, who also offered to involve university leaders to help respond to questions.

## **6. Student Members of the Openness in Research Subcommittee**

John Lof shared that Laurie Cooper Stoll, director, University Senate Office, is looking for students to join the Openness in Research Subcommittee next year. He encouraged members to email Stoll with any student recommendations.

## **7. Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Shekhar adjourned the meeting.

Laurie Cooper Stoll  
University Senate Office