Faculty Research and Development Committee Final Report

Period Covered: 15 August 2012 to 14 August 2013

Committee Members: Doryjane Birrer, English (Chair)
Chen-Hoei Chou, Marketing and Supply Chain Management
Jon Hale, Teacher Education
Lei Jin, International and Intercultural Studies
Diane Johnson, Art History
Gibbs Knotts, Political Science
June McDaniel, Religious Studies
Blake Stevens, Music History
Jeffrey Triblehorn, Biology
Amy McCandless (ex-officio, Dean of the Graduate School)

Committee Business Overview
The primary business of the Faculty Research and Development Committee during the academic year was reviewing and selecting Faculty Research and Development grant proposals for funding in each of three funding periods, and reviewing nominations for the faculty Distinguished Research Award and making a recommendation to the Provost as to its recipient. The committee met in person four times: an initial meeting to discuss committee procedures, and one meeting for each of the committee’s three funding rounds. All other significant committee business was conducted via our secure Society website. The committee Chair, both independently and alongside committee as a whole, also liaised with Associate Provost Bev Diamond with regard to funding pressure at the request of the Provost’s office.

Faculty Research and Development Proposal Review
The committee reviewed 50 proposals during the 2012-13 academic year ($155,990 requested total) and funded 30 of these proposals ($90,951 funded total). This year marked a return to in-person meetings to finalize proposal funding. The proposal review procedure was as follows. Faculty R and D proposals were solicited for each round, received electronically, and posted for review to our secure website by the committee Chair. Committee members typically had 4-5 weeks to review proposals, after which time each committee member posted to the website a document listing his or her ranking for each proposal, along with brief comments about each proposal. Committee members then had several days to review fellow members’ rankings and comments before our in-person meeting to determine funding. The committee Chair synthesized all committee members’ rankings prior to this meeting, determined the highest and lowest ranked proposals, and made initial funding suggestions based on these rankings in light of each round’s budget. Thereafter, the bulk of our meeting time was spent discussing those proposals ranked in the middle and finalizing funding decisions based on the remaining budget. This procedure worked well for the committee, fostering efficient meetings while also allowing for further discussion of proposals on qualitative as well as quantitative grounds, particularly when rankings of particular proposals falling in the middle/“possibly fund” category were in conflict. The committee agreed that the return to face-to-face meetings this year was
important so that funding decisions were not made on numerical rankings alone, especially since some faculty changed their assessment of particular proposals during our meetings based on more thorough discussion.

Throughout the year, one key area for discussion of proposals included weighing the most common type of request (for research travel and/or materials) against two alternative types of requests: those for grants-in-time (for a single course release, Rounds 1 and 3), and those for salary replacement for summer projects (Round 2). Some committee members felt the committee should prioritize requests for ostensibly more “direct” funding for research travel and/or materials over ostensibly more “indirect” funding for grants-in-time or salary replacement. Other committee members felt this kind of prioritization would privilege particular kinds of research projects over others, a privileging often concomitantly linked to prioritizing research in particular fields/areas requiring (for example) laboratory materials or travel to archives over research in fields for which grant requests are primarily for sustained time for intensive research and writing. In the end, such discussions did not lead to significant conflicts over funding, given that as regards proposal quality, committee members were typically in agreement throughout all three funding rounds. However, this is likely an area that will continue to raise questions, and further explicit conversation about such issues of prioritizing will likely be helpful in the future, perhaps at the level of the Faculty Senate.

A second area for discussion throughout the year had to do with the extent to which the committee should scrutinize funds requested for equipment/materials. A number of grant recipients reported significant “leftover” funding and desired to spend the remaining balance on materials not included in the original proposal. Because of the complications that would have been involved in reallocating such funds within the appropriate round and fiscal year, these requests were typically granted. However, given the committee’s limited funds, committee members were concerned that the combined “overages” in funding for particular proposals could have been used to fund several additional proposals during the year. The committee recognized the difficulty of its members being able to determine reasonable costs for materials across numerous fields of research, and did not settle on a means for addressing this issue when reviewing proposals, aside from looking increasingly carefully at itemized budgets. Committee members also unanimously agreed that in the future, faculty members purchasing grant-funded equipment should provide receipts when submitting their final reports.

Additional brief points of information and areas of concern were presented to the Faculty Senate by the Faculty R and D Chair at the Senate’s 2 April 2013 meeting (precise details can be accessed via the minutes here: http://facultysenate.cofc.edu/archives/2012-2013/april-2013/senate-minutes-april-2013). The most significant of the items addressed in this report related to starter grants and unsuccessful proposals. The Chair noted that although Faculty R and D grants are primarily intended to support faculty in their early years at the College, only one-third of proposals received for Rounds 1 and 2 were starter grants; this statistic held true for the year in its entirety. The Chair therefore recommended that junior faculty should be encouraged more strongly to submit proposals, and perhaps should receive support/mentoring
from senior members within their departments in developing proposals. The primary reasons for proposals going unfunded (starter grants and otherwise) included the following:

• the research narrative did not make clear the significance of the research within the relevant field (including through lack of references to secondary sources)
• the narrative was not framed for a non-specialist audience (true of both humanities/social science-based and science/math-based proposals)
• the proposal was poorly written (lacked development, was riddled with surface errors, and/or did not follow the guidelines for proposal development)
• the proposal was for funding not part of the committee’s purview (conference travel)

**Distinguished Research Award**
The committee received 9 nominations for the Distinguished Research Award in March 2013 and solicited additional materials from nominees, including detailed CVs and representative publications. After reviewing the award description and purview, committee members developed rankings and comments justifying their top selections, and the tentative winner emerged from these rankings. This selection was then confirmed by a vote in which all committee members participated. This year’s winner was Simon Lewis, Professor of English.

The committee also recommended to the Provost’s Office that it create two awards for distinguished research: a Distinguished Research Award for a post-tenure faculty member, plus an Emerging Scholar Award for a pre-tenure faculty member. The committee unanimously agreed that having two awards would allow it to honor the research of faculty with a career of longer standing while also giving much-deserved recognition to outstanding junior faculty.

**Final Committee Business**
The committee concluded its work for the semester by electing next year’s Faculty R and D committee Chair: Scott Poole, Associate Professor of History.

Respectfully submitted,
Doryjane Birrer
Associate Professor of English
Chair, Faculty Research and Development Committee