

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

SENATE ASSEMBLY

Minutes of Assembly Meeting, January 17, 1977

- ATTENDANCE Present: Members Aupperle, Brazer, Browder, Cartwright, Child, Christensen, Cohen, Coon, Corpron, Crawford, Diamond, Downen, Edwards, A., Edwards, O., Eisley, Elving, Goldman, Gordon, Gray, Harris, J., Harris, R., Hildebrandt, Horsley, Johnson, Kachaturoff, Kish, Lands, Leary, Lehmann, Lindberg, Livermore, Lytle, Merte, Millard, Heers, Nesbitt, Fowler, Portman, Rabkin, Scott, Seger, Sherman, Votaw, Weeks, Colburn, Williams
- Absent: Members Adams, Angus, Baublis, Bornstein, Cornell, Cosand, Crichton, DeKornfeld, Deskins, Faulkner, Fekety, Flynn, Browne, Jones, Caldwell, Murphey, Proctor, Simonds, Soucek, Stross, Northcutt, West, Winans, Zorn
- Guest: Charles G. Overberger, Vice-President for Research
- CALL TO ORDER Professor Williams welcomed Assembly members and called the meeting to order at 3:20 p.m.
- APPROVAL OF MINUTES The minutes of the December 13, 1976 Senate Assembly meeting were approved as distributed.
- ANNOUNCEMENTS Professor Williams announced that at next month's meeting the report of the economic status of the faculty will be presented in accordance with the expressed wish of the Assembly.
- NOMINATIONS & APPOINTMENTS SACUA presented the name of Professor Richard Mann to fill a three year term on the University Cellar Board of Directors replacing Professor James M. Miller. SACUA also presented the name of Professor Thomas C. Kinnear to complete a term of Professor Lee Danielson on the same Board of Directors. Professor Kinnear's appointment is for one year. Both nominees were unanimously supported by the Senate Assembly.
- PRESENTATION BY VICE-PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH Professor Williams introduced Vice-President Overberger and his address entitled "Current Profile of Research at The University of Michigan."
- Vice-President Overberger expressed his appreciation to the Senate Assembly for inviting him to speak on the topic of research activities at Michigan.
- In opening his presentation, Vice-President Overberger presented some figures dealing with the financial support for research at Michigan over the last ten years. In the first slide shown to the Assembly, Vice-President Overberger presented a bar graph which showed the actual dollar amounts spent by research activities. This slide gave the general impression that substantial yearly gains had been achieved. Slides which followed, however, modified the simple reporting of gross dollar amounts. Vice-President Overberger pointed out that when inflation figures were accounted for the dollar amounts have not increased in support of our research activities. Dr. Overberger also gave the Assembly some important information as to the source of research dollars. He pointed to the heavy dependence upon the

federal sector for research support. On the matter of broad fields of study and dollar support of research interests, Dr. Overberger gave figures relating to the Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, and the Humanities.

As to the number of proposals presented to DRDA, it was pointed out that the numbers have stayed rather constant over the last two years. Dr. Overberger did note, however, that money spent to assist in the development of proposals has not been increased in recent years. He forecast some service difficulty if the DRDA budget is held constant in the future. Vice-President Overberger did assure the members of the Assembly that the Division of Research Development and Administration would continue to do as much as possible to assist faculty members in enhancing their research activity.

Dr. Overberger next moved to some problems related to faculty research. He pointed out concern for the inability to hire younger faculty members. He said that the young faculty members add a vitality that is needed. A second problem is that our national reputation is the product of a nucleus of some 200 to 300 faculty members. It is important that this nucleus of outstanding researchers be maintained. Third, service dollars, that is money to assist in the development of proposals, must be increased to keep Michigan strong. As mentioned earlier, DRDA has not been provided the funds necessary to increase its service function. Fourth, federal support has been dropping, which is cause for concern. Fifth, while proposal activity is high it does seem that the proportionate number of faculty members with outside support has been decreasing. This point is difficult to assess because of the lack of data to determine those with more than one project. It would appear, however, that a smaller percentage of the faculty is bearing the brunt of our University's research effort supported by outside funding. He noted that much research in certain areas of the University is carried out with internal funds, either as part of the normal salary structure or special funds such as are available from Rackham.

Dr. Overberger next turned his attention to a discussion of Michigan's standing, nationally, in terms of federal research dollars. It is apparent that federal support has dropped at Michigan and that we are losing some ground in national rankings. To analyze this problem further Dr. Overberger looked at the acceptance rates for proposals presented to the various agencies in the federal sector. He also presented the average dollar award over the years 1969-1970 to the present. This slide showed that the average award has remained surprisingly constant over the years.

Vice-President Overberger briefly discussed the number of funded research grants by professorial rank. His slide on the subject indicated a slight decrease in the activity of faculty members but admitted further analysis was needed. He pointed out that we must give research high priority across all ranks and at all administrative levels in order to have it play its traditional and vital role at Michigan.

Dr. Overberger said that he realized that there were problems in the research area due to more outside pressure on the University. He mentioned five of these problems:

1. Universities are expected to be problem solvers. Society expects too much in many cases. Universities cannot solve everybody's problems. Failure to meet expectations some hold for universities can ultimately cause diminished support for university research activity.

2. Equality of opportunity and standards of performance must be accounted for in research activity. Dr. Overberger stated his commitment to affirmative action programs and other regulating legislation but cautioned everyone to understand their impact upon research.

3. The accountability of the University and its research activity has increased. Research is on the top of the accountability structure. Guidelines for accountability have serious financial implications.

4. The effects of research on people and their activities is under review. Social accountability is and will always be with us. Dr. Overberger pointed out that we all saw this point demonstrated in the DNA controversy of last year.

5. Universities must compete with other societal problems in the political arena. Here the point is obvious, funding must be spread across all requests. Political realities of the time are such that direct legislative support of research activities is expected to be minimal.

Dr. Overberger moved to a discussion of the future role of the federal government in supporting research activities. He does see small increases in federal dollars over the next few years. A second point was that we are going to have to compete more vigorously in the future with national laboratories, etc. A third point was that proposals for basic research will be supported. Fourth, the federal dollars will find their ways to the universities for the large research projects. The problem here is that universities may not have the graduate students needed to assist in carrying out the research. Fifth, lack of adequate instrumentation is a real problem at Michigan. Dr. Overberger emphasized that we did not keep up during the 1960's. Sixth, we have problems with shifts in fields of research activity. We cannot always adjust quickly enough. Seventh, cost sharing may become an even greater problem. If indirect cost dollars are eliminated the damage to our University will be significant. The eighth point raised was that peer group evaluation will continue into the future. The ninth and final point is that costs for administration to cope with growing Federal regulation will increase. This of course will cause a strain on every university in the years ahead.

Vice-President Overberger closed by saying that he has a great respect for this faculty and that it was his desire that their involvement in research pursuits remain high in the years to come.

Questions were opened by Professor Lehmann, who was concerned about the dollars allocated for research activity and the incentives for faculty members to do research. Dr. Overberger agreed that money generated internally for research activities is limited and that this is a problem. On the matter of incentives, Dr. Overberger said he was a bit old-fashioned in his views and believes that a person does research out of a desire to pursue intellectual problems, to work with graduate students with similar interests, and to secure the prestige that results in being recognized for great research. The strongest incentive is one's personal motivation.

Professor Lands asked about the calculation of the indirect cost rate and how the rate is used as a research incentive. He argued that in some cases the rate may serve as a disincentive. Dr. Overberger took a few minutes to explain the history of the agreements and guidelines that lead to figures for indirect costs. Government auditors originally found the guidelines acceptable, however, there is now some doubt being voiced especially on the point of departmental administration, a figure which is averaged out on campus. He would not agree on the fairness or unfairness of the particular formulation in dealing with this overhead cost.

Professor Lands continued the point by asking if there were more efficient ways to deal with associated costs like secretarial assistance. Dr. Overberger said that his office has looked at a number of possibilities to deal with problems related to the "sensitive area" of indirect costs. No one solution seems to be entirely acceptable at this time.

Professor Kish asked about the role of task-oriented research and its future in the research activities at Michigan. It was his belief that government agencies and independent research groups are securing grants which might more appropriately be conducted at the University. The question was: what could the University do to be more competitive in securing grants that are currently going elsewhere? Dr. Overberger said that the University has an important role in task-research. The areas of applied medicine and science are currently securing grants. Some areas have greater problems in securing task-oriented grants. He went on to point out that his office was aware of the problem and would do all that it could do to assist those interested in task-oriented research, provided that the programs were consistent with the role and mission of the University.

Professor Cohen asked if research funds were used to supplement teaching costs. Dr. Overberger said that the question was more difficult to answer than it may first appear because it is difficult to separate the research and teaching functions. He did say that it was his belief that some research funds were being used to supplement teaching costs, for example, the support of graduate students.

At this point Professor Williams asked if Dean Sussman wished to add to the discussion. Dean Sussman thanked Professor Williams for the opportunity and said that he was in full agreement with the points developed in Vice-President Overberger's presentation. He did say, however, that he wanted to add special emphasis to one point given by Dr. Overberger. Dean Sussman said that it did appear that reduced numbers of graduate students would necessitate the use of postdoctoral fellows to assist the research activities of this University in the future. He added that the demographic information available to his office left little doubt that graduate enrollments would decline in the years ahead.

Professor Johnson said he wished to make an observation and then ask a question. First he said that he was concerned with the status of the young researcher. He said some researchers feel like second-class citizens in this University's structure. Second, he noted that the complexities of Washington now require a strong lobbying effort on the part of the University.

Specifically, he asked if we should not have a Washington office. Dr. Overberger agreed that the absence of the tenure track for a young full-time researcher is a problem, but he added that peer review procedures have helped the Michigan situation. Dr. Overberger pointed out that the tenure track has some problems for those faculty carrying out interdisciplinary research because of the usual strict disciplinary orientation used by those who grant promotions. On the point of the establishment of a Washington office, Vice-President Overberger agreed that more time should be devoted to the "Washington effort." He said that Dr. David Heebink, Assistant to President Fleming, spends two days a week in Washington and that the University has memberships in several excellent organizations such as the Association of American Universities. He also pointed out that some of the deans, especially in the health sciences, have done a good job lobbying.

Professor Elving first noted that the inflationary figures, especially as they relate to graduate student support, are misleading and then went on to ask Dr. Overberger how we evaluate research output. Dr. Overberger said that parameters in various funding models are being considered but that they are not very satisfactory. A model to fix research output would be extremely difficult to structure. How would one evaluate quality for example? It is a rough problem and one for which Dr. Overberger did not have an answer.

Dean Sussman joined the discussion to say that a committee on which he sits is concerned with the evaluation of research output. He too observed that subjectivity of assessment is ever present. He argued that review is best completed at the unit level. Once the assessment is taken from those close to the research, the value of the review is diminished.

Professor Christensen asked about the role of the center grant in the future of research activity. Dr. Overberger said he realizes the wide range of problems associated with center grants and believes the government will continue to support them, particularly in the health sciences.

Professor Gordon asked about the weight a dean or the deans place on the teaching and research functions. Dr. Overberger said that he could not speak for the deans and their executive committees. He did say that for a university with a research tradition, the problem is not grave because the dual functions have evolved with faculty agreement. A new research program in a new college has much greater difficulty in determining the appropriate balance for research and teaching.

Professor J. Harris asked about the role of centers and institutes in our University's research effort. More specifically, he asked about the possible competition between the "departmental faculty" and research staffs of centers and institutes. Dr. Overberger said that he realized that in some instances money was more easily secured by center and institute personnel yet he did not see a serious competitive problem in this area on the Michigan campus.

Professor Sherman asked about legislative appropriations for research. Dr. Overberger said that we have not been very successful in securing line item appropriations for research activity at Michigan.

Professor Votaw asked if "Lansing" did, in fact, appreciate the University's research efforts. Vice-President Overberger said that there is great diversity in the interests of the members of the State Legislature yet he did feel that there was an appreciation of the fact that we are a research university.

Questions were concluded and Professor Williams thanked Vice-President Overberger for his excellent presentation.

No new business was presented.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned: 5:00 p.m.

C. William Colburn
Secretary

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