

USF System Research Council
Meeting Minutes
December 4, 2023

Present: Ponrathi Athilingam, Kelli Barr, Feng Cheng, Elizabeth Hadley, Ganesh Halade, Richard Heller (Chair), James Leahy, Mark Luther, Kristian Lynch, Emily Shaffer-Hudkins, Kristina Schmidt, Kersuze Simeon-Jones, David Simmons (Vice-Chair), Marilyn Stern, Jenny Qin

Absent: John Adams (Past Chair), Taryn Sabia

Guests: Craig Dawson (General Council), Michel Ferrell (Assistant Vice President, HR), Caroline Fultz-Carver (Chief Compliance Officer, Compliance & Ethics), Jorge Rodriguez (Foreign Influence Compliance Officer), Stephanie Wise (Director, Talent Acquisition)

Attendees: Eddie Aikins, Keith Anderson, Judi Dorn, Vanessa Ellis, Sandra Johnson-Austin, Tina Lucas, Allilson Madden, Mark McLaughlin, Cerise Mullins, Jay Ramage, Stephanie Rios, Benjamin Shnitser, Sylvia Thomas

Call to Order

Dr. Richard Heller (Chair), called the meeting of the USF Research Council to order at 12:30 p.m. on December 4, 2023, in-person at the VPR Multi-Purpose Room and via Microsoft Teams.

Approval of Minutes from Last Meeting

The November 20, 2023, minutes were approved as presented.

Foreign Influence and USF Researchers

The Research Council's overall questions focus on hiring issues related to screening international candidates (faculty and student researchers), and solutions to improve the process. Dr. Simmons mentioned concerns for both the hiring timeline and the screening cost for international hires from a variety of backgrounds, seeking an accelerated process.

Dr. Caroline Fultz-Carver stated that they are working hard to streamline the process. Those desiring to perform research in a country of concern need pre-approval from the Board of Governors.

Stephanie Wise stated that the Foreign Influence policy created numerous steps and is a difficult situation, that would increase the research hiring process. She reviewed the screening of the Qualtrics questionnaire.

International graduate students face challenges due to tightened rules and delays in approval processes. They also face challenges in obtaining Visas and work permits, hindering their ability to work as Research Assistants in their first semester. Challenges include estimating the number of students who will accept admission offers, given the uncertainty of Visa processing times, and mitigating potential delays in hiring. Background check processes can take up to 6 months. We must streamline the process for international students, particularly those from countries of concern, and need to mitigate additional layers of funding and bureaucracy.


One question is, have you recently had a foreign influence screening, along with questions regarding their U.S. citizenship. Craig Dawson mentioned utilizing HireRight to expedite the process and spoke on the new policy. There are two separate statutes that are related. A U.S. citizen is not subject to the process unless they have a tie to a foreign country. There is a 120-day gap rule for faculty and staff being re-appointed. For those changing labs who have had a recent successful screening, a repeated screening is not required. New international graduate student hires need a job offer letter to obtain a Visa. The foreign influence screening is required for new international students before a job offer letter can be issued. This conflict is causing issues. Jorge A. Rodriguez, Foreign Influence Compliance Officer, is partnering with USF HR on the process. There are seven countries of concern. Delayed processing for student appointments also arises when students move from Teaching Assistant (TA) to a Research Assistant (RA) position.

Stephanie Wise will try to capture **hiring time data** from GEMS and report back. In the meantime, there is guidance on the Compliance and Ethics, Foreign Influence Screening at <https://www.usf.edu/compliance-ethics/foreign-influence/index.aspx>. Early identification is key in streamlining the process. Stephanie Wise noted that HR is available to assist whenever needed. **A flowchart was requested** to show the hiring process when screening is needed and when it is not.

The Research Council provided concrete examples of barriers to research and requested a clearer definition of “outside activity,” beyond that which is described in the statutes. Guests will be invited to the January 22, 2024, to respond to questions raised today.

College of Public Health issues with IRB office and grant administration in the Research Office
Kelli Barr, Associate Professor in the College of Public Health, stated that IRB reviews and approvals have been delayed. The process is not clear. Need to address bottlenecks.
Jason Ramage, Director for USF Research Integrity Compliance, clarified the process and noted that delays are at the college level, and that IRB staff review IRB application within a day. The office does track turnaround times. Protocols reviewed by the full IRB committee (higher risk studies) take 20 days from pre-review to final determination. Studies that meet one or more of the eight eligible categories for exemption take on average 21 days. Expedited protocols (low-risk studies that do not qualify for an exemption) are reviewed and approved in about 11 days. Occasionally, a review may take longer if it is a complex study, or if we are waiting on responses/inputs from researchers. In some cases, the researcher may not have completed the submission process in ARC so I would first encourage researchers to be sure they have done so. The three IRBs meets once per month; the schedule of meetings can be viewed [here](#).

Post-Award, subcontracts are not being approved in a timely manner. Many colleges echo these concerns. John Johnson serves on the Core Team for the Huron research grant management system implementation. The Huron Grants and Agreements system is expected to significantly improve transparency and enable PIs to check on their grant status. Optimized processing times is an anticipated impact of increased visibility.

Eric Kern presented an update (November 2023) If you would like a recording of the Teams presentation, you can find it  [here](#). The next Core Team update is anticipated in February 2024. The Huron RMS implementation target launch date is May 2024.

Discussion and Decisions for Conference Planning Grant Applications

Round table discussion on the *Conference Planning Grant* applications received. This cycle generated 25 applications, of which 8 will be fully funded, and 2 will receive half of the requested amount.

Other Business

Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:24 p.m.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 22, 2024