



**University Research Council  
Minutes  
October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

Attendees:

Mo Elbestawi, Chair  
Fiona McNeill  
Peter Mascher  
Nick Markettos  
Gianni Parise

Tony Porter  
Kathy Charters  
Brent Davis  
Stephen Collins  
Naresh Agarwal

Barb McKenna  
Vivian Lewis  
Bonny Ibhawoh  
Greg Weiler

Regrets:

Elsie Quaite-Randall

**AGENDA**

1. Minutes of University Research Council Meeting of June 10, 2013 (attached)
2. Business Arising/Action Items
3. Big Data Analytics
4. Development of a Research Account Overdraft Policy (Fiona McNeill/Barb McKenna)
5. Discussion of the New Budget Model – Implications for Research (Stephen Collins)
6. Performance Measures/Administrative Processes (Tony Porter)
7. Differentiation Metrics for Research Intensive Universities (Mo Elbestawi)

### **MINUTES OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COUNCIL MEETING OF JUNE 10, 2013**

- Dr. Parise motioned to accept the minutes of the June 10, 2013 meeting; Dr. Collins seconded the motion. Motion carried.

### **BUSINESS ARISING/ACTION ITEMS FROM JUNE 10, 2013 MEETING:**

1. Each Research Administration office to develop an FAQ for its website addressing the services that are and are not provided.
  - Given that the Mosaic system launch is approaching and will affect how some services are provided, Research Finance is waiting until after the go-live date for the financial tools for Mosaic (scheduled for early December 2013) before developing their FAQ. The other research support offices have developed their FAQs and are posting these on their respective websites.
2. A sub-committee, consisting of Brent Davis, Dr. Porter, Nick Markettos, and Barb McKenna, is to meet and discuss processes faculty have identified that could be improved and discuss these with the VP and the AVP Administration.
  - A Principal Investigator Focus Group, consisting of a cross-section of faculty members, has been formed to solicit feedback from faculty regarding how these processes will be addressed in Mosaic and identify those processes that could benefit from improvement that will not be addressed in Mosaic and these can be taken to the VP and AVP Administration for discussion. This is an ongoing initiative.
3. An awards sub-committee, consisting of Dr. McNeill and the Associate Deans of Research, is to review which awards, both internal and external, are relevant to the faculty and then engage the research offices in implementation plan.
  - This meeting is being organized.
4. Follow up with Faculties to gauge interest in developing a promotional video related to research success stories at McMaster, follow up with the VPR's Communications staff.
  - A video focusing on nuclear research is in development as the 'prototype' and is scheduled for completion by January 1, 2014. Other areas of research excellence will be identified once the initial video is completed.
5. The Associate Deans of Research are to consider if the Student Entrepreneurship Plan will be supported by the Council and reply to Dr. Elbestawi.
  - Dr. Elbestawi received positive responses from some of the Associate Deans and all expressed during this Council meeting that they are generally in favour of the plan.
6. Consideration to be given to best practices for carrying out and promoting interdisciplinary research and publicly depositing research results.
  - This consideration is ongoing. Vivian Lewis requested that 15 minutes be set aside during the December Council meeting for a presentation on the university depository.

## **BIG DATA ANALYTICS**

- The government is interested in the digital economy and this is becoming a priority at the provincial and federal levels; CFI, the provincial and federal governments and the tri-council are all setting aside funding for data mining. Big data analytics is becoming an issue of concern to every faculty and university.
- Dr. Elbestawi proposed consideration of creating an interdisciplinary institute at McMaster based on a Canadian federal model, with quasi-independent centres existing within the Institute. He proposed a one-day workshop, where the Associate Deans would invite faculty members who are closest to the subject, with a discussion to be facilitated by an unbiased moderator. The purpose is to understand the needs, including the technical side (pipelines, storage, hardware), to brainstorm and to explore PhD or grad programs that emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of big data.
- Two objectives would be met during the workshop: (1) interest at faculty level would be gauged; and (2) the goals of the proposed Institute would be fine-tuned and a tangible plan would be developed including the next steps toward making McMaster a leader in this field. The VPR would contribute \$100,000 annually to such an Institute to support administration and other costs.
- The proposed Institute would include users of big data and those that study it and address issues related to data management, the development of analytical models, and research and developments with regard to cloud computing. Interdisciplinary programs are part of McMaster's tradition and there may be existing courses in each faculty that fit this concept.
- Some faculties already have plans in place related to this field; the Faculty of Health Sciences is creating two Chairs in this area, and Social Science is also implementing initiatives.
- Other universities are making moves in this field: Dalhousie has created the Institute for Big Data Analytics, the University of Alberta (via CRCs), and others are making investments in this area.
- The Council's role would be to bring McMaster researchers in this area together to create a vision, rather than delivering a top-down approach.
- Dr. Collins raised the point that big data has different meanings for different people and faculties and that there would need to be guidance in these discussions as some are concerned with the collection and management of large volumes of data and others are interested in algorithms and advancing the analytical process. There are different areas of expertise that can be used in different ways. Informatics capacity is an issue and existing faculty are very focused on their individual areas.
- Dr. Elbestawi asked each Council member to send him a brief description on what big data means and their thoughts on this proposal.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A RESEARCH ACCOUNT OVERDRAFT POLICY**

- There is no current policy or mechanism for the resolution of overdrafts and uncollectable debts resulting from research activity. An Overdraft Policy Working Group has been created to develop and propose a new policy that will address this issue and include elements of risk assessment at the pre-award stage of funding.
- The Working Group has found two possible resolutions:
  - (1) Faculties would backstop overdrafts and debts for their faculty members; or,

- (2) A general pool of funds could be created, taking >1% of overhead from each Faculty. This pool would be accessible to the contributing Faculties to cover overdraft and uncollectable debts only once all avenues to resolve the issue externally and collect the debt have been exhausted. The proposed policy will include a clear process regarding how this pool of funds is to be handled. Dr. Collins stated that the Faculty of Health Sciences already handles this issue internally.
- The issue was left with the Associate Deans for consideration and they are to contact Dr. McNeill with their feedback.

### **KATHY CHARTERS –CFI ANNOUNCEMENT**

- Kathy Charters made announcements regarding the CFI funding and informed the group of changes to the CFI programs and how the applications for 2013-2014 will be handled by ROADS. Kathy will communicate the changes and disseminate these to the faculty.

### **DISCUSSION OF THE NEW BUDGET MODEL – IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH** (Stephen Collins)

- Concerns with the implementation of the new budget model are likely for all faculties as the division of specific funds included in the new budget model are unclear, such as the Research Infrastructure Fund and the VPR's discretionary and non-discretionary budget allocations.
- Dr. Elbestawi provided some clarification on elements of the new model as it relates to research. The Research Infrastructure Fund is under the control of the Provost and set aside for infrastructure maintenance and projects; the VPR has no input on the use of these funds.
- Under the former budget model, the VPR was able to incentivize faculty members for pursuing large research grants by agreeing to reinvest the portion of the indirect costs that were under the VPR's control; however, under the new model, all indirect costs will flow directly to the Faculties, so central commitments from these funds will no longer be possible.
- The VPR's non-discretionary budget will remain as this budget supports the central research admin staff, and various labs reporting to the VPR's office.
- The new budget model is driven by recruitment and activity, not research intensity and many faculties are looking at a cost recovery approach.
- Under the new budget model, there are different levels of involvement at Associate Dean of Research level across the faculties; in some faculties the Deans are handling the budget with little involvement of the Associate Deans.
- There was concern expressed that there needs to be room for institutional initiatives at the central level to enable a researcher to seek support from a central fund/office, rather than being required to go from faculty to faculty to seek support for large projects. Research intensive institutions do not operate in this manner.
- Dr. Parise asked if the existing Indirect Cost Policy will remain effective since the VPR will not receive a portion under the distribution and wondered if the Faculty, as the decision-

makers for indirect costs, are able to set the indirect cost rates. This remains an open question.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES/ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES** (Tony Porter)

- With the hiring of 3 new Research Facilitators in Humanities, Business and Social Science, Dr. Porter suggested that performance measures would help establish improved efficiency and demonstrate the impact of these positions.
- Various systems are currently utilized throughout the university and Mosaic will improve data access and data management and assist with compiling measures required for provincial/federal reporting with respect to research. Institutional Analysis is taking input on a university performance measure system.
- The Council is to consider best practices and communicate these to Dr. Porter.
- Dr. Porter will proceed by working with Kathy Charters to determine relevant research metrics and will work with his Faculty to track publications. He asks the Council to consider a system of metrics and forward any suggestions to him and he will develop harmonized metrics and include a discussion on these on the next agenda.

**DIFFERENTIATION METRICS FOR RESEARCH INTENSIVE UNIVERSITIES**

- This is an ongoing and growing issue which was discussed at the U15 VPR meeting and OCUR. Dr. Elbestawi will pass along information to the Associate Deans that is relevant to their roles.
- Greg Weiler pointed out that universities have tendency to look at measures that relate to promotion and tenure and metrics for research should focus on impact measure and return on investment.
- Further discussion to continue in future meetings.

**ACTION ITEMS**

Item	Responsible
1. Each Council member is to send Dr. Elbestawi a 2-3 line description of how they define big data and give feedback on his proposal for a workshop	All Council members
2. Each Associate Dean of Research is to consider the proposal regarding an Overdraft Fund presented by Dr. McNeill and send Dr. McNeill their feedback	All Associate Deans of Research
3. Kathy Charters to disseminate information regarding CFI funding announcements to the Associate Deans of Research	Kathy Charters

<p>4. The Council is to consider a system of metrics and forward suggestions to Dr. Porter who will work on developing harmonized metrics and discuss these at the next meeting.</p>	<p>All Council members and Dr. Porter</p>
--	---