A message from the University Senate Research Officers Committee

September 26, 2018

Dear Fellow Research Officer:

With the upcoming Postdoc union vote, we would like to remind everyone that you already have a voice in discussions with the Administration at Columbia University through the Research Officers Committee (ROC), a Standing Committee of the Columbia University Senate.

To learn more about the robust and effective representation that the ROC provides Research Officers, I encourage you to attend the next Senate Plenary meeting, this Friday 28 September 2018 at 1:15 PM at the Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Institute in the 9th Floor lecture hall. Anyone with a CUID is welcome to attend. The ROC will present our annual report during the meeting, which we summarize below.

For the past 15 years, the ROC has effected major changes in administrative and research policy at Columbia. Since the ROC was established in 2003, our collaborative work at all levels across the entire University Administration has greatly improved working conditions at Columbia for Postdoctoral Research Scientists/Scholars/Fellows and Associate Research Scientists/Scholars, while at the same time advancing Columbia’s dual mission of education and research.

Some of our major policy accomplishments specific to Postdoctoral Researchers include:

- Increased the minimum salary for Postdoctoral Researchers to match that of a National Institutes of Health Postdoctoral Trainee Fellowship (Year 0).
- Provided health care benefits for Postdoctoral Fellows whose fellowships did not include such support.
- Established the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs and hired additional staff in the Office.
- Established the Columbia University Postdoctoral Society (CUPS).
- Gained University recognition and support for CUPS.
- Established a Postdoctoral Researcher Senate seat on the University Senate.
- Held nearly annual town hall meetings for Postdocs to hear from them about their issues. Each year three town halls were held, one on the Morningside campus, one at Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC), and one at the Lamont-Doherty campus.

Specific to Associate Research Scientists/Scholars, some of our major accomplishments include:

- Increased the minimum salary for Associate Research Scientist/Scholars to match that of an NIH Postdoctoral Trainee Fellowship (Year 5).
- Doubled the number of University Senators from 2 to 4 for Professional Research Officers (PROs), which include Associate Research Scientists/Scholars.
- Developed clear Principal Investigator (PI) guidelines for Associate Research Scientists/Scholars to submit proposals as PI.
- Held nearly annual town hall meetings for PROs to hear from them about their issues. Each year three town halls were held, one on the Morningside campus, one at Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC), and one at the Lamont-Doherty campus.

Additionally, some of our major accomplishments specific to all Research Officers (Postdocs, PROs, and Staff Officers) include:
Revised the **annual recommended salary guidelines** from the Office of the Provost to state the minimum average salary increase that Research Officers should receive.

- Established **more equitable health care premiums** compared to our peer institutions.
- Restored and extended **tuition benefits** for Research Officers.
- Implemented a **mandatory 3-month notice of non-renewal** policy for termination.
- Clarified **Federal Effort Reporting requirements** as they apply to Research Officers.
- Shaped Columbia’s **Institutional Policy on Misconduct in Research**.
- Contributed to Columbia’s **Conflict of Interest Policy**.
- Advised on the **Accounting and Reporting at Columbia (ARC)** financial system.
- Completed **salary equity studies** in 2010 and 2014, which found some significant pay differentials by gender and race/ethnicity.
- Advised on **implementation of new salary guidelines** to reduce the pay differentials.
- Established and increased **Research Officer representation on multiple University Senate committees** that meet in confidence with university administrators to develop new administrative and research policies. These committees include: Benefits Subcommittee, Budget Review Committee, Campus Planning and Physical Development Committee, Commission on the Status of Women, External Relations and Research Policy Committee, Housing Policy Committee, Information and Communications Technology Committee, and Libraries and Digital Resources Committee.

Looking to the future, the ROC is currently working with central Administration on numerous issues of importance to Postdoctoral Researchers and Associate Research Scientists/Scholars. These include salary equity, housing, child care, mentoring, discrimination, mental health, bullying, and sexual harassment.

Key to the success that the ROC has had over the past 15 years in effecting major changes in administrative and research policy at Columbia has been our collaborative working relationship with the University Administration. As a result, the central Administration has been readily accessible for discussions about any and all issues relating to Research Officers. Moreover, they have reached out and sought input from the ROC when developing new policies that will affect Research Officers.

For the upcoming vote next week, I encourage all eligible voters to inform themselves about the ROC and the University Senate. You can find helpful information about the University Senate [here](#), and more about the ROC and our past accomplishments at this [link](#). We also encourage you to attend our annual town halls so that you can make your voice heard. The next series will be this October for PROs and Staff Officers, who should have already received emails about them. We also plan to hold our next town halls for Postdoctoral Researchers in spring 2019.

I hope that everyone will consider this vote thoughtfully and weigh its potential impact. Above all, I encourage all eligible voters to be certain to vote!

Sincerely,

Daniel Wolf Savin, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Officers Committee
University Senator