

The University of Kansas Research Engagement Initiative

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It is a common expectation that full time tenure line faculty members at research universities devote 40 percent or more of their time engaged in research or comparable creative activities. This expectation, along with the devotion of a substantial effort to doctoral training, sets research universities apart from the rest of higher education. It also makes research universities the most complex and expensive entities in the world of higher education. Given their complexity and cost, the scholarship and creative activities conducted at research universities must over time be able to demonstrate by various measures a substantial impact on society to justify to students, alumni, donors, and taxpayers that their cost and “specialness” is worthy of meaningful levels of tangible support. To assume their value to society is simply self evident, is to invite their own eventual decline into irrelevancy.

Research engagement is an inclusive concept that encompasses scholarly and creative activities. Measures of research engagement include indicators of the outcomes of these activities, such as the number, quality and impact of publications, performances, and other creative works as well as inputs that support research engagement such as sponsored research funding. In the fall of 2008, I led an effort at KU to determine the extent of research engagement by university faculty over the previous ten years as part of larger strategic planning effort conducted by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies on the Lawrence campus. The analysis was limited to our history of obtaining external research funding during the previous decade (1998-2008). We were forced to focus on this narrow input measure because it was the only

reliable indicator we had at that time that was collected university wide and was readily accessible. That limitation aside, our analysis revealed that during the previous decade, despite an impressive 80% increase in total research expenditures, participation by faculty in grant supported research remained remarkably flat at approximately 50% of faculty. Mirroring this, the number of principal investigators on the Lawrence campus hovered around 500 throughout this entire period. Our analyses also indicated that participation by faculty in externally funded research was remarkably uneven within many departments, and for some departments overall external funding was lower than might be expected given the availability of federal programs to support research in their given disciplines.

When Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little arrived at KU in the fall of 2009, we presented these and other analyses to her. A natural implication of this data was that we could potentially achieve higher levels of research engagement on the Lawrence campus, which might in turn enhance both our scholarly and education missions over the long term. Shortly thereafter Chancellor Gray-Little appointed 19 faculty members to serve on a Research Engagement Task Force (the members of this task force are listed in Appendix A). Professor Kristin Bowman-James and I were appointed co-chairs of this task force. Our charge was straightforward:

- To identify appropriate measures of research engagement
- To suggest specific approaches to promote, increase, sustain, and recognize all types of research engagement by faculty.

During the following months, the Task Force met together on four occasions, held open forums on both the Lawrence and KUMC campuses, and solicited input and feedback on a set of draft recommendations by various means. The final report of the task force was submitted to the Chancellor on March 24th, 2010. It consisted of three recommendations.

1. "It is recommended that the Chancellor charge the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies (KU-L) and the Vice Chancellor for Research (KUMC) with the creation of a comprehensive system for measuring research engagement by KU faculty. The specific parameters measured for each college and school shall be determined in consultation with their respective

deans and with the approval of the Provost or the KUMC Executive Vice Chancellor. The resulting measurement system should provide discipline-appropriate profiles along with their impact on research engagement at all levels: individual faculty member, department, and school or college. Parameters chosen for research engagement must be quantifiable so that the impact of the metrics can be evaluated over time. Measures of research engagement for graduate and undergraduate students and postdoctoral associates are to be identified and assessed as appropriate. An annual KU Research Engagement Report shall be submitted to the Chancellor by the offices of the Vice Provost for Research and Graduate Studies (KU-L) and the Vice Chancellor for Research (KUMC) beginning June 1, 2011, and annually thereafter.

2. It is recommended that the Chancellor charge the dean of each college or school with the implementation of specific actions to promote, increase, sustain, and recognize research engagement by their faculty and students. The specific approaches may vary from department to department and school to school depending on the discipline and other factors. These school-specific efforts should focus, in part, on the identification and reduction of barriers to research engagement. It is strongly urged that future resource allocations be linked in part to the evaluation of

departmental/unit efforts to promote research engagement. Departments with strong records of research engagement and/or effectively promoting research engagement should be rewarded. Deans will be required to submit a brief but specific Annual Research Engagement Support Plan to the Provost (KU-L) or Executive Vice Chancellor at KUMC effective August 1, 2010.

3. It is recommended that the Chancellor, working with deans and other senior administrators, partner with faculty to enhance resources available to achieve and sustain high levels of research engagement. Such resources might include funds to support pilot research, additional research awards in recognition of exemplary research at all levels, enhancement of research infrastructure and support cores, graduate and undergraduate research fellowships, and the availability of special opportunity funds, such as travel awards, among others. Such funds will be collected from a variety of sources, including private donors and external grants and contracts generated by faculty. It is further recommended that the Chancellor, working with deans and other senior administrators, identify ways to remove the barriers and increase the incentives for grant seeking and the pursuit of other such research awards.

In addition to these three recommendations and supporting discussion, it was stated that "Upon

acceptance of this report, the Task Force recommends two immediate actions. First, the Vice Provost for Research at KU-L and the Vice Chancellor for Research at KUMC should be charged with the development of a comprehensive system for measuring research engagement by KU faculty. Second, the Provost and the KUMC Executive Vice Chancellor should meet with their respective deans and begin the implementation of specific actions in support of enhanced and sustained research engagement throughout the university." After review, the Chancellor accepted the report and initiated these two actions. Consequently, KU has begun the process of creating a "comprehensive system for measuring research engagement" and all Deans on the Lawrence campus, and all Chairs at KUMC have been asked to submit their initial plan for sustaining and enhancing research engagement in their respective faculties.

Final Thoughts

The University of Kansas is in the early stages of a long term effort to further enhance its research mission across all disciplines. KU presently has a large number of departments, centers, and programs that serve as outstanding examples of what continued research engagement can do: both by its impact beyond the university, and for its students who, because of their high levels of research engagement, are taught by internationally renowned scholars at the cutting edge of their disciplines. These departments and centers, which are often rated by various external entities as among the finest on the planet, possess strong research cultures that work to sustain their efforts over long periods of time. The overall goal of the research engagement

initiative is to sustain these departments and programs while substantially increasing the number of departments engaged at this level across the university.

A sustained effort over many years will be required before the extent of our efforts to do this can be reasonably determined.

Appendix A: Research Engagement Task Force Members

Steve Warren, Chair
Vice Provost/Professor
Research and Graduate Studies/Applied Behavioral Science
Kristin Bowman-James, Co-chair
Director/Distinguished Professor
EPSCoR/Chemistry
Craig Adams
Chair and Distinguished Professor
Civil/Environmental/Architectural Engineering
Jim Calvet
Professor, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, KUMC
John Colombo
Director/ Professor, Life Span Institute/Psychology
Derrick Darby
Associate Professor, Philosophy
Don Deshler
Director/ Professor, Center for Research on Learning/Special Education
Adam Duerfeldt
Doctoral Student, Medicinal Chemistry
Bob Goldstein
Distinguished Professor, Geology
Susan Harris
Distinguished Professor, English
Leslie Heckert
Professor, Molecular and Integrative Physiology, KUMC

Mary Lee Hummert
Vice Provost/Professor
Faculty Development/Communication Studies
Steven Maynard-Moody
Director/Professor
Institute for Policy and Social Research/Public Administration
Sara Rosen
Associate Vice Provost and Dean/Professor
Research and Graduate Studies/Linguistics
Christian Schoeneich
Chair and Professor, Pharmaceutical Chemistry
Ariel Tazkargy
Undergraduate Student, English/Global and International Studies
Paul Terranova
Vice Chancellor for Research and Senior Associate Dean/Professor
Molecular and Integrative Physiology, KUMC
Joy Ward
Associate Professor, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Susan Williams
Associate Professor, Chemical and Petroleum Engineering
Bob Collins, Staff/Director
Planning Information and Analysis, Research and Graduate Studies
John Schott, Staff Assistant Director, Institutional Research and Planning
Terry Turner, Staff Director, Planning and Analysis, KUMC