The Advisory Committee to the Vice President for Research (AC/VPR)

Summary of the
General AC/VPR
Meeting
November 15, 2012 from 3-5 pm
University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus

Members Present: Michael Ashby, Eve Bannet, David Boeck, Fred Carr, Pat Hardre, Marguerite Keesee, George Richter-Addo, Ed Sankowski, Kim Winton, Musharraf Zaman

VPR Office Staff Present: Kelvin Droegemeier, Andrea Deaton, Alicia Knoedler, Rick Luce, Cathi Parker

Distributed Documents:
1. Contingency Planning for Federal Budget Sequestration (hardcopy)
2. U.S. Department of the Interior South Central Climate Science Center brochure (hardcopy)

VPR Update: Dr. Droegemeier welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the new members who were present: Marguerite Keesee, Rick Luce, and Kim Winton. Dean Rick Luce discussed his recent town hall meetings held by the University Libraries.

Review of input obtained at the last meeting: Dr. Alicia Knoedler delivered a summation of the September 24th General AC/VPR Meeting held in the CORE classroom and will distribute the final documents to the AC/VPR committee to review.

Overall:
- We need to look at our messaging and provide more reminders, more ways of helping people notice about what is going on in research. We should provide more versions of this info (newsletters, hardcopies, videos, personal conversations, etc.)
- We should play a role in helping faculty think more progressively about ways to bridge teaching and research.
- We need to be thoughtful AND SPEND SOME TIME trying to figure out how to motivate change for rewards in department Committee As. This might work through Dean relationships (Education, Architecture, AGS) or department relationships (the much larger task).
- We should think more carefully about providing services and resources to please everyone vs. providing those services (at the capacity that we have) to those people who are actually going to make use of them.

Q1
Bottom line – where is the reward for taking risks? It isn’t enough to provide resources (through VPR) and support (e.g., through CRPDE) to take the risk.

Faculty are seeking reward. However, the task is to identify what serves as a reward – money, time, recognition, having a job, etc. I would like to know what the priority order is here.

Q2
Bottom line – faculty don’t know how to make teaching and research work together. They need to be shown how to do it.

Sharing examples of successful bridging between research and teaching is desired; I think this is a good idea. If faculty are so busy just getting by, they may not have energy to dedicate to thinking creatively about how to solve this issue. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) is looking for ideas to how they can be supportive of teaching at OU. Perhaps we should have a few faculty lunches with Mark Morvant to discuss research and teaching and then have a seminar or two about effectively putting some ideas in to practice and having CTE staff provide support (people, but maybe financial). Also, perhaps we could provide funding for people who want to revamp a class to be more progressive and bring teaching and research. Their obligation in getting release time (for example) to prep this class (or summer funding) would be to be a mentor in CTE for other faculty who want to do this. This won’t work for everyone but those who don’t want to change don’t have to participate. CTE might also want to help faculty manage online course prep. Commenter #2 describes online courses as an increase to the workload. I think that depends on the individual and what they choose to do. It doesn’t have to be that way.

Q3
Two Bottom lines – faculty are shy and don’t know how to start collaborations (they seem to need examples and venues to push them to this); Similar to Q1 – where is the reward for collaboration?

Reward for collaboration seems to sit at the department level. In some departments, collaboration is valued and is part of the evaluation. In other departments, this is not the case, esp. in Arts and Humanities.

Q4
Bottom line – there is general agreement that the actions that have been taken and resources that have been built are having positive impact (CRPDE, DSI, CARD, Research Council, etc.).

There are some elements that faculty would like to see more of: help with collaborative opportunities, strategic hires, more money, more recognition awards, Challenge Grants, etc.

Other thoughts:
Senior faculty seem genuinely worried about junior faculty and the barriers they face in terms of academic traditions; however, I have yet to hear how these faculty are going to band together to push other colleagues to let go or be a bit more progressive in accepting alternatives to these traditions.

Faculty seem to have some serious blinders on when it comes to thinking outside the box about what is possible at OU and around them. For example, with FIP, they can apply for almost anything but they seem blind to the possibilities or they NEED to see an example list. But, as Marguerite pointed out, faculty are very busy with their day to day and don’t take the time to really push themselves out of that. I understand this behavior but don’t necessarily think it leads to success (it means just getting by).
Table 2 – statements overheard once faculty were asked to start discussing and use the room to present their notes: I am a technophobe, so someone else should do the typing; we should have someone nimble do these things; who is running this thing; decide among yourselves who is going to type.

Other things overhead:
We can’t all have big centers like Kelvin
Where are the resources to hire mid-career faculty?

Question 1: Taking Risks
Do barriers exist that serve to prevent or discourage faculty from taking risks (e.g., pursuing especially novel or big ideas, assuming a leadership role in projects, moving into new topics)? If so, what are they, and what actions might be taken – at the departmental, college and institutional levels – to reduce or eliminate these barriers and incentivize and reward risk-taking?

Table 1
- Dept and Committee A support needed – VPR support is there; need more support from Provost and other offices (President)
- Faculty time – they are overloaded
- Annual evaluation doesn’t mention risk
- Proposals are only valued if funded (they should be valued for submissions)
- Problematic to separate teaching and research
- Interdisciplinary viewed differently across differently by discipline
- Forced time out of university for new ideas with no teaching
- Why take risk with no hope of increased pay
- Seed funding – investment
- How do maintain quality?
- Examine/reinforce/update evaluation criteria taking into account modern trends

Table 2
- Evaluation – size of college matters – larger colleges seem problematic; some departments might be open to a pilot project
- What do we value – interdisciplinary, applied, collaborative
- There aren’t enough journals to publish applied work or need to change the value of certain journals or value interdisciplinary journals

Commenter #1
I think junior faculty sometimes face a barrier in the form of conventional expectations of tenured faculty in our college. (We do not have separate departments.) An assistant professor who is excited about collaboration on grants and multidisciplinary projects may be encouraged under the conventional wisdom to avoid doing this kind of work. Although some caution is appropriate on the part of an assistant professor in this position, this kind of research is quite important in the current academic and professional world of journalism and mass communication. At the college level we have begun giving course reductions midway toward the
tenure year, but additional/special course reductions for junior faculty involved in external grant applications and multidisciplinary projects might be possible with university-level support.

Commenter #2
The administration at OU should figure out what it really wants from its faculty. For at present, there are two competing and increasingly incompatible agendas at OU, both apparently issuing from Evans Hall, both pushing hard in opposite directions. They cancel each other out.

Question #2: Teaching “vs” Research
Classroom instruction and research often are viewed in higher education as distinct, competing activities. To what extent is this true at OU, and what actions might be taken – at the departmental, college and institutional levels – to ensure that teaching and research are mutually reinforcing, tightly coupled and even conducted simultaneously?

Table 1
- Research has advanced and teaching has not
- Teaching is old school
- No system in place to reward teaching. Tenure just for teaching?
- We do not have an objective way of judging teaching. We do for research.
- Faculty specialists. Complement rather than compete.
- Student evals are the only eval tool. Certain courses won’t evaluate well.
- Graduate courses combine teaching and research.
- Teaching is narrowly defined. Seat time

Table 2
- Marketing (making an argument) the balance between R and T, esp. to outside of OU

Commenter #1
I think the extent of reinforcement/connection versus competition varies greatly among individual faculty members depending on their research areas. I am studying ethics in social and online media while teaching media ethics, so the connection for me is straightforward. This is true for some others in our college, but for others the research area is more distant from teaching assignments. In some graduate courses or advanced undergraduate courses, it may be possible to conduct joint faculty-student projects that address course content. Providing a vehicle at the institutional level for sharing examples of reinforcing or simultaneous teaching and research work in particular classes across the university could be helpful.

Commenter #2
Same comment as Q1.

Question #3: Collaboration:
Collaboration is an important component of scholarship in virtually every discipline, yet universities heavily emphasize rewarding individual achievement. What steps might be taken at OU to improve faculty collaboration across disciplines, colleges, and with external institutions, and how might the existing reward structure be changed to stimulate and reward collaborative activities?
Table 1
- VPR supports collaboration
- Valuing collaboration varies by department
- Update eval criteria. How do you get departments to invest in updating these criteria
- Facilitate collaboration within institution. Make connections
- Academic program review is an opportunity
- Need a path and an exemplar
- What would it take to work with the Dean to change a department's evaluation process?
- Collaboration is not mentioned in evaluation criteria

Table 2
- Need to be careful of top down collaborations
- Enlightening self-interest is a good incentive – choose partners carefully
- Faculty should look for partnerships
- CIP – collaborative investment program

Commenter #1
Comments under question 1 on incentives through course reduction are relevant here. I think the Faculty Challenge Grants and sustained opportunities of that kind at the university level can help to build this.

Commenter #2
There may be advantages for teams in the sciences to collaborate with faculty in the humanities, but I don't think it's generally the case the other way around. Humanities fields generally reward individual research. Actually, it would be quite stupid for successful research faculty, who are innovative, productive and respected in the profession, to shoot themselves in the foot in their fields by departing from their disciplinary norms, and I don't know that it would ultimately help OU.

Question #4: What’s Working:
What actions now being taken, or having recently been taken, by the University do you see as being most helpful in advancing research and creative activity? What other actions might be most effective in yielding additional significant and sustainable impacts?

Table 1
- FIP works (Research Council)
- Bring interdisciplinary teams together
- Strategic hires
- DSI was a focused approach
- Break down more physical walls in space renovations
- CRPDE works
- NTT RAs, Postdocs may or may not be allowed to be a PI, dependent on composition of group, not valued, no incentive.
Table 2
- Positive changes – CRPDE, RL, CARD, FIP,
- Improve reward structure for research achievements

Commenter #1
The development of CRPDE is helping by providing an additional sounding board and avenue for direction toward collaboration and funding possibilities. I think the Faculty Challenge Grant program and the restructured, more flexible Research Council grant program are also helpful. Broad sharing of progress and problems by grant recipients may, over time, help to increase the effectiveness of future projects funded this way.

Commenter #2
Same comment as Q1. On the one hand, admin wants more funded and perhaps prestigious/visibly publicly useful research: You have been brought in and your office established to push/stimulate/encourage faculty to do more of that (which is also the answer to #4, the most helpful thing done to advance research at OU).

On the other hand, because we're taking in more students each year and making budget cuts by firing TAs, there is an even bigger push from admin to eliminate course releases, ensure that faculty teach more students each year (75 the minimum –no problem where classes are taught in large lectures, a problem for instance in MLLL or Classics), and there's a plan to begin to move more and more instruction online. The latter will not only involve a great deal of faculty time re-tooling plus re-conceiving and re-working courses; as everyone I know who currently teaches online courses tells me, online instruction involves a huge amount more time dealing with students than frontal teaching does, and will thus cut into research time even more.

It's easier for the faculty, now squeezed between the two, to ignore your research initiatives than to ignore the demands being made on their teaching.

Sequestration and other planning to deal with Federal budget challenges: Dr. Droegemeier presented slides of the IDC Recovery & Expenditures by federal agencies. Some points given were: at OU, the more IDC grows, the more the VPR Office budget grows and the more the VPR office budget grows, the more money we have to invest in faculty across all disciplines; plans are to pay down the inherited debt while investing to grow research; of the $18 million budget, 75% will be used toward “perpetual” commitments; we could face $1.2 trillion sequestration for 2013-2021. Dr. Droegemeier presented sample slides showing the potential impact on the Norman campus. Budget cuts will not be allowed to diminish the University. Graduate students funded by federal grants should be protected. In the VPR Office, existing core research areas will receive priority consideration and institutional commitments will be honored for existing federal awards.

- Discussion ensued: appreciate the advance planning, keep faculty recognition programs, faculty is expected to come up with more for less so recognition for them is important, appreciate that we’re bold and not sitting back and waiting for things to happen; there is a real communication gap with faculty; before we communicate with the world, we need to talk to each other; how does the University inform new faculty of our “mission”; do departments send out “core values” to new faculty?; sometimes we’re too academic; how does the political climate affect OU?; how does sequestration affect me?; what do you
want from me?; transparency of the Sequestration memo distributed by the VPR Office was outstanding, should be used a learning tool; managing the conversation is very important; OU’s mission and the mission, vision, and values of the Norman Research Campus are listed on our website.

Possible changes to the Faculty Travel Assistance Program: At this time, the Faculty Travel Assistance Program is “one size fits all”, does not really function as 1/3, 1/3, 1/3. CRPDE has met with the Research Liaisons regarding the program and researched a three-year history of the disbursement of funding to determine the split between international and domestic requests. The average international request was for $1000 with the domestic requests averaging $500. Proposed changes include allocating the money directly to colleges each year instead of faculty and letting them control the distribution, this would ensure that all colleges have some funding. Colleges will have to prove that the allocations disbursed were for travel.

Discussion of SRI split process: The current SRI split is 18% of IDC recovery to program, 2% to dean. Traditionally, SRI has been predicated upon the base appointment. A short discussion ensued.

Next Meeting: The next meeting will be scheduled for Spring 2013 and will be held at 3-5 p.m. in the Charlie Conference Room. The website will be updated once final dates are selected.