



## Research Policies Committee

Minutes of October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Circulated: October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Approved: October 15, 2020

Present: Natalie Colabianchi, MaryJo Banasik, Maddy Paxson, Jay Charles Vornhagen, Irene St Charles, Vania Hinkovska-Galcheva, Nicholas Harris, Hafiz Malik, Allen Liu, Marisa Conte, Jessica Lynn-Kanitz Durkin, Rebecca Cunningham

Absent: Mimi Dalaly, Robert Ploutz-Synder, Vitaliy Popov, Teri Rosales

3:32 PM: Call to Order, Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved. The minutes for the April 24, 2020 Research Policies Committee meeting were not approved. The minutes will be sent out to the Research Policies Committee to be approved at the Research Policies Committee meeting on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

3:33 PM: Summary of announcements

3:33 PM: Introductions

### Summary:

Each committee member was asked to share their: name, position at the university, area of research, status of research and how it has changed due to COVID-19

- Natalie Colabianchi (Chair of the Research Policies Committee); Associate Professor and Chair of the Applied Exercise Science program in the School of Kinesiology and Research Associate Professor at the Institute for Social Research; built and social environment of where people live, work, and play and its influence on physical activity and chronic disease; data analysis phase with a few challenges due to COVID-19
- Hafiz Malik; Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Michigan-Dearborn; cybersecurity, automotive cybersecurity (sensor security), and forensics; COVID-19 impacted industry-funded projects but projects were nearing the end so challenges were not as significant, new projects are impacted by capacity/density limitations (10-15 people normally, but now only 3 people)
- Allen Liu (Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs Liaison); Associate Professor in Mechanical Engineering and Biomedical Engineering ; mechanobiology and building synthetic cells; density was previously an issue but scheduling shifts has been helpful, undergraduate research has been impacted and office space is an issue from the student-perspective
- Irene St Charles; Clinical Research Coordinator in the Pediatric Surgery at Michigan Medicine; a lot of research has started up again, but some studies are still on hold
- Jay Charles Vornhagen; Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Pathology and former Co-President of the Michigan Postdoctoral Association; highly resistant antibiotic bacteria in the gut microbiome; research has been challenging, isolating,



and there have been financial hardships

- Maddy Paxson (Undergraduate Representative); Junior studying Psychology and Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program Group Facilitator; romantic interracial relationships and racial ideology; planned to use saliva samples but has shifted approach and currently working on IRB proposal
- Marisa Conte; Associate Director for Research and Informatics at the Taubman Health Sciences Library and PhD student in the Department of Learning Health Sciences; use of knowledge in a learning and health system
- Nicholas Harris (3<sup>rd</sup> Year on the policies committee); Administrator in the Clinical Trials Support Office at the medical school; clinical trial projects (COVID and non-COVID projects)
- Vania Hinkovska-Galcheva; Assistant Research Professor in Nephrology; biochemistry

Action: None.

3:42: Quick Overview of Research Ramp-up (Dr. Rebecca Cunningham, Vice President for Research)

Summary:

Dr. Cunningham is an emergency medicine physician by training and spent 25 years in the emergency department at the University of Michigan and at the Hurly Medical Center in Flint while working on her research portfolio. She served as an associate vice president in the health sciences and is currently the Vice President of Research.

Dr. Cunningham shared the following remarks:

- Happy to see a broadly representative group across the research enterprise
- Goal is to think about how we can get research working back again and getting it as productive as it can be while making sure we are all as safe as we can be
- Ramp up status: made recent adjustments to increase occupancy to 60%, undergraduates should be able to be integrated back into labs as much as density can allow, expansion of human subjects restrictions (ages and PPE needed across age groups)
- Safety in labs has been great to date: among human subjects research there have been less than a dozen people who have become ill and there has been no transmission among coworkers to date (tested the asymptomatic contacts of researchers who had COVID-19)
- Restrictions have been loosened because we know a lot more now than we did in April in terms of how people were going to get sick from this when they go back to work, what kind of protections are in place, and how well those protections work in a formalized work place
- Over the course of the next year, she would like this group to have a lot of bidirectional flow and would make herself available; encourages committee members to get input from their domains; and then as the university tweaks policies and change policies she will continue to ask for input
- Solicited feedback on what is working and not working in areas and where committee members see realistic opportunities to change policies safely

Action: None.



3:50 PM: Moderated discussion of research challenges, questions, concerns and triumphs (Everyone)

Summary:

Dr. Cunningham provided initial comments on the specific questions posed by the Office regarding density, getting people into offices, and undergraduate involvement. Dr. Colabianchi solicited additional feedback and Dr. Cunningham asked for specific feedback on the 60% density threshold.

- Dr. Hinkovska-Galcheva explained that although students have the option to work in shifts in their lab, the lab cannot involve students because of the social distance guidelines (maintaining at least 6 feet between people). The design of the lab space does not allow the lab to be at 60% capacity with everyone distanced in accordance with the social distancing policy. Increasing the density more would not be helpful in this case.
  - Dr. Cunningham shared the university is not willing to have people work closer than 6 feet together because it would put staff and students at risk. Potential solutions include shift work and/or working on weekends.
  - Dr. Hinkovska-Galcheva and Dr. Cunningham concluded that although the research can move forward the training and educating of students is not optimal. Dr. Vornhagen and Dr. Liu seconded this sentiment.
- Dr. Cunningham shared it is important to consider density and distance because people are moving around actively and spending time in spaces. The industrial hygienists have stated working 6 feet apart alone is not sufficient for people working all day together.

Dr. Colabianchi and Dr. Cunningham solicited feedback on the modification of risk categories and which studies have not been able to start despite loosened restrictions:

- Irene shared that those with extra interaction (e.g., extra blood draw) are not being started or those that do not have any benefit to the participant. She also shared that students (paid and for credit) are back in the lab, but compliance has pushed back on giving them access to MiChart.
  - Dr. Cunningham shared that studies put into buckets before can be reconsidered by the human subjects research committee. She also shared many studies involving specimen collection are ongoing, but studies which are high risk and offer no benefit are not being activated as it would not be safe and ethical (e.g. observational studies of patients in nursing homes). Jessica to look into the MiChart student issue and get back to the committee.

Dr. Liu asked for Dr. Cunningham's thoughts on when congregate office space would re-open (typically students would have access to the lab space and the office space, but now that they cannot access the office space they stay in the lab instead which inadvertently increase the density of the lab):

- Dr. Cunningham reiterated congregate spaces where dry lab work takes place has not been approved to restart in person since it is work that can be done differently. She was interested in the idea of how to offload the density of lab spaces where densities are unintentionally being increased due to office space being closed. She also shared opening faculty offices is on the active discussion list this week at Fleming to see what fits within the executive order (and what restrictions and



- limitations need to be in place to ensure it is safe).
- Mr. Harris shared it would be helpful to have a compliance consultant (someone who research teams could go to for guidance on what can be done within their unique research space/blueprint). He noted the rules are clear, but the implementation and use of space is difficult since labs are working with different spaces.
    - Dr. Cunningham shared that on the human subjects side they are hoping to identify what groups are stuck in their ability to progress in their work, provide localized guidance, and go back and forth with research teams on plans. Also thought that we may be able to do something on the lab side or within the clinical coordinator space.

Dr. Vornhagen spoke on behalf of the postdoctoral committee and mentioned there has been little done to address the peripheral issues that COVID-19 has caused for postdoctoral students and graduate students. Specifically, postdocs with dependents (30-40% of all postdocs) have had challenges getting into the lab due to having kids in school and the fact that the postdoc salary is not commensurate with the University of Michigan's childcare facilities (whereas grad students receive a childcare subsidy). The peripheral impact has caused many postdocs to not be able to enter the wet lab and this has not been addressed by Central Campus. Rackham started a small emergency fund but it is not enough and prospects are grim in terms of job market.

- Dr. Cunningham shared that many federal agencies have looked to extended the funding year of the postdocs who are involved and sometimes at the expense of bringing on someone else (this has been done at a variety of levels and the answers are not homogenous). Dr. Cunningham shared there has been a lot of thinking about dependents and hopes there will be more action soon. The Office of Research has put together a committee led by Huda Akil and Tabbye Chavous to focus on disparities that have happened during COVID. Dr. Cunningham emphasized the importance of recognizing that COVID impacted groups disproportionately (underrepresented groups will be hurt more by spending freezes, publications among people with dependents will be impacted). The Office of Research is doing a couple of things to address this: 1) looking at their own data to see what the impacts have done to these groups 2) finalizing short-term and long-term, actionable solutions to these issues and developing a report. These solutions may not be as sweeping as we need, but the committee is looking at inequities in the research enterprise (prior inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID) and is targeting more systemic solutions. There is also a plan to bring these solutions to different groups on campus (including postdocs) to get their input. On Central Campus the School of Education is also piloting programs around childcare and dependent education.

**Action:**

- Jessica will contact the human subjects review committee to make sure applications are revisited for studies that were previously on hold
- Jessica will look into the MiChart access issue for students
- Jessica will confirm the postdoctoral representative on the committee led by Huda Akil and Tabbye Chavous
- Cross-reference Dr. Cunningham's schedule with the Research Policies Committee schedule



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4:18: Adjournment

Respectfully submitted

Natalie Colabianchi