

Faculty Senate Ad-hoc Research Committee
10/14/2015 meeting
Summary notes from the meeting

In attendance: David Bolton, Erin Hill, Anne Krulikowski, William Sawyer, Israel Sanz-Sánchez

The meeting started with a presentation of the basic background for the conversation on faculty research at the Senate, including some of the older background (original presentations with Gautam Pillay at the Senate in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, conversation about possibly modifying the university mission to include some acknowledgement of scholarship/research), as well as some of the newer developments, e.g. the question to the President at the last meeting with Faculty Senate on 10/9/2015, when he emphasized his vision that faculty research should be supported primarily by external funds and the dollar goal of \$10 million annually in the Strategic Plan.

After that, the conversation moved into a discussion of the issues that should be addressed in the area of research, and of the process that this group should follow in order to start a productive conversation with Senate and with the larger campus community on the importance of faculty research. The group's conversation about issues and possible solutions was based to a large extent on our own personal experience with the difficulties involved in trying to keep research alive while negotiating a very limited amount of time and resources with other contractual obligations. There was an acknowledgement that these personal narratives are important and that they are not just anecdotal evidence, because they point at recurring problems and difficulties that bear negatively on our ability to develop as active scholars and researchers.

In terms of current issues negatively affecting faculty research, the following were mentioned: (1) mismatch between definition of faculty roles, which include research and scholarship for tenure and promotion, and university mission, which doesn't refer to research and/or scholarship; (2) perceived lack of understanding about the role of research as an overall academic experience that is central to the educational mission of higher education: research and scholarship are not just faculty activities, but they benefit students because they allow faculty to have the broader vision they need to do their teaching and because faculty-student research has been proven to be a high-impact educational practice; (3) mismatch between the stated strategic goals of the institution, which include increased visibility, increased enrollments in and development of graduate programs, and increased external grant funding, on the one hand, and the lack of a support system for research on campus, which goes directly against those strategic goals; (4) vast differences across departments on colleges on what constitutes sufficient research for tenure and promotion, as well as to the degree of support and funding given to research within each unit; (5) perceptions among faculty on initiatives in support of research, which could be interpreted by some as implying that certain forms of professional development are more "worthy" than others or that faculty with active research programs should be exempt from some of the workload requirements that are expected in the CBA.

The conversation also addressed some possible initiatives that would strengthen the position of research at the university level: (1) different system of counting AWA to cover faculty research course load reductions so that it does not count towards the 25% temporary faculty cap; (2) a revised phrasing of the mission statement of our university to acknowledge the research/scholarship expectation that faculty already have and to define research/scholarship as one of the areas that add quality to the overall academic contribution of the university to our community; (3) clearer guidelines about how research productivity is measured in tenure and promotion decisions, and most importantly, (4) increased emphasis on the allocation of resources (both funds and time) for faculty who have a demonstrable need of these resources to implement or continue their research projects, or to incorporate research into their curriculum, and (5) a change in administrative culture at all levels (President, Provost, colleges, departments, APSCUF) to acknowledge institutionally that research is a key part of high-quality teaching and that it should become a priority for the university to support it with resources and time. It was also pointed out that there are models in other public state universities that have successfully incorporated research as a central element of their educational mission, and have devised systems to support that research component.

The conversation also addressed the strategy that should be followed in order to start a fruitful conversation about the place of research. There was wide agreement at the meeting that this would first have to materialize at the level of the Senate so that it can be presented as a Senate initiative before it is brought to the level of the campus community. There was also a consensus that the conversation would have to be framed in a way that makes it clear that we are not advocating for a change in the mission of our university (which should remain very much that of an institution that strives to provide affordable educational opportunities to Pennsylvanians), but for an acknowledgement of the key role that research plays within that educational experience, and of the need for the administration to support research activities in a more consistent, explicit way. We are therefore not advocating for two tracks of faculty (the ones that teach vs. the ones that do research) or for exceptions to the CBA, but we want to raise awareness about the needs of those forms of scholarship that are time-intensive and money-intensive, and that need forms of support that other types of scholarship may not require. We also agreed that an advantage of starting this conversation at the level of the Senate would be that it would involve APSCUF via its representation at the Senate, and that it would be positive for this conversation to also engage APSCUF's voice on the role of research and scholarship activities in our overall educational mission.

Possible steps (in chronological order):

- 1) Question to President and Mark Rimple (APSCUF) at the next senate meeting (10.22) about research.
- 2) Brief presentation for the Senate about the status of the conversation so far at the level of the ad-hoc committee.
- 3) Draft a statement to be brought up to the attention of the Senate and to be shared with university administration.
- 4) Organization of public forums on the status of faculty research (theme: "support the 35%").

- 5) Other additional steps? (survey, collection of narratives... what would be the most effective way to bring awareness about the needs of faculty research to the attention of the administration?).

Proposed question for the President and Mark Rimple (Senate meeting on 10/22): ***At WCU, we as faculty work within the framework of the teacher-scholar model. When we talk about WCU as an institution with educational excellence, what role does faculty scholarship play in this vision and how does the institution plan to support all of the different forms of faculty scholarship?***