

UM Senate Assembly
Research Policies Committee
Office of the Vice President for Research
Friday, March 14, 2008
9:00 – 11:00 a.m.
4006 Fleming Building

Minutes

RPC members present: Carl Akerlof, Toni Antonucci (chair), Michael Benson, Stephen Bougher, Bob Frost, Pawan Kumar, Qiang Zhu, Genevieve Fischré (SACUA student support)

RPC members absent: Jerald Bachman, Kyle Goszyk, Elson Liu, Kazuhiro Saitou, Kristin Seefeldt, Michael Thouless (SACUA liaison), Ray Walling, Elizabeth Young, Weizhen Zhang

OVPR staff present: Steve Ceccio, Judy Nowack, Jim Shayman, Jackie Hoats-Shields

The meeting was called to order at 9:13 a.m.

1. Consideration of minutes from February 8, 2008 RPC meeting

There were no comments or changes requested to the minutes.

Bob Frost: Motioned to approve minutes as written.

Stephen Bougher: Seconded motion.

Vote: All in favor with one abstention (Michael Benson).

2. Continued discussion of proposed changes to the research tracks

a. Update from Steve Ceccio, Associate VP for Research

The committee had previously been sent the revised OVPR proposal, dated February 28, 2008. Professor Ceccio described the changes in this version. The main change is that units can continue to adopt both tracks, instead of being able to use only one. Other changes in this version include modifications to title descriptions and additional criteria for moving between tracks. The time-in-rank is still there. This version of the proposal has been presented to various groups around campus including the Academic Program Group (APG).

Professor Ceccio said each rank has a characteristic level of activity in the following areas:

- Scholarly reputation
- Independence: do they function independently or as part of a larger whole?
- Teaching: didactic and non-didactic teaching
- Institutional service: academic and administrative committees

One aim in the revision was to reduce the level of independence required for promotion from assistant to associate research scientist. There are also no

requirements for teaching or institutional service to achieve the research scientist rank.

A committee member noted that on the other hand, institutional service is part of visibility and thus can be viewed as beneficial for those who do it. Professor Ceccio stressed that the proposal does not attempt to address two related issues: inclusion in faculty governance level at the unit level and effort issues. If a person has 100% effort on a research project, then the institution cannot require them to do service in addition to their 100% time on the project.

The Provost's office requested that time-in-rank limits be made equivalent to the tenure track time limits.

The question was raised, at what level can a person be the sole chair of a Ph.D. committee? Professor Ceccio said Rackham is revisiting this issue. Professor Ceccio speculated that being on a Ph.D. committee for a non-Rackham graduate student would likely be considered teaching by the unit.

There was a question about perceptions of research professors versus perceptions of tenure track faculty and which may be viewed as superior. Professor Ceccio said it is merely a different type of academic life; it is not a question of superiority. This is why the expectations for each position must be clear, and options for changing one's career track should be provided.

Professor Ceccio said he leaves RPC with the same questions to ponder as he left with the APG:

- Why, or in what circumstances, does a unit need two tracks?
- Why impose time-in-rank limits on junior research faculty?
- What is the institution's commitment to the professional development of research faculty?
- What is the institution's duty to manage conflicts of interest in research faculty/mentor relationships?

And, more broadly:

- What does it mean to be a faculty member at UM?
- What does it mean to be a professor?

In the revised proposal language has been added about moving between the tracks. One feature here is that the clock doesn't reset when such a move is made. So, the onus is on the units to make a good choice in whether to move someone between the tracks.

The revised proposal will be presented to SACUA, and there will be one more round of meetings to identify any issues. The goal is to have a final proposal by the end of April. Professor Ceccio asked if RPC could provide written feedback on the revised proposal within two weeks. He emphasized that over the last four months RPC has

already had a significant impact on the process as shown by the revisions to the proposal.

b. Medical School experience with research tracks

Guests:

Jayne Thorson, Assistant Dean for Faculty Affairs, Medical School

*Margaret Gyetko, Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, Medical School &
Professor of Internal Medicine*

Margaret Gyetko and Jayne Thorson were introduced. Professor Gyetko handed out materials from the Medical School. She explained that there had long been confusion at the Medical School about the meaning of the research scientist titles. Presently there are three tracks (clinical, research, and instructional) in the Medical School, and the documents provided include the defining principles of the research track. Each of the three tracks in the Medical School carry the titles of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor. Professor Gyetko said the Medical School is uniformly opposed to time-in-rank limits. She said the idea of imposing time limits is viewed as “all stick and no carrot,” and asked why would someone take on the constraint of time limits when there is no benefit to them. She said the Medical School believes they can provide mentoring for those in the research scientist track.

Jayne Thorson said in their view there is no equivalency in the rewards between the research tracks and the professorial tracks. Professor Gyetko said it is very common for one track to be seen as better than the other.

Regarding the issue of time limits, or up-or-out clauses, it was noted that since these are soft money positions, the timing of the “out” part is already built in, namely, when the funding runs out.

Toni Antonucci said one of the issues of concern to RPC is the scenario of people working in labs with no support by their lab director for their professional development. The time limits could be viewed as a way to ensure the promotion/evaluation process is initiated in such a situation. Jayne Thorson and Margaret Gyetko said having clear expectations at this rank, and having a mentoring program in the unit that is really used, are the ways the Medical School is addressing this problem without using time-in-rank limits. Another point raised was the English competency issue and how this can become an excuse for non-promotion.

It was observed that one advantage of the current system is that it allows people to adapt their positions to various life-choices, such as raising a family, and imposing a clock would make this more difficult. It was commented that flexibility is stripped away with the time limits and it seems punitive with no advantages.

Professor Antonucci said RPC sees both the difficulties created by time limits and conversely, the problems of the “indentured servant.”

Margaret Gyetko noted an example from the Medical School's clinical ranks. She said some faculty at the clinical assistant professor rank don't elect to go up for promotion, and what is wrong with that if they are satisfied and making good contributions? Jayne Thorson said that the information she and Professor Gyetko are relaying to RPC is what the Medical School Executive Committee and the majority of the research faculty at the Medical School have expressed.

c. Update from the RPC subcommittee

Bob Frost reported on the work of the RPC subcommittee which has conducted interviews over the past month with human resources representatives from the following units: LSA, Medical School, Engineering, ISR, School of Information, UMTRI, and CHGD. The goal of the interviews was to get an idea, from the unit level, of how research scientist career paths are experienced and administrated.

Professor Frost listed seven observations gained from the interviews:

- 1) Scale does matter; smaller units are more flexible but do not have as many resources for bridge funding.
- 2) There is a strong consensus that the two track model makes sense. He noted that in some units there is a keen sense of status.
- 3) Job security is a major concern across all these units because of reliance on soft money. There is the view that the problem of "indentured servitude" would not be solved by a clock, but by a better system of mentorship, oversight and review.
- 4) Information gaps and misinformation about the tracks and titles is common. Information provided at the time of hiring is not uniform.
- 5) There is no consistency with regard to who has a role in faculty governance and who doesn't. There seems to be a perception that if the research track people are enfranchised they might outnumber the "real" faculty.
- 6) Bridge funding is weak; there are few coherent policies on this. Engineering has a model that works well and could be used as an example.
- 7) Across the units interviewed, there were reports of people in roles akin to "indentured servants." Interview participants supported the idea that the solution is not an up-and-out rule, but better mentorship.

Another member of the subcommittee who participated in the interviews noted that inadequate and inconsistent human resource practices seem to be a major issue. It was noted that poor management practices may not be solved through such a proposal (i.e., the OVPR proposal). It was also observed that OVPR only sees the results of such problems when people come up for promotion, and from its centralized vantage point OVPR doesn't have the tools to solve unit-based management problems.

Subcommittee members noted that the interviews were very informative, and that Professor Frost had highlighted the key points.

The discussion turned to whether a survey would be possible given the time

constraints. Toni Antonucci asked whether the committee is in favor of doing a survey. The group acknowledged it would not be possible to complete the survey process in two weeks. A statement was made in favor of doing the survey anyway since no survey of this very type has been done before.

Toni Antonucci said her opinion is that RPC should provide a response to OVPR within the stated timeframe, even if it is a request to wait for the survey data. The committee's concerns about the OVPR proposal can be provided, bolstered by the points gleaned from the interviews, above, and it can be stated that RPC is collecting data to support these views. Professor Antonucci proposed that she and Bob Frost write the RPC response and provide it to Steve Ceccio; and Michael Thouless, the RPC SACUA representative, can share it with SACUA.

d. Discussion of survey creation and feasibility

Guest: *Leslie Stambaugh, RLS Associates, Organizational Development Consulting*

Leslie Stambaugh was introduced. It was explained that the confidentiality of the respondents would be assured by having her company conduct the survey. The group discussed the aims of the survey and the timing constraints.

Ms. Stambaugh described that an online survey could be done very quickly and reasonably. The survey would need to be available online for two or three weeks for optimal results. Ms. Stambaugh said six weeks total for the survey project is reasonable. This would include one week for development, two-three weeks for the survey to be out online, one week for the results.

It was proposed to aim for release of the survey on Monday, March 31.

Toni Antonucci said a subcommittee needs to be formed to finalize survey questions. Ms. Stambaugh handed out some questions she drafted that could be used in the survey. In response to one of the draft questions, it was commented that people hired in are given so little information that they would not know the requirements of the other tracks, and possibly not even the terms of their own employment.

The committee expressed approval of the plan to go forward with the survey. Members of the subcommittee to work on survey development will be Bob Frost, Stephen Bougher, Pawan Kumar, Elizabeth Young, Toni Antonucci, and Jim Shayman. Jerry Bachman, who is out of town, will be asked his input over email.

The subcommittee and Ms. Stambaugh will plan to meet on Friday mornings, 9:00-11:00 a.m., starting next Friday, March 21, to design the survey.

3. New business and additional issues from the committee

This item was not covered for lack of time.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.