

Council of Principal Investigators (CPI)

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 21, 2021, 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m., Microsoft Teams

Members in attendance: Gregory Collins, Lynette Daws, Katherine Dondanville, Charles France, Bess Frost, Randolph Glickman, David Libich, Daniel Lodge, Susannah Nicholson, Adam Salmon, Mark Shapiro, Darpan Patel, Susan Weintraub

Members Absent: Armen Akopian, Asma Khan

Guest: Jennifer Potter, Ph.D., Vice President for Research

Dr. Potter met with the CPI to discuss the strategic plan for the Institution as a whole and for the LSOM in particular. Feedback from the recent VPR Town Hall was also discussed. Dr. Lodge opened the meeting and welcomed Dr. Potter, who then addressed the Council.

1. Updates

- VPR Budget. Dr. Potter noted that upon taking the position of VPR she negotiated with the President that her budget would include \$500k for strategic planning. Also, a rigorous assessment of the budget was conducted. She found that some funds allocated for strategic planning were being used for other items. Her ultimate goal is to be sure there are funds in the budget for planning purposes. She also wants an allocation, possibly as much as \$1M, to cover incidental needs of researchers. Dr. Potter stated she would be happy to meet with the CPI again to explain the budget in more detail.
- VPR Office Organization. Dr. Potter reported that the Office of Technology Commercialization is now under the direction of Dr. Giuffrida, the VP of Strategic & Investor Relations, and is no longer included in the VPR budget. She introduced Dr. Mark Goldberg, the new Asst. VP for Strategic Research Initiatives who oversees outward-facing partnerships with external partners as well as specialized initiatives, such as UT STARS applications and grant seekers programs. Dr. Joseph Schmelz is now overseeing DLAR, the Cores, research IT and IACUC. Dr. Kimberly Summers has been promoted to Asst. VP and will focus on protection of human subjects and development of infrastructure for clinical research.
- Town Hall. There was good attendance at the recent virtual Town Hall (about 70 attendees).
- The VPR's office is working with the VA to address challenges at the VA related to human subject research.
- A new director has been hired for the IRB office—Wanda Quezada—to replace a key staff member who left the HSC. Ms. Quezada was recruited from MD Anderson and has a strong background in overseeing human research.
- A Clinical Scholars program is being developed that aims to facilitate partnerships between physician researchers and basic scientists to support collaborative research, particularly with projects containing a strong basic science component. (It was noted that the Clinical Scholars program will not compete with the Clinical Science program).

A tentative curriculum for this program is available, with the expectation that the program will start within the next 12 months.

- Efforts are underway to resolve slowness issues with ORCA.
- Changes in the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs introduced by Dr. Oyajobi were summarized, in particular related to the English language proficiency requirements and relaxation of time limits on the duration of postdoctoral fellowships.

2. Strategic Plan Goals

- Create a research environment to attract and retain high-performing research teams
- Lead discovery in targeted research areas
- Enhance IP commercialization (patent applications)
- Grow translational and clinical research that leverages a larger clinical footprint
- Promote multidisciplinary research and community partnerships, in particular in conjunction with the new VP for Development/Chief Development Officer
- Several other ideas are being considered for the Strategic Plan, including the research portfolios of the basic sciences and clinical departments. The basic sciences are performing better than comparable institutions while clinical departments are not doing as well.

3. Long-Term Considerations

- Dr. Lodge was very supportive of the goals of the strategic plan and wanted to know what would be needed to achieve the goals and whether they are feasible or not. Current deficiencies in institutional planning were discussed, including the lack of infrastructure maintenance and needs for maintaining and updating institutional cores. Although the President mentioned a five-year strategic plan in his recent town hall, details of the plan were not presented. One exception has been the DLAR, which has developed a long-term plan that is currently being budgeted.
- Dr. Potter replied that they are working on funding such developmental and maintenance plans, some of which extend over 10 years and require long-term budgeting. With respect to budgets, Dr. Potter noted that one of the challenges is that financial resources are not located in one place but are distributed throughout the institution (i.e., in departments, schools, and the President's Office). A mechanism needs to be found to direct spending more efficiently where it is needed. Dr. Potter added that there is a five million dollar reserve, and a proposal is being developed for a long-term reserve spending plan.
- Dr. Potter concluded by stating that the strategic plan needs to have realistic, actionable goals, and not just be aspirational.

4. Discussion

- Dr. Shapiro asked about the potential for clinical-basic science research partnerships to alleviate the frequent problem of clinicians lacking access to lab space and basic science research support. He provided a personal example of his orthopedic surgeon who wants to conduct research, but she has no support for preparation of grant applications and no lab space. He asked what could be done to facilitate this talented clinical scientist's research?
- Dr. Nicholson described the challenges facing clinicians who want to engage in research, including pressure to earn RVUs and the need to secure external funding to buy down clinical time. Working with basic scientists could alleviate some of these challenges by providing scientific support and assisting in obtaining funding. Dr. Potter noted that one of the challenges of this situation is the income differential between time

spent on research and high-revenue clinical activities. A possibility would be for the basic scientist to provide, for example, 80% of the effort while creating an environment in which the 20% time of the clinician could be very effective.

- Dr. Lodge suggested that research requirements in existing clinical residency programs may give clinicians-in-training opportunities to gain experience in basic science labs and ultimately provide a pipeline of clinician scientists.
- Dr. Potter said she viewed fostering such relationships (between clinical and basic science departments) as part of the VPR's duties and she would cover the cost to initiate meetings between clinical and basic science departments to develop such relationships. Dr. Potter added that the meetings should be faculty- and chair-driven. Dr. Libich added that there needs to be buy-in from chairs to foster collaboration with basic science departments.
- There was discussion about ways to initiate connections and set up and manage meetings.
- Dr. Lodge wanted to know how the vice deans of research in each school of the institution interact with the VPR. Dr. Potter replied that she meets with all of them at least monthly in a working session, not only to brief them on VPR activities and strategic planning, but also for problem-solving.
- Dr. Potter concluded by saying she has not ignored the Research Core Labs but has been in a listening mode to understand the functions of the Cores and their challenges before developing plans to address their issues and needs.

No other topics were raised with Dr. Potter, and she left the meeting.

5. CPI Business

- The March CPI meeting minutes were approved.
- Communication Officer update. Dr. Frost met with Dr. Mok about the faculty engagement survey and noted that the results of that survey have been released to department chairs. If a departmental chair has not disseminated the survey data to faculty members, Dr. Frost can provide contacts to "faculty champions," if needed.
- Travel Policy update. Due to continuing problems with the new travel system, Dr. Lodge assembled a problem-solving working group to meet with Ginny Gomez-Leon and Monique Lopez. One of the issues was slow turnaround in booking flights through Concur. A proposed solution is to allow travelers to make their own arrangements through Concur or possibly other channels. It was noted that if travelers choose to book travel outside of Concur, they will have to pay up-front with personal funds, while university funds are used if the travel is booked through Concur. Dr. Lodge stated that work on these issues will continue to improve the process.
- EDGE. There was a meeting with Andrea Marks concerning issues with EDGE. One major concern is the post award process. A new manager role was created to try to improve post-award capacities. Efforts are focused on making a series of small changes rather than something major in order to minimize the potential for making the system worse rather than better.

6. New business

- Dr. Lodge is now a standing member on the Research Compliance Subcommittee. He told the CPI about current areas of concern, including how research information is secured, having a personal identifier (DPI) for every principal investigator and end-to-end encryption of research data. Dr. Lodge said that he would keep the committee informed about these matters.

- The May meeting guest will be Dr. Schmelz who will discuss NIH data management policies and possible options for investigators to comply (such as with the use of an electronic lab notebook product).
- Dr. Lodge reminded the members who are rotating off the CPI that they can run for re-election and serve consecutive terms.
- June/July guest suggestions: Yemin Collier to talk about IT issues. John Fritz, John Gebhard or others from OTC to discuss IP policies.
- No further new business was raised for CPI consideration.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:22 p.m.