

## Faculty Senate Research Committee

Academic Year 2020-21

### Final Report

**Members:** Steven Maynard-Moody (chair), Paulette Spencer, Abel Chikanda, Linqin Zhao, Lea Currie, Celka Straughn, Barbara Kerr, Blake Wilson, Meredith Bagwell-Gray, Michael Engel, Satya Mandal, Dorice Elliott, Simon Atkinson (ex officio), and Belinda Sturm (ex officio)

**Meetings:** All on Zoom. Agendas and minutes are posted on Blackboard

- October 1
- October 26
- November 5
- March 5
- March 26
- April 16

This final report is organized based on the standing and specific charges. We discussed one additional issue that is included after our discussion of charges.

#### Standing Charges

1. Monitor the administration of the General Research Fund (GRF) and make recommendations, as needed, to ensure its effectiveness and appropriate utilization.

- FSRC had several general discussions of standing charge 1. No specific concerns were mentioned other than the possible reduction in GRF funding which is based on the general state allocation to KU. VCR Atkinson suggested that GRF could be reduced in proportion to any overall state cuts to the KU allocation.
- FSRC also dealt with specific issues regarding GRF allocation with the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. As summarized in the March 5, 2021 minutes, Tamara Falicov, CLAS Assoc Dean, and Tabatha Gabay, CLAS Administrative Associate for Research, asked FSRC to consider a request from CLAS to move unallocated GRF funds from this year's GRF competition from divisions within the college that had surplus funds to other divisions within the college that did not have adequate funds. FSRC approved (with one abstention) the motion: "FSCR recommends that FacEx allow CLAS to have a one-year redistribution of GRF funds within the College." Dean Falicov, Kathy Reed, and the

FSRC chair had several conversations following the meeting to clarify this motion. Although the GRF proposals were reviewed in AY 20-21, the allocations would not be distributed until the next fiscal year. With this clarification, CLAS was granted permission for the one-year reallocation.

2. FY2022 Committee: Conduct three-year review of the GRF in spring 2022. The FSRC should pay particular attention to the entities' different eligibility requirements for the competition (some entities accept applications from tenured or tenure-track faculty only while at least one other entity accepts applications from lecturers) in determining the degree to which entities are making effective use of the GRF. Reevaluate the allocation method for the GRF (see analysis in FSRC FY19 Final Report).

- This standing charge was not reviewed by FSRC as it applies to the work of next year's committee

3. Monitor the implementation of policies and procedures for determining which proposals will go forward in cases where the number of grant applications that may be submitted from the University is limited. Identify problems or concerns, and report issues and recommendations to FacEx. Policy located in Policy Library, Institutional Endorsement of Proposals when Submissions are Limited by External Funding Agency:

<http://policy.ku.edu/research/institutional-endorsement>

- This charge was discussed during our March 26, 2021 meeting. AVCR Belinda Sturm led our discussion. FSRC had a detailed discussion of this standing charge in AY 19-20.
- Sturm reviewed the process of soliciting interest and providing a review of pre-proposals for limited submission grants requiring institutional endorsement. Except in cases when these are annual submissions, the time between the announcements of requests for proposals and KU's institutional endorsements is often short, weeks not months.
- As described, the current process is organized, peer reviewed, and strives for transparency. If more faculty are interested in submitting proposals than are permitted by the funding agency, the researchers submit a 2-3 page preproposal accompanied by their current and pending funding and a CV. These pre-proposals are reviewed by KU faculty following a rubric based on the funding guidelines.
- The process for timely reviews of proposals requiring institutional endorsement is important to KU's research enterprise. The committee is satisfied that the current policy and procedures are transparent and fair.
- FSRC recommends (with one abstention) that FacEx consider removing this issue as a standing charge and adding it as a specific charge if future faculty raise questions about the current policy and practice.

## Specific Charges

1. Ask Vice Chancellor for Research Atkinson to update FSRC on plans and actions to enhance KU's research infrastructure and engagement and how these plans and actions help secure our standing within AAU.
  - During our November 5, 2020 meeting, VCR Atkinson led a discussion of AAU membership criteria and KU's current standing within AAU. The primary metrics to sustain membership are federal research expenditures as measured by NSF; membership in National Academy of Sciences (NAS), National Academy of Engineering (NAE), and the Institute of Medicine (IOM); faculty awards, memberships, and fellowships (for example, Carnegie Fellowship); and citations as measured by Thomson Reuters InCites™ database. Although not at the bottom of each of these four metrics, KU ranks in the bottom 10 percent on all criteria. VCR Atkinson observed that many other research universities desire AAU membership, but AAU prefers to keep membership limited.
  - FSRC discussed the value of membership. FSRC generally supports the view that KU should not focus directly on the AAU criteria but on how to secure and strengthen our research enterprise in a manner that serves KU. Improving our research enterprise should improve our AAU metrics with special attention on the recruitment and retention of research active faculty. Such faculty as the basis for our continued standing in AAU and as a research university.
  
2. Ask VCR Atkinson to report to FSRC on how KU research is responding to the Covid-19 shut-down and its aftershocks.
  - See below
  
3. Report on what implications Research faced due to the pandemic, and the closing of campus.
  - During our October 29, 2020 meeting, FSRC discussed specific charges 2 and 3.
  - With the exceptions of animal care, critical long-term experiments, and Covid-related research, the KU research enterprise was shut down in late March 2020. In the first week of June, research facilities with approved safety plans began to open up.
  - VCR Atkinson noted that KU research is not back to normal. Research that requires travel, work that leads to performance, and much studio work has not yet resumed. Initially all human subjects research that could not be done virtually was stopped, but in-person research that meets safety protocols is now allowed to resume. KU does considerable research in K-12 schools which has, with rare exceptions, not resumed.
  - VCR Atkinson shared preliminary data showing that while proposal submission has increased recently, proposal funding and research expenditures have declined somewhat.

- The committee asked questions about the effects of Covid on productivity in non-funded research. VCR Atkinson noted that while such work was equally valuable, it was too soon to measure Covid-related changes in publication and citation rates.
- VCR Atkinson also stressed how Covid has slowed progress for those early in their careers and especially for those, most often women, who must take on added responsibility for family members.
- FSRC then had a discussion of the threat to KU doctoral programs and how that may diminish the research enterprise. This is a problem across universities in the US and abroad. VCR Atkinson noted that Vice Provost Roberts is on the AAU standing committee on the future of doctoral education. An additional issue raised by FSRC was the problem of the drastic decline in international students coming to KU for doctoral education.

### Additional Topics of Discussion

1. The University Senate Executive Committee met on September 15, 2020, to review proposed changes to USRR IX. Procedures for Handling Allegations of Research Misconduct. Vice-Chancellor Simon Atkinson and Susan MacNally presented these changes. SenEx would like the Research Committee to review these proposed changes. SenEx would also like the committee to review the “possibility of abuse of power, for faculty, staff, or student who has been accused of research misconduct because of the data they used.”
  - VCR Atkinson told the committee that the research misconduct policy and definition were required by the federal government as a pre-condition for the university to receive federal grants.
  - He then reviewed the current process. Noting that only one case has been considered since the policy was adopted in 2017. Several procedural problems emerged during that review and the proposed changes are designed to improve the process. The emphasis of the proposed revisions is to ensure due process and access to materials to the person charged with misconduct.
  - FSRC unanimously approved these changes, and on October 29, Maynard-Moody, chair, emailed this decision to FacEx.
2. FSRC had a general discussion of the budget crisis and KBOR temporary tenure policy on KU’s research enterprise.
  - VCR Atkinson reported that the budget situation for the Office of Research remains unclear.
  - On the positive side, VCR Atkinson reported that federal funding for NSF, NEH, and educational research has increased, and that most agencies understand the need to provide extensions with costs to cover problems in research resulting from the Covid pandemic.

- When asked about the future of GRF funding, Atkinson said that GRF would likely be reduced in proportion to overall budget cuts to KU but not eliminated. Unspent spends are likely to be “swept” by central administration.
- Atkinson responded to questions about the proposed budget or revenue model that stresses student credit hour production. He noted that grant F&A, or overhead, does not cover the actual cost of research. The full F&A is 51.5 percent for federal grants yet the estimated cost to the university is closer to 70 percent. The research enterprise is supported by tuition income.
- Concern was raised in cuts of GTA funding, which limits the ability of departments to teach undergraduate courses and support doctoral education.
- VCR Atkinson noted that the possible application by KU of the temporary KBOR policy of allowing the dismissal of tenured faculty may reduce KU’s ability to recruit research active faculty.

## Final Thoughts

As we conclude our Final Report for Academic Year 2020-21, FSRC wants to express our deepest concern for the future of research at KU in all its creative expressions. KU has been and is an internationally engaged research university. Research and scholarship at KU speak to all areas of human creativity and knowledge in the arts, law, medicine, natural and human sciences, engineering, mathematics, and humanities. At times this work has direct and visible effects on the lives of Kansans and others around the nation and globe. The research and scholarship of KU faculty also have more subtle and longer-term effects, including offering new ways of seeing problems, communities, and ourselves.

The creative energy and attention of the faculty and graduate students are fundamental to maintaining and extending KU’s research and scholarship, in all its diversity. It takes time, focus, and investment for faculty to draft a competitive grant or fellowship proposal, write a book, or prepare a performance. In the name of efficiency, adding more tasks, distracting creativity with uncertainty, and cutting KU’s investment in research will leave a much-diminished KU for, perhaps, a generation of faculty and students. Women, BIPOC, LBGTQ+, and lower income faculty and students, who are just gaining a foothold in higher education and research professions, are likely to bear the greatest costs in any disinvestments in research.

As KU deals with the Covid-19 pandemic and associated budget shortfalls, FSRC asks that the Chancellor, Provost, and other decision makers place preserving KU research enterprise at the forefront of any plans and changes. Diminishing KU research is an existential threat to our university. Historically, one of the most attractive qualities of KU has been the collegial, collaborative environment, which has brought and helped retain leading researchers, scholars, educators, and students to our institution. Revitalizing this broad intellectual dialogue and supportive climate and culture must be a critical priority of KU leadership.

FSRC also recommends that FacEx add a specific charge to next year's committee to examine the effects on KU research and scholarship of budget cuts, budget models, and the implementation of the temporary KBOR policy on dismissal of tenured faculty. In addition, FSRC recommends that FacEx charge next year's committee to explore ways to revitalize the intellectual climate and culture at KU.