

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH POLICY

Minutes of Teleconference

April 12, 2010

I. Announcements

Chair Miller provided highlights from two recent meetings to the committee:

1. Academic Council meeting of March 31

UPDATE: This joint meeting with the University Committee on Planning and Budget (UCPB) was designed to educate members of both groups on the fiscal intricacies of UC's retirement system and benefits as well as the budget flow-through mechanisms of the University. Much of the information was not new, and most of it was not good, either. There is much data, but a dearth of solutions, other than seemingly draconian cuts.

2. Academic Council meeting of April 7

UPDATE: Following normal Council business in the morning, the afternoon session was joint meeting with the ten chancellors. From the morning session, UCPB's "Choices" Report will be sent for information and to inform discussion on the work of the Commission on the Future. Also, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) has continued its work to educate the public, the legislature, and various advocacy groups on the proposed changes to admission and holistic review. The afternoon session consisted of four co-presentations, each by a chancellor and his divisional Senate chair or vice chair.

II. Consent Calendar

ACTION: The consent calendar was approved as amended.

III. National Lab Issues

Greg Miller, UCORP Chair

ISSUE: Chair Miller summarized previous discussions on the lab, focusing on questions of morale at the labs vis-à-vis prosecution of the research mission during a time of reported problems with recruitment and retention. Anecdotal reports suggest that lab scientists are upset with aspects of the management transition and organizational difficulties. Chair Miller suggests writing to either the Academic Council or to the Academic Council Special Committee on Lab Issues (ACSCOLI) urging them to investigate these reports and then determine whether action by UC is needed.

DISCUSSION: Members inquired why lab morale problems should be given priority over other morale issues on the campuses. Chair Miller indicated that although UC is also having morale issues, the causes are different; at UC, finances are directly responsible for tough management decisions, whereas at the labs, the proximate cause seems more likely to be related to talent management. It was suggested that any correspondence also be sent to UC's LLC governors. Members also wondered whether surveying dual-appointment holders might be a better alternative than a Senate investigation.

ACTION: Chair Miller and Analyst Feer will draft correspondence and circulate it via email for endorsement prior to transmittal to the Academic Council.

IV. Commission on the Future

Mary Croughan, Co-Chair, Research Strategies Working Group

ISSUE: Members review the Part I recommendations.

DISCUSSION: Chair Miller pointed to funding strategies recommendation 8, which calls for the exploration of alternate faculty compensation plans; mandating reliance on external funds for an even greater portion of the faculty is dangerous. Members countered that the practice is common at other universities, but it carries a heavy fundraising burden. Members also argued that increasing teaching releases would be harmful to education by forcing an increased reliance on lecturers and graduate student instructors (GSIs). Moreover, research would be harmed due to the differential impacts across disciplines.

Chair Miller also noted that most of the working groups did not state their assumptions at the outset, which makes evaluation difficult due to lack of framing and, by extension, a lack of a map to completion. Members reported constituent feedback that all the recommendations are money-focused, not mission-focused; they do not address what the University should really be and how we can get there. Co-Chair Croughan agreed, but added that without specific feedback on priorities and decision rules, the inevitable cuts will not be implemented as strategically as possible.

Other specific discussion focused on the detrimental impacts to research of distance learning and differential fees, which UCORP has discussed previously. Members agreed that graduate education received too little attention throughout the report. Members also noted inconsistencies between the recommendations, such as increasing undergraduate enrollment while decreasing student-faculty ratios during a period of reduced faculty hiring.

Members were concerned about the implied shift in priorities they inferred from the combination of different recommendations: If internal funds are to be targeted in certain areas, and external funds are not available in others, then some disciplines will be left entirely unfunded; that is, members feel that the recommendations amount to a market and popularity-driven research portfolio, not one based on sound academics and science. Many felt that it is not unreasonable to expect the State and the University to help pay for research. Co-Chair Croughan noted that such an interpretation is exactly the opposite of what was intended, as the data indicate. Members replied that they had not seen such data. Perhaps the misunderstanding is one of semantics: world class versus cutting edge? Members noted that excellence accrues slowly.

Finally, members noted several overarching concerns with the report, including the aforementioned omissions of assumptions and graduate education; the abandonment of the State as a funding partner; the absence of implementation plans; the absence of supporting data, in many instances; and the toothlessness of the report as a whole.

ACTION: Discussion will continue via email.

V. New Business

None.

Call ended at 2:05 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Kenneth Feer, Senior Policy Analyst
Attest: Greg Miller, UCORP Chair