

Annual Report to the University Senate

Academic Year 2023-2024

Senate University Planning Committee

Committee Charge: This committee shall review the University planning processes and consider their potential outcomes. The committee may provide on behalf of the Senate an evaluation and review of specific issues and activities related to institutional advancement.

2023/2024 University Planning Committee Members:

- ***Bonnie Burr, Chair, CAHNR, Extension**
- *Amvrossios Bagtzoglou, Engineering, Civil & Environmental
- *Oksan Bayulgen, CLAS, Political Science
- *Joanne Conover, CLAS, Physiology & Neurobiology
- *Joe Crivello, CLAS, Physiology and Neurobiology
- *Justin Rogowski, Law Library
- *Mike Shor, CLAS, Economics
- Tutita Casa, Neag School of Education
- Mannat Kadian, Undergraduate Student
- Sean Dunn, Undergraduate Student
- Dan Schwartz, Office of the Provost (Ex-Officio Member)
- Carl Rivers, Office of the Registrar

**indicates 2023/2024 Senate member*

Summary: The University Planning Committee has been working on identifying on how to best bring issues and areas of interest to the Senate for additional review and input. We are looking at how the UPC can identify university committees that may not normally share findings with the Senate and improve communications between these committees and the Senate. Three issues have been identified with further need for follow-up.

Specific Topics Addressed:

1. Strengthening Pre-Award Infrastructure and Facilitation of Grant Applications - The OVPR's office responded to the UPC on five recommendations that were raised. In addition to the following, they restructured the contracts units into two teams (federal, Non-federal) to help alleviate the backlog in processing. They are also restructuring to create an award set-up team this year who will work solely on award acceptance allowing post award to focus on award administration and billing. The UPC will follow up on how this process has been working at the end of FY24.

A) Establishment of an advisory committee with faculty and administrator representation to provide guidance and advice to pre-award administration – SPS currently works with the Presidents Research Advisory Council (PRAC) made up of representatives from each college and school to address issues and concerns related to research. They also meet with the Research Deans Council (RDC) with representatives from all colleges and schools who act as a conduit between the SPS and their college or school research faculty. They also hold regular trainings and discussions with administrators across campus, including discussion groups from both UCH and Storrs.

B) Create a help desk to address questions and concerns from faculty and staff across the university – SPS will be working to establish a help desk and anticipates having this completed at the end of the year. * The UPC will be following up to ascertain when this is completed.

C) Seek closer faculty-administrator ties and interaction with units such as those with CLAS and NEAG – SPS is working with Sponsored Program Administrators (SPA) to share success stories where these programs are utilized. Presentation materials will be shared as a resource to all colleges and schools as best practices for improving local models.

D) Authorize decentralization for small non-federal applications (less than \$100,000) - SPS has taken steps to streamline submission for low-risk proposals and has delegated signatory authority within SPS beyond the Pre-Award Director and Assistant Director. Pre-Award Specialists can submit approximately 50% of their portfolio decreasing the bottleneck securing authorizations.

E) Reviewing and implementing ways to increase collaborations and proposal submissions – SPS has taken a variety of steps to streamline proposals and has been piloting a new budget template, increase guidance for budget cost sharing and taking steps to reduce budgetary review. * The UPC will follow up to see how the pilot has been working.

2. Parking

There is currently a university parking committee that has been working with AAUP to identify ways to improve access to parking for faculty (as well as staff, commuter students and others). The Parking Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC) shared information which highlights that the south campus parking availability will not be increasing, but rather decreasing and Area 1 is also much tighter. Area 2 still has plenty of availability (F Lot) and is easily accessible by bus which drops people off at the Husky next to Gampel.

* The UPC recommends continuing discussions on how to increase communications and make these changes more transparent so that everyone understands the PTAC finds busing in from the outer lots to be a suitable response to accessing campus at all times of day and night. The UPC will also encourage review of illegal parking in Area 2 as well as how the EV policy and accessibility develops in FY 25.

3. Travel Services

The UPC asked Joe Thompson and Peggy McCarthy to talk with the UPC about challenges with Concur. They explained to the committee that the reconstituted Lloyd Blanchard's committee (keeping everyone on – and apologizing if they inadvertently left people off) The Travel Committee identified 30 points of pain and of those 15 are policy related. They broke those down with 7 being related to process and configuration and 8 that can be addressed through education and clarification. The Travel Committee is presenting to senior administrators and will then present to JACC. Joe was not aware he should share findings with the Senate but is very open to discussing this further.

* The UPC looks forward to working with Purchasing and Travel to offer additional thoughts and follow up on process and educational components of how to make these systems more user friendly to those who do not work with them on a regular basis. The UPC will follow up further on the following points:

A) Education is the key to having employees utilize Concur correctly. Perhaps a short fact sheet with important points. Peggy shared that perhaps small vignettes and videos would be helpful.

B) There is a cost to faculty and staff spending so much time trying to figure out how to use Concur. Perhaps that needs to be factored into the Travel Committee's work. Joe said there is currently no data to show how much time is spent going in and out of the system.

C) Points were shared about continual kickbacks from reviewers and the system and it's frustrating when you believe you have entered the information correctly. It's a vicious circle sometimes to try and figure out what is wrong. Joe said to call travel anytime you have an issue. And they are aware it's challenging trying to get the corrections made.

D) Questions regarding who completes the forms and are there any unified efforts to send travel to support staff who can be trained or are trained in getting these done, reducing the time travelers spend trying to learn a system they don't regularly use. Some departments are doing this already. Peggy added it would be helpful to get more systems in alignment and Joe shared we do have staff who are experts in organizational functions.