UTSA Research Goals: Micro Issues

RAB sub-committee

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I: Introduction

Research is commonly defined as scholarly and creative activity that contributes to a larger body of disciplinary knowledge and practice. There are different research modalities by disciplines and colleges, or clusters of disciplines. For example, in disciplines such as Engineering, Business, Sciences, those in the Life Sciences and in many of the Social Sciences, research publications (“referred academic/scholarly”) are at the core of their mission to carry out research, deliver teaching, and facilitate learning. It is well known that the number of research publications grows at a rate of 3.26 percent per year (ref. Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory). A strong record of research publications and associated grant support in these disciplines at an institution increases the visibility of the members and the institution in the profession and is widely used as an indicator of an institution’s standing relative to other research institutions. Moreover, in these disciplines, the co-dependency of teaching and research confirms the significance of research publications in the continued scholarly development of any faculty member.

Comparatively, scholarship in disciplines within the Humanities may have a wider variety of research and creative products, each in line with disciplinary standards. Books, artistic installments, musical composition and performance, single-authored theoretical articles, and multi-authored articles in a team science frame are some common forms of scholarly and creative products. Because of the diversity across disciplines, it is imperative to recognize and support disciplinarily appropriate forms of scholarly and creative products.

Across disciplines and colleges, faculty scholarship contributes to a community of learners, through publications in high quality and leading academic journals, classroom teaching, research advising, and broader community outreach. This reflects well on any academic institution hosting the individual researcher since such an individual becomes increasingly closer to the academic community. It is not difficult to see why supporting such research activity on the part of any faculty member can send a productive signal to other members of the same institution and eventually lead to the formation of a group that supports and recognizes the importance of scholarship as part of their professional identity as well as the importance of scholarship to the health of the academic community.

Similarly, across disciplines and colleges, there exists a diversity of research needs. Nevertheless, as Dr. John Frederick wrote in his evaluation of UTSA’s research enhancement needs, “Several common elements are required by researchers: time to carry out independent investigations, readily-available access to information sources, physical space in which to work, necessary materials and equipment for performing the work, and administrative infrastructure to support externally funded projects. Depending upon the academic discipline, the manifestation of these needs can vary significantly, and with a wide range of disciplines, it can be challenging to provide appropriate and adequate support for research activities” (2012:2). In what follows, we outline specific strategies that can support and enhance research activities within disciplines at UTSA.
The goals and means stated below are meant to be a listing of topics and strategies to be considered toward advancing research activity at UTSA.

It is recommended that UTSA develop a framework of key elements for advancing the research enterprise. The framework might include structure, process, and policy elements. Goals would be articulated for each element and then more specific objectives could be stated in terms of desired, measurable, time delimited outcomes. Means (activities or actions) for each objective would be defined, that if enacted, would likely result in movement toward or accomplishment of the objectives and ultimately, the goals. Baseline metrics should be determined for each objective and a set of activities should be defined and implemented to advance accomplishment of the objectives. Metrics for objectives should be periodically assessed relative to the baseline and in light of activities directed toward accomplishing the objective; decisions should be made regarding modification of efforts. Assessment of progress toward advancing the research enterprise at UTSA will require definition of metrics of research productivity for key elements in the framework, collecting baseline information, and periodically assessing progress.

II. UTSA Research Goals

1. To nurture an intellectual environment that encourages the conduct of scholarship in general.

2. To encourage the conduct of scholarship and extend funding to support these efforts.

3. To encourage and support each department to construct and enact a focused plan for scholarship that draws upon existing strengths of departments and capitalizes existing departmental, college and institutional resources.

4. To encourage and support the dissemination of ongoing research by faculty through presentations at highly regarded conferences and creative works exhibitions.

5. To develop a recruitment plan that recognizes #3 above and seeks to hire faculty whose interests are consistent with #3.

6. To offer a concrete mentoring plan by which senior faculty mentor junior faculty so that the latter may become knowledgeable about research in general and discipline-specific outlets for scholarly and creative products, in particular.

7. To strengthen the competitive edge of productive faculty through alliances between the private and public sectors, where appropriate.

8. To encourage innovation and patents as a byproduct of research, if appropriate to that discipline.
9. To identify and work with faculty with related and/or complementary research interests in other departments of colleges and the University.

10. To devote and support research attention to problems faced by the state of Texas.

11. To explore ways in which faculty can address problems that arise at the boundaries of traditional disciplines, i.e., to encourage the conduct of interdisciplinary research by paying attention to #9 above.

12. To dedicate effort and support of the creation of endowed chair positions.

13. To promote the submission of external funding proposals both collectively and individually so that faculty members are be able to self-sustain their research and support their students in those disciplines where external funding is sufficient and available.

14. To extend, build and promote university-community partnerships that result in measurable positive impact to the community, whether through application of research, creative works in the community, or applied research conducted in collaboration with community members.

III. Means

1. Retain, promote, and reward faculty members demonstrating academic completeness (i.e. productive in both teaching and research). Teaching and research are mutually reinforcing: the best teacher is a scholar who keeps abreast of the content and methods of a field through continuing involvement in scholarship and who communicates knowledge and enthusiasm for a subject to students. (Ref. Fairweather, J. S., 1996. Faculty work and public trust: Restoring the value of teaching and public service in American academic life. Boston: Allyn & Bacon).

2. Ensure transparency and accountability through any process of hiring, re-hiring, promotion, post tenure evaluation and/or determination of rank of members of faculty.

3. Provide financial aid to draw high performance students into graduate programs.

4. Ensure accountability through any process of creating endowed chair positions.

5. Develop policies and procedures for the creation of new graduate certificate and PhD programs based on the lessons learned from the successes and failures of existing programs.

6. Extend support for processing proposals designed by faculty to draw extramural grants, from recognized sources, to fund innovative and promising research.
7. Maintain an adequate fund for capital equipment replacement.

8. Provide competitive small grants to support: a) the development of new research trajectories with high promise of scholarly and creative productivity, and b) existing faculty research programs in disciplines that do not have access to external funding.

9. Maintain a training/education program for responsible conduct of research.

10. Contribute to the training at the highest level of the students in areas of relevance for the country and for Texas. In the case of UTSA emphasize opportunities for underrepresented minorities.

11. Allocation of institutional resources with alignment to the research strategy of the respective department, colleges and University.