

White Paper: Formation of the Research and Scholarship Committee

This white paper is presented in fulfillment of the Academic Affairs Committee (AAC) charge (4):
“Develop a white paper describing a standing “Research Committee” (with an appropriate name for the committee to be created) of academic senate, and bring forward the proposal as a motion for Academic Senate, along with a list of initial charges and ongoing responsibilities.”

Background

RIT is at a clear point of transition in the evolution as a research institution. A key Dimension of the 2015-2025 RIT Strategic Plan is “the student-centered research university,” wherein RIT will be distinguished by research, scholarship, creative inquiry, teaching, and learning that are integrated across all degree levels and disciplines. Since the publication of the Strategic Plan, RIT has also seen a major shift in its classification by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education: from “Masters – Comprehensive” to “Doctoral University - Moderate Research Activity.” This change was precipitated by sustained graduation of greater than 20 Ph.D students per year. Concurrently, an emphasis on *interdisciplinary* scholarship has been underscored, arising from the precept that solving global challenges will require integration of knowledge, skills, and experiences from a wide array of disciplines and backgrounds. To this end, RIT recently convened a Committee on Interdisciplinary Work, to evaluate challenges and opportunities in initiating and sustaining meaningful collaborations across colleges and fields.

As these initiatives progress, it is clear that university policies and practices will likewise evolve and emerge to catalyze, facilitate, and sustain the growing research endeavor, while maintaining excellence in teaching and learning. Currently, mechanisms for the faculty role in shared governance related to research policies and procedures are diffuse and unclear. For example, in 2014 and 2015, the Academic Affairs Committee grappled with charges related to faculty affiliation in RIT Research Centers of Excellence. The committee discovered that while the topic had elements that spanned many standing committees, no single body was charged with evaluating and proposing policies specific to RIT’s research endeavor. A key outcome of this effort was the recommendation that a standing committee specifically aligned with research be established, which led to the 2016 charge to the AAC stated above.

Process

AAC identified a sub-committee of three faculty to lead this effort, and their process included:
1) benchmarking other universities, 2) working with the RIT VP of Research, Ryne Raffaele, to understand gaps where additional faculty input is needed in current practice, 3) seeking additional input provided by faculty members at RIT, and 4) consulting with RIT documents, such as the Policy library, the RIT 2015-2025 Strategic Plan, and research-related finance and administration documents.

Benchmarking was carried out by identifying universities who had standing committees focused on research issues and studying publicly-available information about their charges, activities, and findings. Universities included in this non-scientific, non-exhaustive benchmarking activity included University of Rochester, University at Buffalo, University of Pittsburgh, Case Western, Drexel, North Carolina State, Stanford, Emory University, Georgia Tech, Oakland University, UC Davis, Penn State, and University of Washington. Key items identified included committee name, responsibilities, charges, and current issues and challenges being addressed.

Summary of Findings

High-level summaries of key findings are included here to inform the thought process in making a recommendation on formation of an RIT Research and Scholarship Committee:

- Comparable committees at benchmarked universities were typically described as having responsibility to formulate or recommend new research policy, evaluate existing research policy and services, and/or advise on researcher responsibilities, particularly for research regulation and compliance
- Comparable committees were typically named “research committees” or “research and scholarship committees,” and many called out creative activity as being part of the scope. RIT has always valued scholarship and diverse contributions from faculty and must ensure continued participation of all faculty in the Institution’s development. Hence we would recommend including Scholarship as part of the title.
- Internal discussions highlighted the challenges facing interdisciplinary research and scholarship at RIT and the lack of existing policy mechanisms for catalyzing interdisciplinary collaborations.
 - For example, no policy currently addresses the formation, roles, responsibilities, or scope of research centers specifically, or to address issues like faculty affiliation into such centers.
 - Another example is “overhead” or indirect cost returns on grants. Many universities apply policy to the management of these returns intended to facilitate collaborations, a practice shown to improve interdisciplinary efforts (Kulage et al. 2011).
- There are several existing Governance policies that require periodic review, yet do not clearly fit into current committee charges. For example: Misconduct in Research and Scholarship C02.0 (last review (LR) 1996); Protection of Human Subjects in Research C05.0 (LR 2011); C04.0 Individual Conflict of Interest and Commitment Policy (as it relates to research) (LR 2011); C03.0 Intellectual Property Policy (LR 2009)
- In many cases, university-level research policy (including some of the examples above) are informed or determined by applicable Federal standards or funding agencies. However, comparable committees at benchmarked universities often grappled with university-level implementation issues, such as how to effectively communicate these policies to increase faculty awareness and compliance.

Recommendation

The sub-committee recommends that the Academic Senate form a Research and Scholarship Committee to represent the faculty in matters pertaining to research and scholarly activity.

The responsibilities of this Committee would be to evaluate, propose, and assess effectiveness of University-level policies and procedures with respect to research operations and facilities, and research regulation and compliance relating to faculty and student research and scholarship activities throughout the University.

The scope of this committee would include research and scholarship of all types for which University-level policies and procedures may apply (e.g., funded and non-funded; faculty and student; graduate and undergraduate). We recommend that the membership of this committee should include, beyond representatives from the Colleges and Senate, the Vice President of research or their representative and a representative from the Associate Deans of Research.

Based on internal and benchmarking research, we propose that the committee’s charges initially be formulated to address three key areas, although these may evolve over time as the

University's research and scholarship agenda naturally grow and change. Example charges are provided for each, recognizing that narrowing the scope to high-priority items would likely be necessary to create an appropriate charge within a given year

1) Building capacity for research and scholarship.

Example Charges:

- Evaluate sufficiency and opportunities for improvement of current models and mechanisms for strategic reinvestment in research and scholarship (e.g., the University overhead return model, seed funds for research initiation)
- Propose mechanisms for catalyzing interdisciplinary research (e.g., overhead return distributions between colleges, credit for collaborating researchers on sponsored awards)
- Propose policy and guidelines for forming or affiliating with a named research center or lab (including Centers for Research Excellence and Signature Interdisciplinary Research Areas)
- Review and advise on effectiveness and opportunities for improving existing research-support infrastructure (e.g., Grant Writer's Boot Camp; Research Computing)

2) Evaluating research policy and compliance

Example Charges:

- Review existing research-related policies, such as Misconduct in Research and Scholarship C02.0 (last review (LR) 1996); Protection of Human Subjects in Research C05.0 (LR 2011); C04.0 Individual Conflict of Interest and Commitment Policy (as it relates to research) (LR 2011); C03.0 Intellectual Property Policy (LR 2009)
- Review the adequacy of RIT resources (e.g., information and communication) provided to assist faculty with policy compliance (e.g., Human Subjects Research)
- Assess existing grievance mechanisms (faculty and student) for their ability to cover research-related concerns

3) Strategic assessment and advancement of research and scholarship

Example Charges:

- Evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of current systems for collecting data to characterize university-level faculty scholarship (e.g., Faculty Scholarship Report).
- Evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of current systems for collecting university-level data on sponsored research (e.g., RAPID)
- Advise VP for Research and/or Sponsored Research Services as necessary with respect to calls for proposals with limited submissions.

Motion 1:

The Academic Senate establishes the Research and Scholarship Committee:

Research and Scholarship Committee. The Research and Scholarship Committee shall evaluate, propose, and assess effectiveness of University-level policies and procedures relating to faculty and student research and scholarship activities. The committee shall also serve as liaison for the Senate with the Vice President of Research and with other appropriate

administrators and administrative policy bodies of the University. The committee shall consist of one faculty member per college, each to be elected by his or her collegial faculty; three members at large elected by the Academic Senate; one Associate Dean for Research (or equivalent) selected by the Deans Council; and the Vice President of Research or his or her delegate (ex-officio, voting).