

Financial and Administrative Policy Minutes
24th Meeting, AY 2022-23
Monday, April 3, 2023, 9:00 am
Meeting held remotely; Zoom meeting ID: 997 1982 8892

Members: David Spanagel (HUA, Chair), Hal Walker (CEAE), Joe Sarkis (BUS, FAP appointee to RPC), Tanja Dominko (BBT, COG Appointee), Kris Sullivan (Associate VP of Academic Affairs), Mike Horan (Executive VP and CFO, *Ex Officio*)

Guest: Bogdan Vernescu (Vice Provost for Research)

1. The meeting was called to order at 9:01am
2. The agenda was approved
3. Approval of the Minutes of the 22nd meeting were approved as amended
4. Approval of the Minutes of the 23rd meeting were postponed to the next meeting
5. Follow up on how WPI plans its acquisitions and utilization of state-of-the-art shared instrumentation

The Vice Provost for Research (VPR) gave an overview on university processes for the acquisition and utilization of major instrumentation. He began by summarizing recent acquisitions of major equipment (source of funding listed in parentheses), including Practice Point, LEAP (MassTech), Cold Spray 3D Printing (DOD), and research in the area of cell tissue engineering (Mass Life Sciences Center). These were all funded through major, external state and federal grants.

The VPR also outlined the process of establishing “cost centers” as a mechanism to charge for the use of major equipment. The process of charging for use began approximately 7 years ago. At that time, it was determined that it would be easier to set up cost centers for new research centers rather than for existing centers, given the multiple ownership of some pieces of equipment and the fact that much of the existing equipment was close to or passed its expected service life. Practice Point, LEAP and Sagamore were all established as “cost centers.” These cost centers are currently rolling out a new software called “I-Lab” to facilitate online billing and equipment reservations. This software will also allow for tracking of use of individual pieces of equipment, which will be useful in maintaining instruments and identifying future needs.

Regarding the Life Science and Bioengineering Center (LSBC), the VPR noted that WPI is trying to fund replacements for some major equipment but currently the needs are greater than the funds available. FAP asked what the estimated funding gap is for LSBC. The VPR noted that about \$3M is needed to replace equipment but currently there is only about \$1M in funds available. They are currently focusing on updating the confocal microscope and NMR.

Also regarding the LSBC, FAP asked the VPR how decisions are made regarding the purchase of capital equipment. The VPR explained that there is a committee in place made up of Department Heads affiliated with the center and that this committee makes these types of decisions. In a previous FAP meeting, a concern was raised about whether this committee or staff were making these decisions. The VPR explained that there was a misunderstanding about some previous purchases. The committee of Department Heads had made a priority list of expenditures, the top two of which were initially funded. At a later time, however, additional funding became available and so other items on the list were purchased (in priority order). The decisions were not made by staff.

One member of FAP made the point that it is often difficult to find funding to purchase equipment in the price range of \$60k to \$140k (which may not be eligible through large grants) and whether the university would make this more of a priority. The VPR noted that since funding for new instrumentation is limited, the priority goes to shared facilities. That being said, the VPR also noted that equipment in the price range of \$60k to \$140k can also be shared. The Associate VP of Academic Affairs added that there is also a \$500k deficient in deferred maintenance at the LSBC.

One member of FAP asked about the current activities of the Research Development Council (RDC). The VPR explained that the RDC meets quarterly with members nominated by the Deans. The Chair of CGSR is also a member. The RDC gives feedback to the VPR. One member of FAP asked whether it would be possible to disseminate the minutes of the quarterly RDC meetings. The VPR agreed this would be a good idea. Another member of FAP suggested the minutes of the RDC could possibly be included as an attachment or report to the the minutes of CGSR.

FAP also asked the VPR about whether it is time to re-think the return of indirect costs recovered from grants. The VPR explained that currently 10% of the indirect costs charged to the grant goes to the PI, 4% to the department of the PI, 2% to the Dean of Graduate Studies, and 2% to the VPR. A member of FAP asked whether it would be possible to utilize a greater overall fraction of indirect costs for research. To this point, the Executive VP and CFO noted that last year we brought in ~\$40M in research and had about \$8M in costs to support this research. Thus, currently our research costs more than we bring in with respect to indirect costs.

A member of FAP asked whether there would be any advantage to setting up a research foundation, for example in terms of charging differential rates for indirect costs. The VPR noted that a foundation would not provide any additional flexibility than already available.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 10:04am.

Respectfully,
Hal Walker
FAP Secretary