
The University Senate

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Senate Research Committee (SRC)

September 13, 2021

Minutes of the Meeting

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 represent the views of, nor are they binding on the senate, the administration, or the Board of Regents.

[**In these minutes:** PEAK Initiative; COVID-19 Update and How it Impacts the Research Mission; National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) Updates on Harassment and University Response; Innovation Corridor and Corporate Engagement; 2021-22 SRC Topics]

PRESENT: Rick Wagner (chair), Courtney Aldrich, Liam Chen, Murray Frank, John Freeman, Ole Gram, Jessica Gutnecht, Noah Grode, Kris Hogquist, Lisa Johnston, Leslie Kennedy, Boyd Kumher, Michael Oakes, Julie Olson, Nicole Pilman, David Roberts, Jayanthi Sasisekaran, Shashi Shekhar, Susannah Smith, Nathaniel Talledge, Dimitri Trifunac, Abdi Warfe, Pamela Webb

REGRETS: Anna Bokun, Gregory Cuomo, Mohammad Saleem Bhat, Shaker Zahra

GUESTS: Myron Frans, senior vice president, Finance and Operations; Ken Horstman, vice president, Office of Human Resources

OTHERS ATTENDING: Dan Gilchrist, Erin Heath, Bri Keeney, Phil Klein, Amy Kucera

Chair Rick Wagner welcomed the committee and the members introduced themselves.

1. PEAK Initiative

Myron Frans, senior vice president, Finance and Operations, and Ken Horstman, vice president, Office of Human Resources, presented slides titled [PEAK Initiative: Positioned for Excellence, Alignment & Knowledge](#) and provided an overview of the project, the guiding principles, a timeline for the work, the structure of the new PEAK success office, and some examples of how the Office of Human Resources will restructure following the PEAK analysis of their unit.

SRC members suggested that a flow chart be designed to communicate to the University community where to go for questions about specific issues (e.g. FMLA) following the reorganization of responsibilities within units.

COVID-19 Update and How it Impacts the Research Mission

Michael Oakes, interim vice president for research, provided the following information about the impact COVID-19 has had on research at the University:

- Research awards are up in record numbers. The institution reported 1.15 billion dollars in total awards in fiscal year 2021.
- Public health research funding grew exponentially as the institution became involved in trials for treatment and vaccines for COVID-19.
- When campus operations changed in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) worked to pause or shut down a significant amount of the research enterprise to protect people. Those changes have had far reaching implications, particularly with respect to work that was being done in the field, and work being done with respect to animal and human research participants.
- During reduced or suspended research operations, OVPR was concerned about the ability to care for research animals, including feeding the animals, when employees were ordered to stay home. The university, along with all other major research institutions, were grappling with this, and euthanasia was considered for some research animals. The Research Animals Resources (RAR) team stepped in and cared for the animals during the research shutdown.
- Over the course of the pandemic, OVPR has learned how to move quickly with respect to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), when necessary, including when it is appropriate to outsource to a commercial or independent IRB. The OVPR has also developed processes and systems to protect animals in emergency situations.
- Most laboratories are now open and the IRB and RAR are both fully functioning. The Sponsored Projects Administration (SPA) is struggling to find appropriate staffing to support their work, and is working with OHR to recruit, develop, and grow workforce needs.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) Updates on Harassment and University Response

Oakes then provided the following updates related to national research funding agencies and their policies on harassment in research:

- Agencies have set expectations that research institutions must have strong systems in place to prevent and address harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of harassment.
- Michael Lauer, Deputy Director for Extramural Research, NIH, sent a letter to the University in the summer of 2021 requesting information on the institution's policies and procedures on responding to harassment in research spaces.
- The research funding agencies previously indicated that the University's policies need to be made more clear, both about what the policies are, and how they are executed.
- The current University policy aligns with what NIH expects of the institution, and states that the Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action will make a recommendation for discipline following an investigation, and that recommendation must be followed unless there is approval for an exception made by the Executive Vice President and Provost or the University president.

Innovation Corridor and Corporate Engagement

Oakes also provided the following information about the Innovation Corridor:

- President Gabel charged Senior Vice President Myron Frans and then Vice President for Research Chris Cramer, now Oakes, in February 2021, to create a shared vision that will enhance the University's state and regional leadership in multiple innovative areas. To address this request, the Innovation Corridor Work Team was established, co-chaired by Frans and Oakes, to accelerate and comprehensively assess the value of opportunities already presented by potentially interested partners, and in the longer term, to develop a framework and recommendations for a shared vision. The Work Team has drafted a [Framework for a University Innovation Corridor](#) and [Recommendations for a University Innovation Corridor](#).

2021-22 SRC Topics

Wagner asked members for input on topics for upcoming SRC agendas. Lisa Johnston suggested addressing the University's Sustainability Development Goals.

With no further business, Wagner adjourned the meeting.

Bobbie Erichsen
University Senate Office