University Research Committee

Summary of Activities, 2024-2025 (Academic Year)

In the past academic year, the University Research Committee (URC) met on 9/6/2024, 10/4/2024, 11/1/2024, 12/6/2024, 1/10/2025, 2/7/2025, 3/7/2025, 4/4/2025, and 5/2/2025 for a total of 9-meetings. As the committee roster covers many university disciplines, all meetings were held over zoom except for the meeting on 4/4/2025, which was held in-person.

Ms. Amy Spellacy served as the administrative point-of-contact to schedule meetings and collect notes for minutes of the meetings. A Microsoft Teams channel was established for the URC and annual access is provided to the URC members with all meeting minutes and meeting materials stored in folders on the Teams platform. The Chair for 2024-2025 (Dr. Shaurya Prakash), Vice-Chair (Dr. Joal Beane), and the Senior Associate Vice President for Research Operations (Dr. Cynthia Carnes) met the Wednesday in the week prior to scheduled URC meetings to plan the agenda and ably assisted by Ms. Spellacy (Program Manager, ERIK). The agenda was shared 1-week prior to the URC meeting with the active committee roster.

At the conclusion of the 2024-2025 academic year and with the incoming committee roster available, an election for the Vice-Chair for 2025-2026 was held leading to the election of Dr. Kristy Townsend. Dr. Townsend will serve as vice-chair to Dr. Joal Beane (2025-2026, Chair) and then will take over as Chair of the URC for 2026-2027.

Frequent updates on ERIK activities were provided by Dr. Carnes to the URC. These updates covered essential topics such as research operations, implementation of the Huron system, and resource and related infrastructure changes at Ohio State either due to changes in state or federal regulations or due to establishment of new procedures and entities at the university. In addition, the committee received two updates (one at the beginning of the year and one at the end of the year) from liaison members, Dr. Zeynep Benderlioglu (representing the Committee of Research/Academic Technology) and from Dr. Lisa Baer (representing the Working Group on Public Access to Sponsored Research Data).

The URC also received an e-mail update from the Chair of the University Fiscal Committee; however, at the writing of this report the formal budget and fiscal requests for ERIK were not available. The committee also interfaced with the research compliance team members in Dr. Jim Giuliani, Dr. Bridget Carruthers, and Dr. Julia Behnfeldt for receive updates on research integrity, research security and compliance, and to assist in nominating faculty members for the Research Security and Integrity Committee (RISC). The URC nominated Dr. Leigh Bonds to serve as the URC liaison to the Committee on Academic Affairs during the evaluation and establishment of the Salmon P. Chase Center in response to the request from Vice Provost for Academic Programs, Dr. Randy Smith. Dr. Prakash was nominated as the URC representative for the ERIK committee for center and institute review led by Dr. Loren Wold. Throughout the year, Dean Stromberger noted the critical role and contributions of the Graduate School in the overall research enterprise.

In addition to the updates noted above, the activities of the URC in 2024-2025 focused on:

Evaluation of Policies and Programs Affecting Scholarly and Creative Activities: This year, the committee spent significant time on understanding the barriers to research activities. The discussions centered around the complexity of managing, operating, and encouraging scholarly and creative activities. There was general agreement that the research enterprise impacts both

undergraduate and graduate students, multiple research staff classifications, and faculty. Additionally, the output of all university research activities was noted to have significant positive impact on the state, nation, and the broader community Ohio State serves as a land-grant institution. The economic impact in generating intellectual property, promoting and conducting high-quality training of students and staff for a direct impact on local, state, national, and international workforce was also noted. The URC also recognized the contribution of the research activity and infrastructure on patient-care and supported Ohio State's emphasis on the Physician-Scientist model. Overall, Ohio State remains a premier research institution. Therefore, there was general consensus that research activities at Ohio State strongly meet the 'education for citizenship' motto.

Challenges and barriers: One consistent theme that emerged in 2024-2025 was the impediment to scholarly and creative activities due to limitations arising from Human Resource (HR) policies. Some examples include:

- **Long approval times for positions**. Depending on type of position requested, there are significant and multiple layers of approvals required. Several instances were presented where approvals process could extend over a period of 4-6 months. The delays led to challenges in hiring, talent retention, and delays on funded projects.
- **Lack of flexibility in salaries**. The university continues to benchmark salary structures and make improvements in salaries offered. However, for research activities that drive scholarly and creative output were noted to be limited by restrictions on offering competitive salaries across units. Specifically, it was noted that there is a general lack of flexibility available to faculty, principal investigators, department chairs, center and institute directors in offering salaries as a major impediment to research. This barrier, particularly when funds are available to respective units has led to loss of talent, maintaining personnel morale, and difficulties in hiring individuals with adequate expertise. Notably, with URC input, position descriptions have been made uniform with general guidelines for salary ranges, which make classifications easier. However, these classifications are broad categories and do not capture the nuance of specific research positions that may vary dramatically even within the same academic unit.
- **Faculty salary compression**. The long-standing issue, cross-cutting across various faculty domains and committees was also noted. There is significant salary compression at Ohio State as documented by the Faculty Compensation and Benefits Committee (FCBC). While, the topic was beyond the charter of the URC, the negative impact on retaining faculty and keeping the morale of faculty high was noted, which could also lead to lower overall productivity.

URC Recommendations: There was consensus among the URC that reducing HR barriers can enable significant advantages to Ohio State in further enhancing scholarly and creative activities.

Additionally, there was a recognition that many policies are not directly implemented by ERIK but may be generated and enforced at the college and perhaps, even at the individual unit level. Therefore, operationally, there are conditions that are not uniform across the university. Further data and evaluation of specific barriers that impede research at each college should be collected and empowering the URC to work with Associate Deans of Research (ADRs) and ERIK may ease these barriers.

Research Infrastructure, Policies, and Support: The URC dedicated much discussion to evaluating the research infrastructure and support. It was noted that through various college, ERIK, center and institute initiatives, Ohio State has excellent physical research infrastructure. It was also noted that some of the research infrastructure is unique – for example, the National Gateway Ultrahigh Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Center funded by NSF, and multiple the shared resources enabled and supported by the James Comprehensive Cancer Center. Increased regulations and higher research expenditures (> $1.5B in this past year) have led to an increase in staff support across the university.

A key and emerging theme relates to the role of software and information technology. It was noted that the Office of Technology and Digital Innovation (OTDI; re-named from OCIO) plays an ever-increasing role in all domains of research, scholarly and creative activities at Ohio State. With the advent and increasing use of artificial intelligence-based tools, the impacts on research remain an open and active topic of discussion. Initial discussions on the proposed implementation of the Provost's desire to enhance AI fluency were also noted.

Research staff make significant contributions to scholarly and creative activities. Therefore, the URC assisted in re-defining several staff classifications. Additionally, the URC provided feedback on Dr. Helen Malone's initiative in conjunction with the Rules Committee to re-structure the Research Faculty definition to permit at least 5% of time be not committed to externally funded grants. Moreover, The URC recognized the vital role for research driven scholarly and creative activity impact on faculty careers through the current rigorous promotion and tenure (P&T) processes managed by the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA). Furthermore, the URC reviewed and provided significant feedback on the revision of procedures for the "04" rule (Faculty Rule 3335-5.04) to enable clearer definition of the four tracks for investigations, annual reviews for RISC members, expanded definitions for sub-tracks to cover research-related misconduct, and suggestions to develop reasonable time frames for investigations and sanctions.

Challenges and barriers: The cost of all digital operations was noted to be increasing with additional burden on research resources. The constraints in using external funds in supporting broadly usable computing infrastructure were also noted. The discontinuation of the digital flagship program and not having adequate institutional support for computing infrastructure for all graduate students was noted to be a significant risk for future research operations. Additionally, with the implementation of new and advanced security features (for example, dual authentication), the need for Ohio State personnel, including students, to use personal devices for professional activities was also considered a significant risk. Additionally, the committee debated on the financial inequity and ethical concerns among faculty, staff, and students required to use personal resources to support Ohio State mandated activities.

The URC reviewed and concurred with Provost Bellamkonda's assessment of the rankings of various graduate programs. Overall, Ohio State remains a pre-eminent institution and the flagship university in the state; however, there are critical areas that require strategic enhancements to keep pace with peer- and aspirant institutions. It was noted that significant barriers persist in expanding undergraduate research activity and developing a critical "talent pipeline" to retain our best students for graduate (and post-graduate) programs at Ohio State.

URC Recommendations: The URC recommends benchmarking the entire computing and digital infrastructure at Ohio State for research, scholarly, and creative activities against leading Big Ten+ and aspirant institutions. Moreover, it was suggested that the digital and computing infrastructure

be treated similar to fundamental utilities required for fulfilling basic responsibilities for all faculty, staff, and students.

Identify opportunities and develop resources to enhance incentives for Ohio (and Ohio State) talent to attend Ohio State by increasing the number graduate fellowships and broaden support for post-doctoral fellows. Additionally, developing resources for endowed faculty positions at Ohio State is needed support the retention of faculty and enable high-risk, high-reward research to enhance contributions to the land-grant mission of Ohio State. Periodic review of the strategic research infrastructure can enable development of new physical facilities for emerging research areas.

Operations: The committee evaluated both it's own and university research operations to identify opportunities for efficiency.

Committee operations:
In 2022, the URC had modified the committee operations to enhance efficiency. While the changes were operationalized, these are not formally noted in either committee rules, charter, or guidelines available. The list below provides a summary of operationalized and recommended efficiencies.

- URC to have a standing meeting day and time to avoid complex scheduling challenges and delays, especially given the breadth and extent of the committee. First Friday of each month from 1-2 pm was designated as the standing committee meeting time. The committee is to meet at least monthly during the academic year. Additional meetings may be called by the committee Chair, if required.
- Committee meeting times to be reserved for the year, at least 1-week prior to the first meeting of the year to enable broad committee participation.
- Given the breadth of the committee membership, meetings *via* remote tools (e.g., Zoom or Microsoft Teams) provide an easy avenue for maintaining quorum and participation. However, it is recommended that at least one meeting per year be held in-person.
- Committee chair to seek nominations for new committee Vice-Chair at least 1-week prior to last committee meeting of the year, or at conclusion of the academic year. The active committee roster votes on the received nominations. Vice-Chair serves as Chair-Elect for the following year.
- Self-nominations for Vice-Chair are permitted.
- URC Vice-Chair serves to complement the chair, fill-in for the chair as required, and assist in formulation of monthly meeting agendas.
- The URC chair presents once a year at the Senate Steering committee meeting. The presentation is to be shared with the URC and the ERIK leadership.

University and Senate Operations: The URC evaluated several areas to enhance efficiency of overall operations. The **recommendations** are:

- In formal Ohio State materials (for example, the faculty senate website), older terminology is used for ERIK. It is recommended that all documents be updated to reflect the re-organized structure of the erstwhile Office of Research (OR) to the Enterprise for Research, Innovation and Knowledge (ERIK).
- ERIK has developed a website for informing the university community of impending rule and regulation changes due to state and federal legislation. The website is not easily available through ERIK's main website. It is recommended that overall communication between ERIK and the university community be improved.

- Significant resources have been invested by Ohio State in *Workday*, *Huron*, *Interfolio*, and other operational software. Past benchmarking by ERIK has identified areas where Ohio State remains well below peers and aspirant institutions in related staff support leading to undue burden for operations on PIs. Adding staff with clearly defined roles in a de-centralized format such that local operations are improved is suggested.
- One key area of investment is to add staff for both, pre-and post-award grant management. The current sponsored program officers (SPOs) have consistently noted significant work-burden. Similarly, PIs have noted challenges in SPO communication as many SPOs work remotely and may not even be located in Ohio. Streamlining Office of Sponsored Programs to improve workloads, communication, and efficiency is recommended.
- After a pilot program, ERIK has implemented a proposal intake form to enable better tracking and timely submission of external funding proposals. This was noted to be a positive step. A further enhancement to efficiencies can be obtained if the supporting document templates such as agency specific CVs, facility documents, and budget and personnel justification could be provided to all PIs through a common portal.
- While P&T processes are not within the URC domain, the impact of research activities on these processes is critical. Therefore, as OAA invests in the implementation of a new software, *Interfolio*, the URC recommends providing resources to each college to help faculty prepare their dossiers.
- Centralizing several grants and contracts related financial processes indicates the positive efforts of the university in improving ease and efficiency of financial systems. One barrier remains in consistently providing monthly invoices for cost-reimbursable contracts that show an even-monthly spend-rate. A critical challenge is the billing procedure for graduate student tuition on these contracts. Several peer institutions charge tuition on a monthly basis to external contracts and Ohio State charges it once a semester. Adjusting the tuition billing for graduate students supported on external contracts to a monthly charge will make invoicing uniform and enable easier management of these contracts.

Committee Members for 2024-2025:

Tony Annerino
Ahmet Ayan
Lisa Baer
Joal Beane (Vice-Chair)
Zeynep Benderlioglu
Leigh Bonds
Ajit Chaudhari
Cynthia Carnes*
Laurence Coutellier
Daniel Gallego Perez
Ahmed Elsharkawy
Srishti Gaur
Roger Goddard

Becky Huang
Kari Hoyt
Elena Irwin
Justin Kieffer*
Andrew Miles
Shamama Nishat*
Gabe O'Hara
Shaurya Prakash (chair)
Priyamvada Singh
Mary Stromberger*
Kristy Townsend

*Indicates non-voting member