

Yearly Report to Faculty Senate (May 3, 2024)

Faculty Research Council (FRC)

Committee Chair:

Alex Stehn (Philosophy, College of Liberal Arts)

Members:

Claudia Biguetti (School of Podiatric Medicine)

Nathalie Chacon (Physician Assistant Studies Department, College of Health Professions)

Subhash Chauhan (Immunology and Microbiology, School of Medicine)

Baofeng Feng (School of Mathematical & Statistical Sciences, College of Science)

Michael Guerrero (Bilingual & Literacy Studies, College of Education & P16 Integration)

Susan Hurley-Glowa (School of Music, College of Fine Arts)

Dongchul Kim (Computer Science, College of Engineering & Computer Sciences)

Sibin Wu (Management, RCV College of Business & Entrepreneurship)

Sudershan Pasupuleti (School of Social Work)

VACANT (School of Nursing)

Ex-Officio:

Can Saygin (Office of Research and Graduate College)

Purpose: The purpose of the Faculty Research Council is to recommend faculty research policies and the award of internal research monies.

Responsibilities: The Faculty Research Council has the responsibility to:

- 1) recommend faculty research policies;
- 2) establish criteria and protocols for awarding internal research monies; and
- 3) review applications and make recommendations concerning awards of such internal funds. To avoid the potential appearance of conflicts of interest, faculty who serve on this Council and intend to apply for funding through this program shall inform the Council Chair and recuse himself or herself from all Council activities or meetings during that particular award cycle.

List of meeting dates:

1. May 10, 2023 (set our agenda for the summer and next academic year)
2. July 25, 2023 (discussed and established process for reviewing seed grant proposals)
3. August 1, 2023 (completed reviews of 50 seed grant proposals)
4. August 14, 2023 (finalized ranking of seed grant proposal after adding third reviewer to applications where the two initial reviewers disagreed substantially)
5. November 1, 2023 (made Round #1 Travel Funding Decisions)
6. No meetings were conducted in Spring 2024, but there were many email discussions trying to figure out what happened with the travel funding process (see below).

List of issues addressed, actions taken, and recommendations:

- 1) **Creation of a Teams/SharePoint** to facilitate the FRC's working going forward:
[UTRGV Faculty Research Council \(FRC\)](#)
- 2) **How to improve the Seed Grant program**
 - a) **Issue:** FRC members are often contacted by faculty whose seed grants were NOT funded. We need to be transparent about both the review process (which we control) and the end results (which we do not control, since the FRC advised but the Provost ultimately decided which and how many applications to fund).
 - b) **Recommendation:** A final seed grant funding report should be sent to the FRC just before announcements go out to seed grant applicants. This would help FRC members respond to any complaints and would increase process transparency.
 - i) **NOTE:** The FRC received the following report but had to ask for it explicitly. Our recommendation is that the report be generated and sent automatically.
 - (1) 50 applications were submitted, reviewed, and scored.
 - (2) The top 30 applications scored between 100 and 90 (60%).
 - (3) One application was withdrawn, thus 29 were selected for funding.
 - (4) Of those selected for funding, 28 were awarded the amounts requested, and 1 application was given twice the amount requested. (The original budget seemed underfunded, so we increased it.)
 - (5) The total amount awarded was based on the available budget.
 - ii) **NOTE:** Historical seed grant stats:
 - (1) AY 23-24 awarded 169k to 29 out of 49 applicants (59%)
 - (2) AY 22-23 awarded 379k to 55 out of 87 applicants (63%)
 - (3) AY 21-22 awarded 330k to 50 out of 85 applicants (59%)
- 3) **How to improve the Faculty Travel Support Program**
 - a) **Issue:** \$800 is what most research faculty at UTRGV receive from their home departments for travel funding, but this is not enough to travel to most conferences.
 - i) **NOTE:** Some faculty receive more from their departments. At the top end of the scale, Medical School faculty receive \$3,000.
 - b) **Recommendation:** Faculty with research specified in their MOA need guaranteed (or at least reliably predictable) travel funding. This could be achieved if ALL eligible faculty were assured of at least \$800 from the Travel Support Program, which when combined with home department funding would total at least \$1600, enough for one conference.
 - c) **Recommendation:** A travel funding report should be sent to the FRC after the decisions are made, just before announcements go out to faculty who applied. This would help FRC members respond to any complaints and would increase process transparency.
- 4) **Role of the FRC in the evaluating and granting of awards going forward**
 - a) **Issue:** For the first travel award cycle, the FRC recommended that ALL eligible travel award applications (n=85) be funded. The Provost approved our recommendation.

- b) **Issue:** Announcements went out to faculty who applied for the second travel funding cycle, but the FRC was never contacted. We did not participate in the review process, nor did anyone from the administration contact us proactively to explain what changed.
- c) **Recommendation:** Going forward, communication with the FRC needs to be improved.
 - i) **NOTE:** This is what the FRC received from Dr. Cinthya Saavedra (VP for Faculty Affairs) in response to our inquiry about the process: “Prior to 22-23AY this process was entirely internal, however in the absence of a Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, a faculty evaluation was recommended by the former Provost. The good news is that research funds were reallocated this fiscal year, so we can fund a majority if not all applications. Therefore, moving forward we for see no need for the FRC to review.”
 - ii) **NOTE:** The FRC concurs. If all (or nearly all) eligible travel funding applications are funded, so that all research faculty can count on \$1600 of travel support (as per Recommendation #3b above), the FRC does not need to be involved apart from receiving reports (see Recommendation #3c above).

5) Whether or not the FRC should provide feedback on seed grant proposals

- a) **Issue:** This question came up internally last summer. The FRC decided not to provide feedback because it would be far more labor-intensive for reviewers (who are 9-month employees conducting their reviews over the summer).
- b) **Issue:** The Provost asked us to rethink the reviewer selection, assignment, and review process. He also thought that all applicants should get feedback (funded or not).
- c) **Recommendation:** The FRC should revisit the issue—in conversation with Dr. Saygin, Dr. Saavedra, and/or Dr. Zayas. If the FRC no longer reviews travel, this may free us up to do more work providing feedback on the seed grant proposals.

6) Levels of travel funding and other research support across the UT System

- a) **Issue:** Faculty research capacity is tied directly to research support.
- b) **Issue:** As the pressure increases on faculty to produce more research, we need to ensure that there is a corresponding increase in things like travel and research funding.
- c) **Recommendation:** The FRC would like information about the levels of travel funding and seed grant funding available at comparable institutions.