

September 24, 2010

SENATE RESEARCH OFFICERS COMMITTEE:

2009-2010 ACADEMIC YEAR FINAL REPORT

Salary equity study: Four years ago, at the request of both the Research Officers Committee (ROC) and the Commission on the Status of Women, the administration initiated a salary equity study for research officers (ROs). The Provost's Office finally completed the study this year; on 02 June 2010 the ROC discussed the findings with Stephen Rittenberg, Senior Vice Provost, and Lucy Drotning, Associate Provost for Planning and Institutional Research. The study found a number of instances of statistically significant salary differences, most of which appear to be tied to starting salaries. At the Provost's request, the Executive Vice President for Health Sciences, the Executive Vice President of Arts and Sciences, the deans of the Morningside professional schools, and the director of the Earth Institute are now reviewing their processes for setting salaries. The ROC plans to meet with Dr. Rittenberg in 2010-11 to discuss the results of these reviews.

CUMC salary issues: At the June 2 ROC meeting Dr. Rittenberg said he would conduct a new study comparing raises for ROs between CUMC and the Morningside/Lamont campuses for the past year. He will compare these findings with a similar study that he carried out for 2007-2008. The earlier study found significant differences between percentage increases in raises for ROs with similar titles at the two campuses, and prompted the administration to adopt a plan to standardize raises. The new study will help to gauge progress on this plan.

Termination policy: The ROC wrote a letter to Provost Claude Steele identifying problems with Columbia's termination policy for ROs and recommending solutions. One problem is that ROs are not entitled to a minimum period of notice of nonrenewal, yet they are expected to give no less than three months' notice before they resign. Another has to do with the conditions under which ROs are entitled to a layoff allowance. The Faculty Handbook says ROs with five continuous years of compensated service are entitled to severance if their position ends as a result of "sudden and unexpected loss of funding." But the meaning of this phrase is not clear. The ROC discussed these issues with Dr. Rittenberg on June 2.

Postdoctoral issues: The Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPdA) is a valuable resource and advocate for postdocs at Columbia. The ROC hoped to meet in 2009-10 with the director, Kathryn Espiritu, but she had just resigned. Unfortunately, OPdA is now on its fourth director in the five years since its founding. The turnover has hampered the ability of the OPdA to help postdocs with vital issues such as healthcare benefits for postdoctoral research fellows, salary equity, and housing.

Fraction of research funds generated by RO Principal Investigators (PIs): The ROC sought information from the Columbia's Sponsored Projects Office about the fraction of total research funds that RO PIs bring to the University. On 05 May 2010, the ROC met with Carol Tycko, Director of Business Systems in the Sponsored Projects Office, to review her

preliminary report on this subject. The ROC asked for a number of clarifications of the data and will meet in 2010-11 with Ms. Tycko to review the revised report.

Effort reporting: Federal law requires that a source of non-sponsored funding be used to cover the time spent by faculty and ROs writing research grants. The ROC is particularly concerned about finding funds to cover postdocs who participate in grant writing. This is a critical part of their training for their future career. The ROC raised this issue in their meeting on 15 December 2009, which included the guests Eric Coles, Database Administration, Sponsored Projects Administration; Robert Kass, Vice Dean for Research at CUMC and Chair of Pharmacology; Martha Hooven, Vice Dean of Administration, CUMC; Scott Norum, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Arts and Sciences; Joanne Verdebos, Vice Dean for Research Administration, CUMC, and Carol Tycko. The ROC plans to follow up these discussions this coming year.

Office of the University Ombudsman: The ROC met with Ombuds officer Marsha Wagner and her deputy, Bathabile Mthombeni, on 23 March 2010. The guests presented a general report on the kinds of issues ROs have brought to them over the years, along with some recommendations about how these could be addressed. The ROC will pursue some of these recommendations with relevant administrators in the coming academic year.

University Senate Confidentiality Policy: The ROC reviewed a revised set of confidentiality guidelines proposed by the Structure & Operations Committee, and offered suggestions on how to balance the principles of transparency—which is fundamental to the purpose of the University Senate—and confidentiality, which is essential in committee discussions of sensitive information with administrators.

Senate working group on fringe benefits: The ROC looked forward to representation on a small Senate working group on fringe benefits, which was in formation throughout last spring. But plans for this group were scrapped after the end of the semester by the administration, which created instead a 27-member task force with minimal Senate representation—four faculty members, two of whom are Senate leaders, and no one from the other Senate constituencies whose members use Columbia fringe benefits: researchers, librarians, or administrative staff. The ROC wishes to express its disappointment with this approach, which effectively bypasses the elected body that is charged to make policy on issues, such as fringe benefits, that affect the entire university or more than one school.

For the Committee,

Daniel Savin, chair