



Research Board Minutes

Date: January 27, 2021
Time: 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Place: Google Meets
Attendees: K. Atkinson, B. Chang, C. Davidson, A. Eamer, G. Edwards, S. Forrester, J. Freeman, L. Jacobs (Chair), M. Lemonde, S. Rahnamayan, L. Roy, V. Sharpe (secretary), A. Slane
Guest(s):
Regrets:

1. Approval of the agenda

Approved by consensus.

2. Approval of previous meeting's minutes

Approved by consensus.

3. Report of the Vice President Research & Innovation

Canada Research Chairs - L. Jacobs shared that both our CRC applications have been approved. He thanked Laura Rendl, Jenn Freeman and the Dean's offices in FBIT and FEAS as well as individual faculty members for the immense work that went into the applications. There is currently an embargo on releasing the names of the CRCs but we are able to share internally that the FEAS Tier 1 is starting May 1 and the FBIT Tier 2 is starting on June 1. Many people have made significant moves to get them involved in the university research enterprise already. The Tier 1 is already integrated into a number of diverse initiatives including our partnership with the University of Miami. We have plans to get the Tier 2 involved in a number of projects such as project arrow and cybersecurity initiatives. It would be ideal to have them ready to hit the ground running when they start at the university. **ACTION:** If you have ideas about where they might fit in with your research or your faculty's research reach out to L. Jacobs and he can connect you.

Partnerships - L. Jacobs noted that our partnership with Ontario Shores is continuing to evolve significantly. We established a research chair last year (held by Carolyn McGregor) and we now have another one in the works with Ontario Shores. There is a nice fit with Mental Health, Social Sciences and Data Interception and in particular we've had major developments in the area of dementia.

Collaborative Research Consortium Program (CRCP) "EaRTH initiative" - L. Jacobs noted that the launch of this initiative is February 1, 2021 and that information will be updated on our website <https://research.ontariotechu.ca/faculty/funding/internal-funding.php> and information sessions will be held. He noted that the institutions involved are Ontario Tech, Centennial College, Trent University and U of Toronto Scarborough and that it is a nice fit for us. He noted that the first call is in the research area of Integrated Energy Systems but there is a vision for roles for Health Science and Social Science research.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Collaborating Centre - We have sent an expression of interest letter for Ontario Tech University to become a Collaborating Centre and hope to have an announcement soon.

COVID and return to campus research – L. Jacobs noted that we remain in stage three and that with the province-wide stay at home order only face to face research has been suspended.

4. Report of the Executive Director, Office of Research Services

J. Freeman provided and circulated a presentation that included information on:

- COVID response: Ontario Tech continues to operate on campus research under stage 3. Face-to-face research is currently suspended by the REB which is in line with other universities due to the provincial stay at home order.
- CRCEF: ORS and RTA we submitted all of the costs. We were successful in being awarded \$164,000 for the University maintenance and ramp up costs. Researchers who submitted and were eligible will be seeing those funds roll out through Research Accounting soon. All universities were cut to 63% of their ask and then were awarded 100%. L. Jacobs noted that this relief funding has given us the opportunity to fulfill something from the SRP – the EDI lens to the research enterprise to show that we are supporters of the Dimensions Charter and DORA. Both are commitments to EDI in research. Decision around the allocation (about \$775,000) we will use an EDI lens to disperse half of that allocation. First time in history of Ontario Tech that EDI is being used in the disbursement of research funds.
L. Roy asked about the distribution of funds. J. Freeman replied that it was decided that we would maintain the same methodology as it is a key component. We are asked to report back and we'll be in a better position in the future. This is a good first step for us to do this in this exercise.
- EaRTH initiative: Launches Feb 1. The funds (\$50,000 per project) will be split equally between the four institutions. Each project must have at least one researcher from each institution. J. Freeman noted that the LOI is to help with matchmaking and that ORS will try different processes to see if we can find partners/matches, noting that researchers can do their own research to find potential partner collaborators. L. Jacobs noted that there were very little research collaborations between us and UTSC and us and Centennial and few between us and Trent (relatively narrow scope where they occurred). A significant piece of this project is creating a collaborative network on the east side of the GTA. He noted that one of the nice thing about the four institutions is that they are all roughly the same size. It is a shared hope that this project lays the foundation for bigger longer tri-council funded projects.
- Controlled Good Policy: Will see Academic Council review in January 2021.
- EDI: A self-ID survey is being developed to launch soon as well as an Employment Systems Review. An EDI Officer will be hired on a limited term contract to support the Director, EDI to facilitate achieving the goals of the CRC EDI Action Plan. There is an internal funding call from SSHRC, approximate value \$60,000. S. Forrester sought clarification on and best practices for the self-ID survey. J. Freeman clarified that the survey would not be for new hires but current staff and faculty and that ORS did ask new CRCs during the hiring process. She noted that for any questions it is best to connect with Sharifa Wright as she is the best person to guide you. L. Jacobs noted that the NSERC EDI Grant we received is paying for a lot of these initial steps such as the EDI Officer. A. Eamer inquired about the creation of the questions in the self-ID survey and if there would be an opportunity to see the survey and provide feedback before it is circulated. J. Freeman noted that the survey was designed by the employment equity sub-sub-committee which included faculty members with expertise in this area. Then Sharifa Wright was hired and joined and added some nuances. Some additional expertise from faculty members was sought. There was agreement on questions and they are now determining the survey platform. The survey was heavily vetted by faculty and expertise around the questions was sought. There is no plan to bring the tool to the Research Board. The survey was created in partnership with the Faculty Association. Once the survey is complete the Employment Systems Review will begin. It focuses on hiring practices and other pieces such as stakeholder interviews, review of documents, etc. L. Jacobs noted that a few years ago a decision was made for the university to withdraw from the Federal Contractors Provisions agreement. A decision has been made to re-join and EDI is a component.
- Hiring and Recruitment: ORS has seen a significant increase in contracts and there is a pain point as we have had only one person (Legal Counsel Candi Gogar) to process them. ORS is increasing staffing in this area with a limited term contract Contracts Officer and a one-term articling student.
- Research Ethics Board (REB): There has been year over year significant increases in REB applications and we've had a budget allocation to convert a limited term position (Research Ethics Assistant) into full-time continuing. J. Freeman noted two additional ORS vacancies: Grants Officer (limited term to cover a leave) and Project Coordinator, City Idea Lab (limited term, grant funding). L. Jacobs noted that there is also a vacancy in Entrepreneurship for a Brilliant Catalyst Program Officer. This position is oriented around the Brilliant Developer Studio which will be a combination of developer and entrepreneurship.

- Undergraduate Student Research: NSERC has made changes to the program to allow for 12-16 week projects, remote or in-person. They also raised the award top up from \$4500 to \$6000. This will lead to a greater disparity between STAR Awards and NSERC USRAs. L. Roy noted that we don't want to frustrate or disappoint students as undergraduate student research is very important to the recruitment pipeline for graduate students. L. Jacobs noted that a small amount of funding put forth for undergraduates might contribute to greater graduate student enrollment. J. Freeman stated that there is no money in the VPRI budget to assist with these costs. The STAR Awards are funded by the VPRI and there has been no increase to this budget line for years. L. Roy asked if there was a way for faculty to take on the students that weren't selected for one of these awards. J. Freeman noted that faculty have done a faculty-funded USRF research grant. J. Freeman asked for input on International students applying and if there were any concerns about students working on research projects while not being in the city or country.

L. Jacobs invited sharing of J. Freeman's report at upcoming Faculty Council meetings after February 1.

S. Forrester asked L. Jacobs if there was discussion at the Ontario VPR level about tracking research personnel infections and any COVID transmission related to research. L. Jacobs noted that there are no known COVID cases related to university research and no transmission of COVID at Ontario Tech. No institutions have traced their COVID cases to research-related activities. He noted that at the OCUR meeting the general feeling is that research is expected to continue, except for the suspension of face-to-face research and that there has not been bad news coverage relating to research. He stated that our process is strong and has held up with very little tweaking.

5. Working Groups on Research Priorities

Research Metrics Dashboard

S. Forrester – The group met January 14 and discussed some metrics where Ontario Tech does very well, how to promote them and how to best to show what we're doing.

CRC program policy review

S. Rahnamayan – The group met January 25 and agreed to meet with current and past CRCs at the university. A meeting has been scheduled for March 8 at 11 am.

Data Management Strategy

C. Davidson – The group met on January 27 and are working on determine next steps in rolling out awareness raising; what the Data Management Strategy is and why it is required. They will distribute a succinct two page document to this group to seek input and feedback on how to proceed. They are considering inviting a speaker to the Research Board later this spring to kick-start the conversation in the context that tri-council has off and on for the last 5 years been putting pressure on institutions to develop data management strategies and in particular work on data management plans for individual projects. The priority ebbs and flows and may come back significantly so we'll want to make sure we have the groundwork ready. L. Jacobs noted that the government announced their own strategy, which includes the closing of Compute Canada, the reorganization of Compute Ontario, and the establishment of the New Digital Research Infrastructure Organization (NDRIO).

Institutes and Centres

M. Lemonde – The group met on January 20. The meeting was mostly information gathering and discussion.

ACTION: The working groups will meet again in the next few weeks and be able to complete deliverables very quickly with most being completed by the end of April.

6. Faculty Exchange

Education – Many faculty are applying for the ECampus Ontario funding. Deadline is tomorrow.

FBIT – Many faculty are applying for SHSHRC IDG applications due this week and ECampus Ontario funding. Good news to share about recent research seminars that due to budget constraints speakers are normally only from close local areas but because they are now completely online we have been able to attract speakers from the US and we're seeing very high attendance.

FESNS – The Small Modular Reactor (SMR) Action Plan for Canada was released and has implications for our faculty (<https://smractionplan.ca/content/ontario-tech-university>). A few faculty have been successful in getting industry funding from CANDU Owners Group. Getting a small HPC (high performance computing) Facility – getting shipped this morning. The problem in nuclear [modeling and simulation] is where one can store their data because it is either proprietary or export controlled. This limits the ability to use Compute Canada or similar facilities. FESNS bought a small modest phase 1 capability and perhaps will expand in phase 2. There is a potential income earning opportunity if Ontario Tech could host an HPC for nuclear modeling and simulation. K. Atkinson also noted that the university would benefit from an annual internal nuclear forum to share information and gave an example of an OPG–FSSH project of which he was not previously aware. He noted that it would be helpful to share partner information. Suggestion to have wider distribution of information in key strategic areas.

Grad Studies – Pleased to say we’ve signed another cotutelle agreement with the University of Sao Paolo, Brazil in Mechanical Engineering. There is new interest from FBIT to discuss ongoing collaborations and possible cotutelles with the same university in Brazil. Another one in discussion is with a tech school in Nuremburg, Germany where there is broad intent to collaborate. Ahmad Barari is investigating the possibility of a joint Masters. L. Jacobs noted that there is also an opportunity with the University of Salerno in Italy. K. Atkinson suggested that we also explore UK options and perhaps Central Europe (Czech, Poland, etc.).

FHSci – Kinesiology faculty members were successful with grants. ECampus grants being submitted by faculty. M. Lemonde noted that the working group she is on (Institutes and Centres) can promote the Centre for Small Modular Reactors. She noted that a lot of undergraduate research projects have been submitted.

FSci – There has been a lot of research activity in Science, following the COVID rules and completing the inspections. Some faculty were concerned about the library cuts that were reported. C. Davidson stated that she is familiar with the concerns about the library cuts, shares the concerns and will reach out to Faculty Councils to have more direct discussions.

FEAS – Research is continuing to go well. At Faculty Council earlier this week there were two events discussed: 1) Hydrogen Energy Technologies: Challenges and Opportunities workshop that featured renowned researchers in this field. The entire workshop was recorded and is on YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI2-ynoxfBU>

2) In an announcement in November 2020 of Stanford University’s published list of 1965-2019 top 100,000, or 2% in their field, scientists in the world that we had numerous Engineering researchers lists. We should all really be proud. S. Rahnamayan noted that faculty want to return to campus but are learning how to do everything virtual. FEAS is applying to a grant for infrastructure for our labs (67 lab courses). He noted that the proposal for funding is to improve lab courses for virtual learners.

FSSH – Researchers are continuing to pivot re: COVID and suspension of face-to-face research and are continuing to apply for grants. The online world of virtual events has inspired people to organize events. FSSH has done more outward facing public events to showcase research (e.g. through the Oshawa Library) than before. A. Slane noted that FSSH researchers share the concerns about cuts in the Library.

7. Other Business

A. Annual tri-agency reporting

G. Edwards provided an overview of the process of getting researcher signatures on form 300/F300s (someone from RTA sends each researcher this form and they have a meeting to discuss. It sometimes requires multiple attempts.) He noted that this year there will be some changes due to significant changes in volume year over year and last year doing it remotely. Reviewing detailed financial records increases touchpoints, speed to market, etc. New improvements for this year include:

1. Reliance on our financial information system, Banner. (Every year RTA sends out reports that are generated by our system. We receive requisitions to move funds from line to line or accounts).

New: Any changes must be done prior to fiscal year end of March 31. Everyone needs to make sure that the information captured in our system is in good order which allows us to rely on our system.

2. Sign-off from researchers. Our financial system compiles data which everyone who is a grant recipient approves. There are a significant number of researchers who need to be chased and reminded multiple times to sign off on their report.

New: The expectation is that researchers are in agreement with the data unless they object within a set amount of time.

G. Edwards noted that in five years he's not seen an error in reporting and that the information system is reliable. He shared that Finance is making process changes to make the experience for researchers and RTA better.

S. Forrester sought clarification on the changes. G. Edward clarified that during the rollout everyone will have gone over the data prior to March 31 and objections must be received within a 10-day window. There will be approximately 350 reports generated. He noted that amendments to reports can be made but RTA needs to streamline the approval process due to volume. L. Jacobs noted that this process is being rolled out across the province and we are following suit. S. Forrester asked if faculty representatives can help out by sending out reminders to their faculty. G. Edwards welcomed this communication and support.

L. Jacobs noted that many may have received a request from him earlier this week to ask about research freezer capacity that could be used for a short time by an external partner. **ACTION:** Please let Vivianne know if you have a freezer/freezer capacity

B. Chang asked if the Research Excellence Awards will be taking place this year. L. Jacobs replied that the VPRI budget was deeply cut and we've been trying to figure out how to offer the REA in some way that makes them of some value but fits within our budget. There is also thinking about the Richard Marceau Chair and if that can be bundled into that competition. He noted that he would like to have a decision by the end of March. He noted that in evaluating the first two recipients of the RMC it was clear that the award winners were very effective at using the awards to further the institutional priorities around research. B. Chang noted that the awards are great recognition for researchers and that the award isn't about the money. S. Forrester agreed that the monetary part is minor. L. Jacobs noted that the trend in the last 10 years or so has seen universities offering a "President's Award in Research" and that has been well received by researchers. It does not include a financial award. L. Jacobs noted that the REA is forward-looking where the President's Awards are backward-looking about past accomplishments.

8. **Next meeting** – February 18, 2021, 10:00 – 12:00, Google Meets

9. **Adjournment** – 12:01 pm