

Research Planning Committee (RPC) Meeting
Wednesday, December 15, 2021
2:30 p.m.
Zoom Video Conference
Minutes

Members Present:

David Ford, Ph.D., chairperson
Noah Hillman, M.D.
John Tavis, Ph.D.
John Walker, Ph.D.
Gary Albers, M.D., ex officio
Angel Baldan, Ph.D., ex officio (as designated for Enrico Di Cera)
Richard DiPaolo, Ph.D., ex officio
Ravi Nayak, M.D., ex officio
Jeffrey Scherrer, Ph.D. ex officio (as designated for Kim Schiel)
Tammy Burton, CPA, ex officio non-voting
Ajay Jain, M.D., Ph.D., ex officio non-voting
Oleg Kisselev, Ph.D., ex officio non-voting
John Long, D.V.M., ex officio non-voting
Adriana Montaña, Ph.D., ex officio non-voting
Ken Olliff, D. Min., MBA, ex officio non-voting
Willis Samson, Ph.D., ex officio non-voting

Members Not Present:

Daniel Hoft, M.D., Ph.D.
Ratna Ray, Ph.D.
Enrico Di Cera, M.D., ex officio
Daniela Salvemini, Ph.D., ex officio
Kim Schiel, M.D., ex officio

Guests:

Matthew Christian
Sandra Cornell
Stephanie Decker
Dagmar Ralphs (as designated for Tammy Burton)

1. The Minutes of the November 17, 2021 meeting were approved.

2. Scintillation Counter

Dr. Angel Baldan, Professor in the Biochemistry & Molecular Biology Dept, reported on the necessity for a scintillation counter in the Doisy Research Center. The goal was to determine if this equipment should eventually be prioritized on the capital equipment requests.

- Dr. Baldan, speaking on behalf of all users in the DRC, is requesting a new Perkin Elmer scintillation counter to replace the one that broke at the end of the summer and is now unrepairable. The unit was purchased about ten years ago.
- The new unit will support the research efforts of at least two NIH-funded investigators in the Biochemistry Dept, he and Dr. Edwin Antony, who have current protocols approved for radioactivity.

- There are safety concerns associated with radioactivity use that require monthly wipe tests. So, even if these PI's aren't using radioisotopes in their research right now, these requirements are still in place because they have active licenses.
- Dr. Duane Grandgenett has the only operable counter in the DRC, which is a very old Beckman LS6500. Drs. Baldan and Antony are now forced to use it. Krishan Pandey is the main user of this machine although it looks like it's going to fall apart.
- It would be wise to invest in a new machine to allow these three groups to continue their approved NIH research. The quote from Perkin Elmer is around \$47,000.
- Dr. Tavis mentioned the necessity to have a machine in the building for no other reason than to avoid regulatory issues.
- Dr. Hoft has a counter, but it's in a 96-well plate format. Pharm/Phys Dept has one, which of course is in another building. The distance poses an issue for DRC investigators with the handling of radioactivity.
- Dr. Ford asked if any other departments are using radioactivity. Dr. Tavis from the MMI Dept is a user; he thought Dr. Lynda Morrison might also have an active protocol although he wasn't certain.
- Dr. Ford stated that although only a few investigators are currently using the scintillation counter, it's important for a research facility in the school of medicine to have one. It's eventually going to be needed by others. Dr. DiPaolo agreed.
- Dr. Samson gave his approval by stating that it is essential we have resources like this for future recruitment. Dr. Ford agreed and stated that this unit will probably go very high on the capital equipment request list.

Action Item: This equipment will be voted on in next month's meeting.

3. Interim Sr. Associate Dean for Research Update

Dr. Adriana Montaña, Interim Sr. Associate Dean for Research, provided a PPT presentation.

- **Topic: Consulting Engagement with HURON Regarding Clinical Trials**
- This is a 16-week engagement that will validate our understanding of foundational current state assumptions, including:
 - Research Portfolio, Active Investigators, and Research Revenue Trends
 - Leadership, Governance and Organizational Alignment
 - Clinical Trial Operations (CTO)
 - Research Compliance
 - Information Technology
- This group will also gather feedback to inform our future state design thinking (e.g., what are the "must have" elements for infrastructure support clinical trials); the meetings began this week.
- Dr. Baldan asked if this consulting group was in response to the letter that Dean Jacobs received from the ECFA (Executive Committee of the Faculty Assembly). According to him, the Dean was sent a letter explaining the deplorable conditions in this institution for clinical research and the administrative burden imposed upon researchers - like getting IRB approvals and talking to the CTO people.
- Dr. Montano confirmed that the letter was addressed to Dr. Jacobs and Ken Olliff in the OVPR. She said the decision to hire the consulting group was somewhat in response to the letter but was mostly related to concerns that have been in the organization for a while.
- Dr. Jain wanted to know if this focus group was more for clinicians to drive clinical trials, for the PhD teams to do it, or was it for both groups.

- Dr. Montano stated that there are two sources of funding: industry sponsored clinical trials are managed by CTO (Dr. Oleg Kisselev can give the details on this), and the federally funded clinical trials that are managed by the OVPR. This last group is done by clinicians with a coordinator.
- Dr. Jain stated that he had a clinical trial lined up that was industry supported, but the IRB issues caused the company to withdraw.
- Dr. Nayak agreed with Dr. Jain and stated that one of his junior investigators this week lost out on an industry-sponsored trial because of CTO and IRB hang-ups at SLU. In his opinion, these trials help clinicians gain experience and develop a network before they apply for NIH grants.
- Drs. Jain and Nayak offered to speak with the Huron group about the hurdles faced by clinicians in research.
- Dr. Scherrer participated in the initial meeting with Huron and thought it was positive. It was mostly focused on clinical trials with some emphasis on IRB. The topics discussed in today's RPC meeting were very much a part of the discussion with Huron. He feels this consulting group has a very good grasp of the issues the university is facing, how those issues came about, and how to provide ways to resolve them. Other universities have experienced similar hurdles.
- In response to the concerns raised by Dr. Jain that clinicians should have access to the Huron group, Dr. Montano confirmed that the discussions thus far have included all clinicians except one – Dr. Jeff Scherrer.
- Dr. Nayak suggested the possibility of having a decentralized approach to clinical trials to make the process more efficient.
- Dr. Kisselev stated that many SOM departments with underdeveloped infrastructures prefer a centralized approach. He felt that Huron has the experience to figure this out and guide us.
- Dr. Albers attended the Huron meeting where Huron acknowledged this issue. They stated that the resolution will probably involve a hybrid approach. He thought the meeting was well-represented by various types of clinical research within SLU.
- Dr. Montano stated the first debriefing will be in January. At that time, the next set of groups will be established. Everything should be finished with Huron by May.

Action Item: Dr. Ford encouraged those who want to be involved in future discussions with Huron to contact Dr. Montano.

4. OVPR Update

Matthew Christian, Associate Vice President for Research and Chief of Staff, provided a PPT presentation.

- **Topic: External Funding for the School of Medicine; slides included the following:**
- Research Expenditures by Month (SOM)
- Year to Date Annual Expenditure Comparison (November of FY20, FY21, FY22 vs. Annual FY19, FY20, FY21, FY22)
- Year to Date Annual Expenditure by Department (FY21 vs. FY22)
- Mr. Christian stated that the OVPR will be in discussions with the Executive Committee of the Faculty Assembly (ECFA) tomorrow about IRB concerns. The OVPR has a team that meets once a week to discuss any award that is over a week old. Dr. Oleg Kisselev provides the OVPR with any concerns out of the clinical trials or industry-sponsored clinical trials group – approaching the issues as a team. Mr. Christian stated they are trying to manage exponential growth in award funding at this stage.

- Dr. Nayak encouraged the OVPR to showcase scholarly, investigator publications and not just grant funding. Mr. Christian and Dr. Montano are currently working with a group called Academic Analytics that will be able to aggregate and publish this information for both clinical and basic science researchers. Currently, the OVPR is lacking the capability to collect this information for SOM investigators.
- Dr. Montano stated that the new software has many advanced features and will allow the OVPR to present the publication information in a variety of ways.
- Dr. Samson gave some insights on impact factors and how the publication system works.
- Dr. DiPaolo applauded the growth referenced in Mr. Christian's presentation but also cautioned that the infrastructure in the research administration must be fixed. Issues with IRB and similar hurdles must be resolved in preparation for future growth and the ability to recruit new faculty.
- Dr. Tavis stated that Dr. Maureen Donlin is making a push for improvements to the IT research network infrastructure. Mr. Christian stated that IT testing will be done on the major science buildings this spring.
- Dr. Scherrer stated that Huron was made aware of the lack of ITS support for research services. Overall, the ITS Department is in stiff competition with industry in its ability to recruit and retain IT personnel.
- Dr. John Walker expanded on the plea for infrastructure resolutions and mentioned an inability to invoice on subcontracts. He recently lost 100's of thousands of dollars because no one knew how to navigate Workday. Dr. Montano stated that Tammy Burton's office (SOM Finance) is working to resolve these issues by providing more training to the business managers. Ms. Burton supported Workday and its capabilities but also agreed that additional training is needed.
- In reference to Dr. DiPaolo's initial plea for infrastructure resolutions, Dr. Olliff agreed. He stated that the current challenge is to move from being in a reactive state to having a proactive plan. He felt that the RPC could help the OVPR determine where the biggest pain points are right now and in the future. He also stated that a 2022 OVPR priority will be to make the data democratized and usable; everyone including the PIs and chairs will have access to the data.
- Dr. Ford immediately responded to Dr. Olliff's statement and listed the most pressing issues for research: IRB needs, ITS needs, Workday needs. To whom do we address these issues, Dr. Ford asked. Dr. Olliff suggested that he himself, Dean Jacobs, Dr. Ford (RPC chair), and Dr. Montano (Sr. Assoc. Dean of Research) should be the ones to spearhead these discussions in the coming months. He also thought it would be beneficial to use the RPC to resolve many ongoing concerns. Dr. Ford then asked the committee members to send him by Jan. 7th their comments on improvements that are needed now and in the future for our research enterprise.
- Dr. Jain asked for a simple method within Workday to get access to grant information, like account numbers, expenditures, and balances. Dr. Tavis supported this plea for a simple dashboard. Drs. Ford and Baldan both stated that they too have no up-to-date knowledge about the balances on their accounts.
- In response, Mr. Christian suggested that he, Ms. Burton and Ms. Dagmar Ralphs get together and make sure PIs and business managers are equipped concerning Workday. Dr. DiPaolo stated that the issue is not the ineptitude of the business managers but a lack of transparency in Workday. Ms. Burton agreed that a standardization of the system is

needed and is in the works. She also stated that active engagement by all department personnel is very helpful to quicken the process.

- Dr. Baldan asked for a realistic timeline when the PIs will have access to financial data on a regular basis. Dr. Tavis stated that he recently lost significant funding because he was not aware that funds were still in his accounts prior to the grant expiration dates. He would have timed the spending correctly if he had known the account balances.
- Mr. Christian reminded everyone that Workday and ITS are not part of his department – he is only a user of the system. The issue is university wide.
- In response, Dr. DiPaolo stated that the issue needs to be elevated to a higher level in leadership if the OVPR will not take responsibility for or ownership of the issues with Workday. Mr. Christian stated that he and Ms. Burton are in discussions with Kyle [Collins] and David and will get back to the group with more information next month.
- In the interim, Dr. Tavis asked for a simple set of “Instructions for Dummies” on what to click to get to the needed data in Workday. Ms. Burton and others thought this was a very doable and helpful idea.
- Dr. Walker asked for the same type of instructions to invoice for multi-institutional grants since he has lost significant funding. Ms. Burton stated that this type of issue might be more related to incorrect grant set-up on the front end. Dr. Ford mentioned that he has experienced the same type of loss with his subcontracts.

5. Old Business / New Business – David Ford & Group Discussion

- It was agreed that the deadline for proposing agenda items is the Friday prior to the next meeting.
- The February 2022 meeting will be dedicated to reviewing the SOM PRF’s (President’s Research Fund) applications.
- The January 2022 meeting will involve ranking capital equipment requests. The RPC’s involvement has been requested by the Dean [Dr. Jacobs] and Tammy Burton. Dr. Ford asked the RPC not to focus on the dollar amount for each item but to focus on essential vs non-essential needs. He requested feedback on the list by Jan. 7th and will try to develop a rubric in preparation for the next meeting.
- Research Opportunity Fund – This fund received \$300K in July 2020. The current balance is around \$47K. Where have the funds been allocated thus far:
 - Most of the funds have gone to the Genomics Core.
 - A pilot program funded several investigators. Dr. Ford will ask those investigators for an update.
 - The nano-assembler was funded and has produced a good return on investment.
 - Around \$19K went towards a pyrogen-free FPLC presented by Dr. Hawiger.
- Dr. Tavis believes the priority of the Fund should be on items that support many investigators and have a leveraging effect beyond one lab. Dr. Ford agreed.
- Dr. DiPaolo stated that more growth in the Genomics Core is expected. For example, digital spatial transcriptomics is a new and emerging technology, and a profiler for this technology is currently managed by Dr. Grant Kolar. Use of the profiler is expensive but should be supported. He emphasized that this Fund is needed to support ongoing and future innovative research efforts such as this.
- Dr. Ford plans to craft a request for an additional \$300K. He will provide examples on how the funds could potentially be used. Dr. Olliff applauded the RPC’s management of

the Fund and supported its plan to request additional monies. He offered to present it at the next SCRI meeting, which is scheduled a few months from now.

- Dr. DiPaolo will get back to the committee concerning the business plan for growing the Genomics Core.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Sandra Cornell
SOM Research Planning & Operations Manager