Research Working Group Meeting

October 31, 2012

Emerging themes for Research Working Group Report

- Emphasis on the integrated scholar model in which teaching and research are both emphasized for faculty success across all levels, undergraduate to graduate.
- Support for areas of distinction and the consideration of directing resources to build on existing strengths as well as develop new areas of excellence.
- Support for cross-unit/departmental collaborations and linkages should be fostered via a variety of approaches (such as cluster hiring, examination of institutional barriers, re-thinking of areas beyond disciplinary lines).
- Perspective that we continue to build on our strengths in translational research (e.g. high impact on regional communities or economy across a range of areas (public health, biomedical, educational, and entrepreneurial,…)
- Emphasis on novel approaches to generating new resources or reward structure that recognizes faculty achievement and excellence. Questions as to how we develop our infrastructure to support active research areas were raised.

Next steps

- Emerging themes to be developed for distribution to the working group (via Google Documents)
- Assignment to working subgroups who will address these themes
- Some effort should take place between meetings given tight timeline we are facing

Discussion points: The following issues were raised by individuals or subsets of committee members without any consensus reached or sought as part of our initial brainstorming sessions.

Teacher-scholar:

- It is not clear that everyone agrees that the priority at SDSU is an emphasis on both teaching and research.
- Some faculty believe that one could be an OK teacher but stellar researcher and still get promoted…but the converse is not true.
- Some people feel that the research expectations (for tenure, promotion) are similar to those of a Research 1 university, whereas the teaching load is not commensurate with these expectations.
- Others feel that the tenure requirements (in terms of research) are much softer than at a more rigorous university.
- On the university promotions committee, the attitude seems to be that if someone is a superstar in research, this may lessen the importance of teaching in tenure/promotion decisions; however, in general, there are high expectations for both aspects of evaluation.
- Fundamental belief that a balance of teaching/research should be required of every faculty member. Current tenure and promotion process is definitely set up that way.
- How do we improve the opportunities to more fully engage all levels of students in the research experience?

Resource allocation:
• We have areas of distinctiveness on campus, and we should consider building on these areas rather than distributing our limited resources across too many emphases. But does everyone agree with this?
• For departmental chairs, the extreme proportional allocation scheme was perceived as potentially problematic.
• A rational discussion and transparent approach to determining strengths and where we want to make commitments was emphasized as key to our long-term success in developing a shared vision.
• There needs to be a balance—can’t only “feed the top 1%”
• Some groups may be viewed as less productive because they lack resources. A case could also be made that allocating resources to that group will produce something different; will improve the campus, etc.
• From a fundraising perspective, this is very important, i.e., knowing our priorities and where we want to be headed with research defined as an integral part of our identity.
• Nothing should be established “forever” – there need to be checks and balances, people can reapply for support but it shouldn’t be automatic.

Translational research/SDSU focus on research:

• When we talk about research, we need to remember that we are part of a community.
• Also, there may be opportunities to partner with other universities to accomplish more. E.g., creation of a center (such as UCSD/SDSU) to partner around an effort like a technology, or education for veterans, etc., something relevant to this specific community. (Comment that some of these exist, but people may not be aware).
• We want to be regional in impact but international in scope
• We are a unique place – e.g., the border with Mexico, provides opportunities that make us unique.

Generating resources/Changing reward system:

• It is not the role of the committee to discuss the specific allocation of resources, but ultimately a broad discussion will need to ensue.
• What are obstacles to resources that raise money that we might be able to resolve? e.g., Help with grant writing, boiler plate language, templates, etc.
• Some people feel that the challenge is that what we want faculty to do doesn’t map onto philanthropic efforts.
• Reward structures and research protocols are very well established.
• Reward system may be limiting – how can we be recognize academic excellences in different ways?
• Think outside the box – could you get a philanthropist to state that they will reward excellence in a general way?
• Or reward an endowed chair to work on innovation?
• In some ways, the President’s leadership fund was created for this purpose in mind – to provide unique resources for efforts that don’t necessarily fit into traditional model.
• President’s leadership fund may have appeal to donors. We could increase this through philanthropic efforts, and make it much larger.
There are philanthropists who want to support a given issue, cause, or problem. We could consider putting together faculty to work on this approach - like philanthropic think tanks.

Assigned time: Is release time distributed in a way that people are happy with/that is appropriate?

- Some people feel there is an explicit process in place; others feel that in their department the assigned time process is automatic.
- In some colleges, many faculty carry 12 units because they realize this is critical to the ongoing functioning of the university.
- A discussion followed that considered the use of evidence based metrics for the transparent assignment of release time as a campus based best practices model.
- Should fewer faculty get more release time based on evidenced based metrics or does a more uniform distribution serve our collective goals better?
- If we really buy in to teacher/scholar model, is it possible to get release time for being a better teacher? Or only to be a better scholar?
- One committee member suggested that the notion of assigned time comes from history of being a teaching only university. Assigned time is release from teaching, because the idea was that’s what we should all be doing, 100% teaching.