SEC Ad-hoc Research Committee Summary Report
- **SPRING 2015**

Summary Report

Executive Summary

1. Provide more flexibility in internal funding to support research more broadly

A. Add an additional RCAP II award cycle.
B. Have smaller amounts of internal funding awarded at the university level.
C. Reinstate the Faculty Scholarship Council.
D. Empower the RCAP review committee to evaluate and modify the RCAP submission and review process, on a yearly basis if necessary
E. Support continuance of the iRCAP as a reoccurring grant program (now called RCAP, track C).
F. Establish a committee comprised of faculty from different disciplines across the colleges with FUSE experience to review and, if necessary, modify the FUSE program.
G. Allow for varying rubrics for RCAP and FUSE proposals.
H. Allow greater flexibility in FUSE budgets.
I. Allow colleges and departments greater flexibility with the ways in which graduate students' funded roles are defined.

2. Develop and promote research beginning at the grassroots level

A. Develop a broad research mission at the university level that is based upon more specific definitions created at the college, department and individual levels.
B. Emphasize and celebrate the diverse research and creative activity on campus.
C. Utilize the Student Research Council to continue organizing the Student Research Conference.
D. Re-imagine REACH week as a series of events throughout the year.

3.   Develop a committed, transparent plan to increase financial support for research

A. Increase development support for colleges and departments to build research infrastructure.
B. Invest university resources into faculty research initiatives.
C. Effectively support graduate students.

4. Optimize research infrastructure to provide flexibility, equity, and transparency that will in turn improve WKU's research profile

A. Return research and sponsored programs to a central figure whose role is to work with faculty to facilitate their research programs.
B. Create and maintain transparency for the WKU Research Foundation.
C. Reevaluate the role of ARTP and affiliated centers.
D. Improve transparency and accountability of the Graduate School.
E. In consultation with the Center for Faculty Development faculty and staff, broaden the mission of the Center for Faculty Development to assist with grassroots level research coordination.

Senate Executive Committee's Faculty Ad-hoc Research Committee Summary Report

Background and Charge of the faculty committee

In January 2015, the WKU Research Council Working Group, comprised of the WKU assistant and associate deans of research for each college, was asked by Provost Gordon Emslie to create a report on a potential reorganization of the research structure at WKU. The SEC felt it necessary that the WKU faculty were given a strong voice in these discussions, and developed a Faculty Ad-hoc Research committee with several goals in mind:

1.   To work parallel to the already formed Research Council (which is primarily administrative in nature – see below for a list of those committee members) and with the Provost on the discussions and future changes to the research organizational and administrative structure at WKU.

2.   To discuss and determine a faculty-driven research mission for the institution, as the SEC feels this is an integral part of considering our WKU research goals and direction, and will inform the restructuring.

3.   To seek out and welcome input from a broad spectrum of faculty across the campus and extended campus locations.

To meet the stated objectives and draft a report, the faculty committee members and alternates met weekly from January 27, 2015 – March 24, 2015. Members and alternates solicited feedback from faculty of all levels in their colleges regarding faculty and student research at WKU. The committee, via college and departmental-level emails, through faculty meetings and personal contacts, collected information on what types of research are conducted across the university; the ways in which faculty and student (undergraduate and

graduate) research is internally supported; and ways in which WKU could better support faculty and student research programs.

Membership of the Committee

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Member (M) – Jenni Redifer

Alternate (A) – Marguerita DeSander

College of Health and Human Services

M – Jill Maples

A – Don Hoover

Gordon Ford College of Business

M – Leyla Zhuhadar

A – Thad Crews

University Libraries

M – Haiwang Yuan

A – Laura Delancey

Ogden College of Science and Engineering

M – Kevin Williams, Chair

A – Aaron Celestian

Potter College of Arts & Letters

M – Kristina Arnold, Liaison to the Research Council Working Group

A – Patti Minter

University College

M – Molly Kerby, Vice-Chair

A – Said Ghezal

Student Government Association – student representative

M – Paige Settles

Membership of the Research Council Working Group

Andrew McMichael, PCAL, Co-Chair

Cate Webb, OCSE, Co-Chair

Scott Lyons, CHHS, Co-Chair

Jackie Pope-Tarrence, CEBS

Bob Hatfield, GFCB

Dennis George, UC

Bryan Carson, University Libraries

+ ex officio: Nancy Mager, OSP; Jeff Hook, CRD; Carl Fox, Graduate School; Blaine Ferrell

Introduction

At a comprehensive university such as WKU, both the research and teaching missions are primary areas of focus for faculty and are often intertwined. While no one faculty member can be expected to achieve or support all the below goals, the *collective* scholarly activity of the university should:

- Contribute to the advancement of knowledge, scholarship, and methods of understanding within the disciplines represented by the faculty at WKU
- Increase the profile of the university at the regional, national, and international levels
- Uphold our faculty as experts in the disciplines that they teach and provide our students with access to relevant, up-to-date information in the classroom
- Involve undergraduate and graduate students in research and creative activities as appropriate to their discipline
- Better prepare our students for graduate and professional schools and the workforce
- Increase competitiveness of both faculty and students for national scholarships and awards
- In such disciplines or activities in which monies are available, lead to external funding that supports the costs of the research/creative activity and supports the infrastructure of the university
- Create productive partnerships with local and regional community members to solve problems and enhance our community's overall quality of life.

WKU faculty have had many successes with their own and their students' research and creative activity programs and there are ways in which the University successfully supports faculty and student research initiatives. However, there are several areas in which systemic improvement would better facilitate both faculty and student research. **This report outlines both areas of success and areas of improvement for WKU's current promotion of faculty and student research and creative activity.**

SUMMARY REPORT

Recommendations of the committee include:

1. Provide more flexibility in internal funding to support research more broadly

Rationale based on faculty feedback:

The RCAP program has been seen primarily as a success and has been strongly supported by faculty in all colleges. RCAPs can be especially useful as bridge funding for faculty who are between external grants. However, with only one application cycle per year and an 18-month project life, awards are restrictive for faculty who need smaller amounts of money for research more quickly than the current program allows. This restriction is felt particularly deeply in the humanities, creative arts and social sciences, where projects often occur on varying timelines, including opportunities in which funding is needed within 2-3 months and projects that require several years to reach fruition (e.g. books). Another difficulty with the RCAP award mechanism relates to evaluating the diverse types of research and creative activity across campus; it is difficult for scientific research and artistic productions to conform to one set of guidelines or to be analyzed by the same rubric, for example.

FUSE awards are an excellent means of incentivizing student involvement in undergraduate research. While these awards are valuable and consistent with a mission to improve student engagement in the discipline at the undergraduate level, there are some suggested areas of improvement. For example, some types of research would require greater than $1000 in supply budget to complete; also, some conferences are more expensive than others. More fundamentally, the existing FUSE structure is better aligned with student research conducted collaboratively alongside faculty or in pre-existing lab environments than with individual projects in areas in which – due to the nature, requirements, ethics and pedagogy of the discipline

– faculty and students *do not* collaborate or co-publish, such as some humanities and creative disciplines. This structure makes it more difficult for faculty in some areas to successfully support FUSE students within the existing set of a FUSE grant's expected outcomes.

There is also faculty concern about the lack of sufficient travel funding to conduct research and to present it at appropriate conferences. Currently, when faculty have spent their allotted departmental and college professional development funding (an amount that differs based on department and on college) they must either pay out-of-pocket to conduct their own research or are forced to turn down prestigious invitations. Furthermore, the RCAP funding mechanism does not support travel for presentation directly and FUSE travel is for accompanying a student at a meeting at which the student presents, which is not always the same type of meetings that the mentor would attend regularly, or at which he or she would present.

Graduate students are integral to research production at WKU, both through completion of their own research projects / theses and through their contributions to faculty research programs. Efficient and effective availability of funding for graduate student stipends and for graduate student research (including travel) therefore directly affects the research productivity for departments that either promote graduate student research, and/or use graduate students as research assistants. Across the colleges, faculty have expressed concern with funding for student research.

Recommended actions:

A. *Add an additional RCAP II award cycle.* In order to accommodate and support all types of quality research, regardless of discipline, we recommend altering the award cycle such that the larger RCAP I grants would retain one application cycle, but RCAP II awards would have two cycles, one in Fall and one in Spring. Monies from the overall pool would need to be protected for the second RCAP II award cycle.

B. *Have smaller amounts of internal funding awarded at the university level.* There has been wide faculty support across the colleges for small amounts of internal funding for faculty research to be made competitively available monthly (in the 2K – 4K range) in a program similar to the former Faculty Scholarship Awards. These small, quick turn-around grants are vital to assist faculty in many departments with basic research needs that occur on relatively tight timelines, for example invitations to perform new choreography at a competitive dance festival (requiring travel for the choreographer and dancers); acceptance of an exhibition (requiring shipping of work); or conducting research at an international archive that requires travel to the site. These University-level grants would supplement any department and college-level professional development grants. Our recommendation is that either additional research monies be made available to this revived "Faculty Scholarship Award" or a percentage of the current RCAP funding be reserved for these monthly University-level grants.

C. *Reinstate the Faculty Scholarship Council, with representation of faculty from each college appointed by that college's dean.* This committee would serve several purposes. First, it could serve to review and award the monthly Faculty Scholarship Awards. Second, it could serve as a faculty-level advisory group parallel to the administrative Research Council when a faculty perspective on research is needed.

D. *Empower the RCAP review committee to evaluate and modify the RCAP submission and review process, on a yearly basis if necessary, to continue to make it more efficient, effective and responsive to faculty needs.* The RCAP funding mechanism is appreciated campus-wide. However, as with any new program, there are details that could be changed to enhance its overall effectiveness. Based on feedback from faculty and three generations of RCAP review committee members, the members of the RCAP review committee (including staff members of the committee) have the best ability to identify and suggest appropriate changes to the RCAP process.

E. *Support continuance of the iRCAP as a reoccurring grant program (now called RCAP, track C).* The iRCAP, though proposed as a one-time grant similar to the RCAP, allows opportunity for faculty to pool resources and engage in inter-, multi-, and trans-, disciplinary work. Collaborative research expands possibilities for involving students in a variety of fields, expands opportunities for publications and presentation for faculty, and increases chances for external funding. Building an infrastructure that supports interdisciplinary work is crucial to a successful research plan for WKU.

F. *Establish a committee comprised of faculty from different disciplines across the colleges with FUSE experience to review and, if necessary, modify the FUSE program so that it equally supports research by undergraduate students in all disciplines.* For example, different FUSE grant categories in which a student could apply might be developed (science, social science, humanities, creative arts), with each category having a different set of expectations and requirements based upon discipline area or research methodology. Currently, there is the perception that FUSE grants are aligned most closely with the types of research practice in which students work alongside faculty in a lab. For example, to date Ogden College has submitted 1.4 times as many FUSE grant applications as all other colleges combined (234 as compared to 166, based on data supplied by OSP).

G. *Allow for varying rubrics for RCAP and FUSE proposals.* The committee feels that it would be helpful to have different rubrics for research in hypothesis-driven scientific disciplines, for example, than for narrative-based humanities disciplines or creative activity in departments such as art, music and theatre/dance. The faculty reviewers could likewise be divided into groups with each group ranking the proposals graded by the same rubric. This avoids the need for those in the arts to fit their creative activity proposals into a rubric that is more science-focused or vice versa. However, with varied rubrics or different groups ranking different types of proposals, care must be taken not to preference one type of research over another, and funding committees must ensure that good research and creative activity is funded in all disciplines.

H.   *Allow greater flexibility in FUSE budgets.* The FUSE proposal could be slightly modified to allow the student and faculty mentor to adjust the amounts requested for supplies and travel, with the cap of $3000 total between the two categories remaining intact.

I.   *Allow colleges and departments greater flexibility with the ways in which graduate students' funded roles are defined.* The Graduate School necessarily provides oversight with graduate funding, but the Colleges and Departments are best suited to define what appropriate funded roles are for graduate students in their areas. For example, in some disciplines teaching experience at the graduate level greatly enhances a graduate student's chances of successful entry into and completion of a PhD program, while in other areas, graduate student funded time would more appropriately be spent on a faculty- or student-directed research program.

2.   Develop and promote research beginning at the grassroots level.

Rationale based on faculty feedback:

It is important to value all quality research at WKU, not just the research that produces direct external funding. Additionally, while external funding is essential for many scholarly activities, *it is important to view external funding as a means to an end and not as the end itself.* And whereas some research endeavors can lead to significant external support, other desirable outcomes also exist, including the production of new scholarship leading to publications, exhibitions and performances; presentations at regional or national conferences; and student theses, among many others. Even areas that do not produce large numbers of grants may contribute to the global support of research through endowments or other development opportunities. It is important that the university publicly value a diversity of desirable outcomes and that *quality* research across campus is encouraged and rewarded appropriately.

Research activities are promoted on the university web page, through campus and industry publications (e.g. Research Kentucky), and by sharing stories of students and alumni who have participated in research at WKU. It is important that, consistent with our university mission statement, the university commit to celebrating all types of research and highlight the accomplishments of faculty and students from all backgrounds. Research activities highlighted need to be broadly representative of the diversity of research on campus (i.e. there is the perception that excess focus is placed on large new equipment and/or a select few Honors or Gatton Academy students).

Recommended actions:

A. *Develop a broad research mission at the university level that is based upon more specific definitions created at the college, department and individual levels.* Research and creative activity will look very different in the Department of Physics, for example, than it will look in the Department of English. Furthermore, research ideas and collaborations are more likely to be successful if they originate from the grassroots efforts of faculty than if they are initiated from a top-down administrative model. A broad vision for the research mission of WKU could be developed analogous to the broad tenure and promotion guidelines listed in the faculty handbook. Then, as has been done for tenure and promotion, each college and department could elaborate on the specific outcomes of research and creative activity that are valued by the individual units. The faculty would have the responsibility for creating guidelines and research outcomes that are both fair and challenging, and each department and college would ensure that the tenure and promotion guidelines for research were consistent with that unit's contribution to the University's collective research mission. Furthermore, the departments and colleges could contribute to developing a vision of graduate and undergraduate research that is consistent with the priorities of the unit. This mission also provides a foundation for which to pursue additional resources for research.

B. *Emphasize and celebrate the diverse research and creative activity on campus.* We recommend that existing PR personnel at the department, college and university levels, with

input from the Faculty Scholarship Council, work collaboratively to develop a method for publicizing and celebrating the diversity of research and creative activity at the WKU main and regional campuses *at the University level, including official WKU publications and the WKU main webpage.*

C. *Utilize the Student Research Council to continue organizing the Student Research Conference.* The Student Research Conference is an excellent way to showcase both undergraduate and graduate research and creative activities on campus. The Student Research Council involves faculty in the process of organizing the conference and continuing to refine and improve the format.

D. *Re-imagine REACH week as a series of events throughout the year.* Students and faculty across campus are regularly engaged in celebrations and promotion of research and scholarly activity, including presentation of student research and lectures by area experts within various disciplines. Instead of concentrating these presentations and lectures to one week and competing for attendees, a REACH designation should be developed whereby research and creative presentations in each of the colleges throughout the year are identified as REACH activities and promoted as such.

3.   Develop a committed, transparent plan to increase financial support for research

Rationale based on faculty feedback:

WKU's mission statement begins: "Western Kentucky University prepares students of <u>all</u> backgrounds to be productive, engaged, and socially responsible citizen-leaders of a global society." Undergraduate and graduate research is one of the best ways to engage students in their respective disciplines; however, this engagement is based upon close mentoring from faculty, requiring significant faculty time. It is important that the extensive time commitment for

mentoring student research is acknowledged at all levels and is included in calculating total faculty teaching commitments.

During the last several years, WKU has endured a series of state budget cuts that have led to few raises for faculty and staff, insufficient numbers of new faculty hires, and cuts to departmental and college budgets. At the same time, our existing strategic plan has goals to increase masters practica, theses, and dissertations by 75%, Honors CE/T projects by 25%, and student presentations during REACH week by 50%. The Gatton Academy's expansion will add an additional 40% more Gatton students. As a result of these combined pressures, faculty have more classes to teach and/or more students per class, larger numbers of students interested in or "required" to do research, and less money and time with which to do these research activities in addition to continuing their own research program.

Furthermore, in areas in which external funding is necessary and/or expected, there are only modest amounts of money available in guaranteed start-up packages (the RCAP program, while valuable in many regards, is not a start-up package). High teaching loads early in a faculty member's career lower the opportunities to acquire preliminary data that is necessary for establishing credentials, obtaining external funding, and/or securing collaborations. Since FY 2007, our external funding for research is slightly lower despite significant restructuring of administration (http://www.wku.edu/research/annual_reports/fy_2013.pdf), reflecting in part the increased competitiveness for federal funding; it is unreasonable for WKU to expect that significant advances in sponsored research will precede infrastructure upgrades.

Federal agencies including the NIH and NSF consider university infrastructure as a key review criteria for many competitive proposals for which WKU investigators apply (e.g. NIH R15, NSF MRI). Anecdotes on campus include frustrations from faculty who were unable to make satisfactory progress on research because of teaching loads, instrument maintenance issues, or other factors that led to difficulty obtaining follow-up funding. Just as the move of the football team from FCS to FBS was preceded by upgrades to the stadium and other facilities, any

significant upward movement of the research profile must be preceded by infrastructure changes that require significant expenditures.

Faculty will be better equipped to conduct their research if it is better institutionally supported. Financial upgrades to library budgets, start-up packages, internal funding for established faculty, staffing support, allocated spaces in which to conduct research and creative activity, and other areas essential to research are necessary. While we recognize that significant infrastructure upgrades may not be possible in the short term, it is important that the university prioritize expansion of such infrastructure in the future. The faculty could share the responsibility for this financial upgrade in the long term, given initial adequate resources: external funding can provide indirect (F&A) funds, support travel, and provide stipends for undergraduate and graduate students who do research with the faculty members.

Recommended actions:

A. *Increase development support for colleges and departments to build research infrastructure.* In the next 5-10 years, it is imperative that the university increase infrastructure and funding for research. The Office of Development and Alumni Relations and the Office of Sponsored Programs have begun to work together to pursue support for research opportunities; we encourage this partnership to continue to expand. Furthermore, an upcoming capital campaign focused on the departments and colleges provides an excellent opportunity for such infrastructure improvements; each unit can consider initiatives that would support research activities for the unit. Some examples could include:

- Endowed chair positions
- Departmental scholarships for graduate students
- Summer stipends to permit research opportunities for undergraduate students
- Art endowment to provide a facilities upgrade, better supporting student research
- Travel scholarships for students to attend conferences and present their research and creative activity

B. *Invest university resources into faculty research initiatives.* Simultaneous with departmental and college initiatives to increase research infrastructure and outputs, it is imperative that investments in research continue to grow at the university level. Just as the university has invested to grow athletic programs, the Honors College, and the Gatton Academy, it should now be prepared to invest in the research infrastructure at the university as the departments and colleges pursue a growth in scholarly activity. Indirect (F&A) costs from grants should be invested into areas that enhance scholarly activity, but other investments from the general budget are also important. It is critical that the infrastructure grow concurrently with the growth in research activity for that activity increase to be sustainable. Examples of initiatives that the university should invest in include:

- Maintain/increase funding for RCAP, FUSE, and other internal funding opportunities
- Increase travel and/or professional development budgets for faculty
- Increase funding for necessary library resources
- Maintain/increase site licensing for key software packages
- Provide competitive start-up packages for faculty who are expected to produce significant external funding

C. *Effectively support graduate students.* WKU offers over 80 graduate programs, including masters, specialist and doctoral degree programs, certificates/certifications/ranks and endorsements. Graduate student research can be extremely important to departments that utilize graduate students. In order to attract and retain the best students, WKU needs to ensure that graduate stipends/assistantships are nationally competitive. Equally as important, the Graduate School must work with the WKU colleges and departments that educate graduate students to enable these departments to make and announce award decisions to prospective students in a timely manner. Graduate student travel also needs to be supported; the current structure only allows for funding up to $2000 for graduate research and current cuts have significantly decreased that amount and the number of projects funded.

4. Optimize research infrastructure to provide flexibility, equity, and transparency that will in turn improve WKU's research profile

Rationale based on faculty feedback:

While faculty with administrative positions and faculty with teaching / research / service positions are all University faculty, a difference in perspective naturally exists between administrators – who look at collective departmental, college and University research numbers, and teaching faculty – who are intimately acquainted primarily with their own research explorations. Administrative pressure to increase the number of external funding and proposal submissions is passed down to faculty, negatively affecting research productivity.

A disproportionate emphasis on quantity can lead faculty to employ a "scattershot" rather than a targeted approach to funding support and/or the submission of manuscripts to lower quality journals. Either strategy may increase quantity but can sacrifice quality. The *quality* of research and scholarly activity therefore cannot be measured simply by calculating the number of proposals submitted/received or by the amount of external sponsored research dollars collected by WKU. Measuring success by dollars collected is also problematic due to the variance in the availability of external funding opportunities, which change based on economic conditions and other factors beyond the control of WKU.

Measuring research success or awarding internal support primarily based on external funding received forces faculty to chase the often-trend-dependent dollar, rather than focus on the way in which their research explorations naturally progress. While faculty are aware that some areas and project foci allow for a greater probability of landing external funding (there are a lot more dollars available in bio-technology grants than there are for supporting feminist filmmakers, for example) individual faculty members must be trusted to set the course of their own research

trajectories. Forced collaborations, excess pressure to pursue new research areas, and other top-down strategies for research are ineffective and lead to faculty frustration.

Recommended actions:

A. *Return research and sponsored programs to a central figure whose role is to work with faculty to facilitate their research programs.* For the past five years, WKU has experimented with centralizing all research under a Vice President of Research. This model was worth exploring and has some effective components. However, in comparing the organizational charts of many of our benchmark institutions (MTSU, Appalachian State, UNC-Greensboro, East Carolina University, and ETSU) most have research and sponsored programs units reporting at least indirectly to the provost. Earlier WKU organizational charts (e.g. 2008) also had a similar model, therefore it seems reasonable to return to an organizational structure in which units that support sponsored programs and faculty scholarship, such as the Office of Sponsored Programs, the Office of Research Integrity (compliance), and the RCAP can be overseen by a central office/figure that reports to the provost and research is integrated into and aligned with the University's academic mission.

B. *Create and maintain transparency for the WKU Research Foundation.* Faculty are often confused about the role of the WKU Research Foundation and how unrestricted funds are utilized. In order to ensure transparency in the use of WKURF collected F&A funds and transparency and oversight regarding their expenditure, we recommend that the WKURF report quarterly to the Council of Academic Deans on collected and expended funds. We also support efforts to bring initiatives before the WKURF Board of Directors for approval prior to committing the funds, as this will improve transparency.

C. *Reevaluate the role of ARTP and affiliated centers.* The ARTP began as a group of 8 centers housed within Ogden College but was moved to the university level with the creation of the Vice President of Research position. Currently there are 18 centers within ARTP, including some that originated outside of Ogden College. Many faculty are unfamiliar with ARTP and

its relationship to the affiliated centers; furthermore, there are potential advantages and potential disadvantages to having the centers overseen at the university level versus at the level of the colleges from which they originated. We recommend that, *in consultation with the center directors,* the role of ARTP and the appropriate oversight of the centers be determined and then clarified to the faculty.

D. *Improve transparency and accountability of the Graduate School.* Graduate faculty across the colleges are concerned about the efficiency, transparency and accountability of the Graduate School, believing that enhancing all three areas is necessary to effectively support graduate students and the research across the campus that depends upon these students.

E. *In consultation with the Center for Faculty Development faculty and staff, broaden the mission of the Center for Faculty Development to assist with grassroots level research coordination.* As they are engaged in basic investigations even before developing a specific research project, faculty have expressed an interest in knowing more broadly what types of expertise and experiences are represented by faculty on the WKU campus. Concern has also been expressed by faculty across the colleges with the difficulty in finding research collaborators and co-investigators in other departments and colleges at WKU. An example of a way in which the CFD could support research would be to develop and maintain a clearinghouse or database of faculty and their research interests and experiences. Another idea suggested by faculty would be to develop faculty research liaisons at the departmental and/or college-level to track and coordinate departmental research agendas; be knowledgeable about existing research support; mentor other faculty; and facilitate interdisciplinary / inter-college collaborations. This project could also be done in collaboration with the college Assistant/ Associate Deans of Research.