

**University of Massachusetts Amherst
Research Council of the Faculty Senate
Paul Utgoff, Chair
2006-2007
Minutes
June 1, 2007**

PRESENT: C. Clifton, L. Sievert, D. Ostendorf, W. Patterson, T. Butterfield,
P. Kostecki, M. Malone, B. McCandless, P. Utgoff

The meeting was called to order at 9:08 a.m. Minutes of the May 5, 2007 meeting were unanimously approved with the following correction: in the fourth paragraph, the third from the last sentence should read "Chair Utgoff suggested that the next step in the process would be to refer the issue to the Research Policy Committee for review."

This special meeting of the Research Council was called specifically to respond in a timely manner to the Provost's earlier request that the Research Council advise the Provost regarding the process to be used by her for the allocation of eight faculty positions held in a research pool as part of the campus' 250 plan.

RC Chair Utgoff submitted a draft memorandum which incorporated several recommendations addressed at the Council meeting on May 5, 2007. One of the Council's suggestions was to hire new faculty in clusters which would provide a means to grow in areas in which the campus wishes to achieve both coverage and excellence. The process for Provost receipt of cluster proposals was discussed at great length. Should they be filtered through Deans or should departments have the opportunity to access the Provost directly. Upon the advise of the Vice Provost for Research and the concurrence of other Council members, Deans should be involved in considering the proposals.

Discussion continued until it was **MOVED** to forward the Research Council's memorandum to the Provost once all the amendments had been included. This action was **APPROVED** unanimously. The following memorandum will be forwarded to Provost Seymour.

To: Charlena Seymour, Provost
From: Paul Utgoff, Research Council Chair
Date: June 1, 2007
Subject: Process for Allocation of Eight Faculty Positions held in Research Pool

You have asked Research Council for its thoughts on how best to allocate the eight faculty positions that you have set aside temporarily in a "research pool." It is important to note first that we are supportive of the processes that have been followed to date, and we believe that these processes should continue. We find the research benchmarking process to be very well motivated, that one should provide faculty resources to those departments or programs that have invested

such resources well in the past, as measured by the products of research and broadly defined scholarly endeavors. We also support the general approach that directions for productive growth are understood best at the level of the individual faculty who have specific expertise and perspective in their respective areas. Individual faculty advocate at the department or program level for certain kinds of growth, department or program chairs/heads advocate at the college or school level, and deans advocate at the campus level. This general flow is healthy because it is the individual faculty who are most closely in touch with their intellectual communities and where they are heading. Tenure and promotion mechanisms also begin with individual faculty through their departmental personnel committees.

Our recommendation is based on three fundamental considerations. First, we believe that peer review of departments, such as that provided by an AQAD review, serves a highly useful purpose in providing feedback regarding priorities for growth. For such reviews, departments undertake a very healthy comprehensive process of self-examination that typically includes a carefully considered forward-looking component. One must always be moving in important directions as fields develop and progress. Special strengths, and adjacent growth areas in which one should build or acquire special strength, are identified by the department. The external reviewers often verify these views, and add their own perspective on which intellectual directions are most important and promising.

Second, we believe that departmental boundaries, defined by the expertise of the faculty within each department, can sometimes reflect an organization that may have evolved over a considerable period of time. Such an organization may not easily reflect newer ways in which researchers and scholars are interacting. For example, as new conferences and meetings come into being to serve the needs of researchers and scholars, the participants gather based on shared intellectual interests, which may span a set of more traditional academic disciplines. New journals also reflect shifting interests and patterns of intellectual interaction. We believe that colleges and schools on our campus need to respond to these shifts in intellectual interaction. Any such studies or planning documents prepared by a dean should be considered carefully. Such studies are extremely useful because they take a broad view that extends well beyond that of a single department or program. Indeed, traditional department and program boundaries are reconsidered as one ponders the various interactions among faculty and disciplines. As a single simple example of new kinds of interactions, one among many, bio-computing has deep intellectual interests within biology and within computer science. College level studies can address the problem of how best to organize and facilitate the various intellectual interests in order to maximize research impact.

Third, we believe that departments sometimes need more than one faculty position at a time to grow in an important direction. A single excellent young researcher may not wish to join an organization in which he or she will not have sufficiently intellectually close colleagues on campus. Furthermore, a new junior faculty member will not typically have as much perspective in growing a research area locally as that of a senior faculty member. That same junior faculty member may not yet have enough of a reputation or high regard to attract high

quality faculty colleagues. A junior faculty member competing for additional faculty positions, even at the departmental level, may be delayed several years. It is our view that your research pool of faculty positions should be used specifically to address the problem of achieving growth or excellence in strategically important areas for which allocation of just a single position will not be effective. To this end, we believe that a cohesive cluster of tenure-track faculty positions can provide a unique means to grow areas in which the campus wishes to achieve strength leading to excellence. We recommend that such a cluster consist of one senior member and either one or two junior members, with the senior member having a strong say in the selection and hiring of the junior member(s). One would hire the cluster at once, or instead hire the senior member for Fall 2008, with a commitment that the junior member(s) be hired for Fall 2009. We recommend two clusters of three, and one cluster of two, for a total of three clusters of eight faculty positions, three senior members total, and five junior members total. The goal is to develop excellence as soon as possible in areas that are deemed important. We do not address the budget issues, preferring to advise you on how to advance the campus research mission most effectively.

In view of these considerations, we recommend:

1. that you allocate these eight positions as three clusters, each consisting of one tenured senior faculty member and either one or two untenured junior faculty members, for a total of eight positions,
2. that you solicit proposals for a such a cluster of positions, at the department or program level, permitting the possibility of joint proposals, to be submitted to the relevant dean(s), cc to you, with a suitable page limit,
3. that the proposal justify the need for such a cluster, including the need for the new senior hire, and including how the cluster is expected to attain strength leading to excellence for the department or program, and the college campus as a whole,
4. that each proposal be seen as significantly strengthened to the extent that it is supported by a relevant departmental peer review, such as an AQAD review, or a comprehensive college level plan for growth in strategically important areas.

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.