

**Present:** Michael Harold, Gregory Marinic, Wynne Chin, Pradeep Sharma, Haluk Ogmen, Maria Solino, Stuart Long, Karl Titz, Michael Zvolensky, Alessandro Carrera, Jack Fletcher, Gregg Roman, Stuart Dryer, Alan Burns, Luis Torres, George Zouridakis, Allan Jacobson, Abdelhak Bensaoula, Mark Clarke, Mary Ann Ottinger, Christie Peters, Rozlyn Reep, Brooke Gowl

**Absent:** Ezemenari Obasi, Gangbing Song, Robert Palmer, Randy Lee, Richard Bond, Jacqueline Hawkins, Rathindra Bose, Selesta Hodge, Cris Milligan

The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:36 pm.

**Welcome by the Chair:** Dr. Harold welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Approval of December Minutes:** Dr. Harold asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Dr. Dryer made the motion and the minutes were approved.

**Status Report by Assoc. VC/VP Dr. Ottinger:**

Dr. Bose was unable to attend the meeting so Dr. Ottinger gave a status report in his stead. She started by saying “thank you” to Dr. Torres and his subcommittee for their hard work with the Small Grants and New Faculty awards.

Dr. Ottinger continued her report by saying she and Dr. Gowl are meeting with Associate Deans and faculty across a number of departments as well as sending selected grant opportunities. She asked the RSC to help by letting her know areas of interest and potentially with visits for discussing funding opportunities as well as ways to make the submission of large complex grants run more smoothly.

Dr. Harold followed up on Dr. Ottinger’s report by thanking DOR for all of their hard work with internal grants, especially Dr. Ottinger and Rozlyn Reep. He expressed thanks to Dr. Torres and his subcommittee for their time and work on this important program for faculty.

Dr. Harold told the committee they are representing their colleges to advise administration on research & scholarship. If there are any items they would like to raise he asked that they do so, especially since RSC provides an excellent forum.

**Subcommittee Reports:**

**New Faculty & Small Grants:** Dr. Torres started his report by saying “thanks” to his subcommittee for their hard work. The time frame to review proposals was very tight due to the holidays and faculty traveling, but they were able to get everything done. Dr. Torres gave special thanks to Dr. Ottinger and Rozlyn Reep for their support.

According to the handout Dr. Torres provided, New Faculty awards had a budget of \$156,000 and Small Grants had a budget of \$90,000. The New Faculty program was able to fund 26 proposals. The Small Grants program was able to fund 30 proposals.

The subcommittee had several recommendations to give to the RSC:

- 1.) Travel Grants – A large number of the Small Grants proposals are to cover the costs of travel to conduct research. Perhaps travel to conduct research should be seen as different from the conduct of the research itself and subject to different review criteria.
- 2.) Exclusion of Reviewers – In both the New Faculty Grant and Small Grants programs, exclusion of reviewers to avoid potential conflicts of interest is now done at the College level. This decreases the likelihood that at least one reviewer has actual knowledge of the field of study the proposal deals with and creates challenges for the review process.
- 3.) Ranking System – While there is a 1-5 ranking system for reviewers (with 5 being higher), there is no objective criteria for what a “1” means or what a “5” means. Similarly, there are no clear cut criteria for what the reviewer is evaluating. As a result, different reviewers might use different criteria that are used in their own fields.
- 4.) Startup Packages of \$50K – The New Faculty Grants and Small Grants instructions now include language to the effect that faculty receiving startup packages in excess of \$50K are ineligible to apply. There were some questions that emerged with the announcement such as: A.) How are we ensuring the criterion is met? B.) Does this include RA/Post-Doc support in a startup package? C.) Does this criterion expire?
- 5.) Multiple Awards – Several applicants to both mechanisms previously received the award. Should it be permissible to receive the award multiple times?

The subcommittee recommended that these issues be discussed and some clarity be provided.

Dr. Carrera commented on the 5<sup>th</sup> point that was raised. He stated that people apply multiple times because there are no other outlets, especially for folks in CLASS.

In reference to the 1<sup>st</sup> point, Dr. Dryer said he is not concerned with money being used for travel as long as it's essential and spent on a key part of the applicant's research. Dr. Clarke agreed with Dr. Dryer. He said that if travel requires you to do your research, it's valid.

Dr. Torres said it takes time to evaluate the proposals and reviewers have to ask how much time is being spent in order to make a decision on whether it's about travel and not the research. Dr. Dryer responded by saying travel and research are closely tied.

Dr. Harold brought up point 2 which is "Excluding Reviewers." He believes it's a reasonable request.

Dr. Harold brought up point 3 which is the "Ranking System." He believes the ranking is in the purview of the subcommittee and they should come up with suitable language.

Dr. Harold brought up point 4 which is "Startup Funds." Dr. Harold said there is now a \$50,000 threshold and it should be an aggregate startup package whether its equipment or people.

Dr. Sharma stated that after faculty purchase a machine for example, all of their startup funds are gone. They have no funds leftover to publish a book, etc. He was able to get a Small Grant & New Faculty grant after using his startup funds which was very helpful. Dr. Sharma believes the \$50K requirement is a mistake and the committee should make a decision.

Dr. Harold said the argument is there's only so much money to go around. There are many colleges that do not get much in terms of funds. Dr. Fletcher followed up by saying that the previous committee brought up this issue and felt there needed to be mechanisms for people who did not get startup funding.

Dr. Dryer added that he does not think it would be unreasonable to exclude summer salary from the startup package. New faculty members have to make decisions with discretionary spending and internal grants are the only access some colleges have for funding.

Dr. Harold said there are more funds to go around in Engineering and Science because of IDC.

Dr. Carrera told the committee he is from CLASS, a college where there is no discretionary money or funds for travel and research. This makes internal grants important to faculty such as himself.

Dr. Torres made the comment that as a reviewer he does not want to have to make the decision of ranking proposals low because they have large startup packages.

Dr. Ottinger suggested that the subcommittee provide the preferred wording for the \$50,000 startup package, especially for those who exceed the \$50,000 limit, so the requirement is understood more clearly. Dr. Dryer also suggested an expiration date for startup package restriction.

Dr. Harold raised the last and final point which was “Multiple Awards.”

Dr. Fletcher said it is perfectly legitimate for people to have multiple awards as long as they show they're use. Dr. Torres agreed and said that as long as applicants are showing scholarly activity, he is ok with multiple awards.

Dr. Harold told Dr. Torres to put together details for each recommendation that was discussed and provide information at the next meeting. Dr. Torres said he will talk with his subcommittee and develop a draft.

Dr. Ottinger mentioned there was a suggestion for a Q&A section on the DOR website to provide more guidance for internal awards. The idea will continue to be explored.

### Old Business

Dr. Harold introduced Joan Nelson, Executive Director for Human Resources to discuss the hiring practices for Post Docs and Research Associates as well as the Reduction in Force Policy.

Joan Nelson greeted the committee and introduced Sabrina Hassumani, Executive Director, Academic Budgets & Administration.

Ms. Nelson began by saying HR is responsible for managing and ensuring that policy and procedures are adhered to. Research and Post Doc positions fall under staff positions. For post docs, their jobs are unique, but by law they still have to post positions because they are still qualified as staff positions. HR will work with departments to address issues such as “why do I need to post a position when I know who I want?” There have been cases where HR will do a broadband posting where faculty can send candidates to apply for a position. Candidates who are highly qualified can have their resumes pulled from the posting.

Every 2 years the University is audited by either the Texas Workforce Commission or the Office of Federal Contracts and Compliance Programs. They are looking to ensure that the University is recruiting and attracting people in accordance with policy. If they exempt a group, they have to provide clear justification as to why the group was exempt.

For individuals who have a position with a start & end date, they are not posted because they are considered temporary and non-regular positions. There are some temporary positions that can be benefits eligible.

Ms. Hassumani told the committee they (Ms. Hassumani's department) can publish guidelines by which positions can be created and utilized appropriately.

Dr. Clarke asked what the underlying issue was in regards to generating a separate category for Post Docs.

Ms. Nelson stated that most Research and Post Docs are in a different category. If it's considered a regular position, it still has to follow standard guidelines.

Dr. Fletcher said that Post Docs are not hired to be Research Assistants and they are brought to the lab to train. He stated the policy is wrong and Post Docs should be exempted. Dr. Harold added to Dr. Fletcher's comments by saying Post Docs are hired for specific needs and should not be considered as non-regular employees and ineligible for benefits. He stated that there needs to be another category. Ms. Hassumani responded by saying that if you disclose upfront that you want a Post Doc temporary position with a start date and end date, they can be benefits eligible, but are treated differently.

Ms. Nelson repeated to the committee what she was hearing from its members, which was Post Docs are: 1.) Non-regular temporary positions. 2.) They will have a start date & end date. When they receive an offer letter, it will have an end date with the understanding that there is a possibility that it could end sooner. According to law, if a position is longer than 4.5 months, they have to be benefits eligible. For those who are benefits eligible, they have a 90 day wait period before they are covered. For temporary positions, after they pass 4.5 months, there may still be another 90 day wait period before they can receive benefits. So if you say you want Post Docs to have benefits but be temporary as well, you cannot have both at the same time.

Dr. Sharma said that other universities encounter what the committee just discussed. There are Post Docs that are benefits eligible, but if they don't perform they can be fired, and then the faculty member can fill the position quickly without having to spend more money from their grant.

Dr. Fletcher mentioned the University of Texas as an example. He could hire Post Docs without posting, he could fire or put them on Research track, and they were benefits eligible when they walked through the door. Dr. Nelson said she will look into how the University of Texas handles the process and will report back to the committee.

Ms. Nelson addressed Dr. Dryer's issue with the RIF process. She stated that when a position is eliminated and opens again within 6 months, according to policy you have to offer the job to the individual who was RIF'd. But if the job has changed (criteria changed) then HR will make appropriate exceptions.

Dr. Dryer stated a colleague of his had RIF'd an individual, and he (Dr. Dryer) attempted to create the same job, and according to HR it was the same job; however, his work is different from his colleague's. Ms. Hassumani told Dr. Dryer that she considered it to be a new position because it was not the same as the one that was

RIF'd. But according to Dr. Dryer, it was still treated as the same job by HR. He thanked Ms. Nelson for solving the problem, but said he should not have had to go to Ms. Nelson in the first place.

Ms. Nelson told the committee she hopes everyone feels like they can come to her with issues such as the one Dr. Dryer encountered. She also summed up her understanding of what she heard from the committee members, which is Post Doc positions are seen as being very different, and are currently a regular staff job. She believes it can be resolved (she'll do her research) if it can be seen as a temporary position for a specific amount of time (so faculty can rehire if need be), in which case the obligation for the University will be different than that for a regular staff employee. Ms. Nelson will follow up with Dr. Harold regarding the issues discussed.

#### Subcommittee Reports:

**Excellence & Research:** Dr. Harold said the award was announced and encouraged committee members to work with their colleagues to identify strong candidates.

Dr. Burns said about a year ago the committee had a loose discussion about not receiving enough nominations for this award. Someone recently raised the point of whether a person with external letters for support (for tenure) can also use the letters when nominating a candidate. The point was raised with Dr. Lee via email and his answer was "no", external promotion letters cannot be used. According to Dr. Burns, faculty should not have to go back and change letters.

Dr. Harold stated that if he was a reviewer on the subcommittee, he would think the promotion letter would look like the individual was trying to shortcut the process.

According to Dr. Dryer, there were a lot of applicants for the Excellence award last year. He said that even with a small number of applicants there's still a lot of work to be done in terms of evaluation.

Dr. Harold requested that Rozlyn Reep notify the subcommittee with the number of nominations submitted so members can encourage more nominations if needed.

**Centers & Institutes:** Dr. Fletcher said his subcommittee has nothing to report. They sent the two center proposals they discussed for revisions and have not received a response.

**Resources & Core Facilities:** Dr. Burns reported that his subcommittee put out revised guidelines and sent a copy to Cris Milligan.

Dr. Ottinger said the guidelines are going through one last read before being posted on the web. She stated that currently there is no money in the budget to support a Core so no action will occur at present.

Dr. Harold stated on behalf of the committee that he hopes this program will be funded in future years.

**Conflict of Interest:** Dr. Burns stated there was nothing to report.

**Intellectual Property:** Dr. Dryer said that he will be able to begin attending meetings now that his schedule has changed. Dr. Clarke mentioned that the next meeting will be Tuesday and their projected numbers for disclosures will be in the top 70's by the end of the year.

#### New Business

The Research Faculty Mechanism issue was tabled for the next meeting. Dr. Harold said the issue has to do with bridge funding for research faculty, a policy the committee would recommend to the VP.

Dr. Bensaoula brought up this issue and stated that a document was submitted 1.5 years ago and it was turned down by the Faculty Senate. He did not hear about the Faculty Senate's decision and does not know why it was turned down. He believes bridge funding is essential and that colleges and departments have not fully embraced research faculty.

Dr. Harold said they will gather information on the Faculty Senate vote before the next meeting and will review the information as a committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:01 pm.

**The next meeting will be on Friday, February 21, same location from 1:30-3:00 pm.**