

Committee on Research (COMCOR)
Morsani College of Medicine, University of South Florida
Annual Report 2013-2014

Committee Charge: The COMCOR is charged with making policy recommendations related to research and the research environment of the Morsani College of Medicine (MCOM). The committee is responsible for responding to changes that may impact research in the MCOM, and for aiding in the development of new policies that proactively facilitate a productive research environment. The committee chair acts a liaison with the Executive and Management Committee on Research.

Summary of 2013-2014 COMCOR Activities: The majority of the committee's effort went toward identifying deficiencies and solutions for improvement in two important areas: 1) Faculty development practices within the MCOM, and 2) Measures of faculty research productivity that could be used for setting clear expectations and making fair evaluations. Details for both of these issues are provided below. Other issues addressed during the year included concerns over changes in travel policies, recommendations to optimize internal seed and bridge grant programs, and concerns about overuse of MCOM core equipment by College of Pharmacy researchers. Ongoing issues include upgrades of core equipment that will be required with the current expansion of the MCOM research enterprise, implementing a new internal pre-review program to make grant proposals more competitive at the national level, and developing additional strategies to increase the amount of NIH funding for research projects within the MCOM.

Faculty Development: One of the primary goals for 2013-2014 was to identify ways to help MCOM faculty achieve better success at obtaining NIH grants or other nationally competitive research funding. MCOM faculty face the same problem as researchers nationwide: shrinking state or institutional financial support for research and an increasing number of applications for grants each year that is far outpacing the growth of the extramural research budgets of the NIH and other funding sources.

The COMCOR aimed to identify barriers that may be impeding the development of competitive research proposals by faculty using several sources. An initial source was the previous recommendations by the Faculty Development Strategic Workgroup made in 2004, however this resource did not directly address the current core concern: finding ways to develop faculty into more competitive applicants who obtain extramural funding. A second approach was development of a survey to evaluate current mentoring/development practices in different MCOM departments. The survey was sent out to the department heads and division chiefs in which they were asked to identify departmental staff support for preparing grant applications, practices in their departments that foster research productivity, current departmental mentoring practices, and ideas for new mentoring resources. Six departments/divisions responded to the survey,

and the results showed that practices for mentoring and development varied widely. The recommendations for improving mentoring revealed that some departments had very rudimentary problems, such as having junior faculty with insufficient protected time for research, and underdeveloped knowledge of study design and research methods. One identified a need for senior faculty who have strong research backgrounds. Some key recommendations were also to increase the availability of grant writing workshops, find a way to provide editorial support, build a set of templates describing USF facilities or other required sections of many grants that would be made available to faculty, and have a stock of faculty director letters available. The committee also met with Dr. Catherine Lynch, Associate Dean for Faculty Development, who outlined the REACH program, which consists of various workshops and networking opportunities. During the meeting the committee and Dr. Lynch brainstormed a potential new program for helping faculty develop their research ideas and have grant applications peer-reviewed internally prior to submission. To follow up on this, Dr. Nelson and Dr. Breslin met with Dr. Cindy Munro, Associate Dean, Research and Innovation, College of Nursing, to discuss their current internal pre-review of NIH grant applications. She indicated that the College of Nursing strongly encourages all applicants to submit their applications for a preliminary mock study section review. The mock study section consists of senior faculty and some outside reviewers. Senior faculty in the College of Nursing are expected to contribute to the development of junior faculty through their service, and are typically only asked to review one application per year. The outside reviewers are typically an expert in the field who is either in conflict or has just rotated off of the target study section. The outside reviewers are provided with a small honorarium for their services and usually participate in the mock study section by phone (or in person if local). Dr. Munro indicated that their program has been very successful at helping faculty get their applications funded.

A plan for an internal pre-review (mock study section) program has been drafted and will be presented to the Faculty Council, Department Chairs, Dr. Liggett and Dr. Lockwood in the November, 2014 for their input.

Accounting for Faculty Research Productivity: The Faculty Council has been working on improving measures of faculty productivity that are used in annual evaluations and for justification of salaries. In late 2013, the COMCOR was asked to formulate a set of “research value units” that could be used to account for research effort of basic science faculty. The committee came up with a comprehensive list of duties and associated time needed for various research tasks and presented the list to the Faculty Council. Ultimately it was decided that the accounting of all of these activities was too cumbersome. A committee composed of members of Faculty Council and the MCOM administration most recently proposed that salary covered by extramural funding and teaching effort would be used as primary measures, and that at least 50% effort should be covered by these activities for basic science faculty.

Future Directions: In the coming year, helping with the implementation of the grant application pre-review program will be a major priority. Other plans include new programs for fostering development new research projects, such as a less formal work-in-progress meeting series, identifying new core equipment needed to bolster MCOM research productivity, and helping investigative teams work toward developing NIH program project and training grant applications. The committee encourages any faculty member who has new ideas to enhance the research activity at MCOM to contact us. Questions or comments may be directed to Dr. Jerome Breslin, COMCOR Chair.

Respectfully Submitted on Behalf of the COMCOR

Jerome W. Breslin, PhD
Chair