

**Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Advisory Committee on Research Programs**

**March 8, 2011
Summary Notes**

Members present: Robert Curl (Chair), Bettie Sue Masters (Vice Chair), Allen Bowling, Roberto Osegueda, and Max Summers.

Members absent: Rinn Cleavelin, Frank Gerome, Ramanan Krishnamoorti, and Renee Simar.

Staff present: Dale Cherry, Reinold Cornelius, and Suzanne Pickens. Kevin Lemoine was present for a portion of the meeting.

Welcome and Introductions

Dr. Curl, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Research Programs (ACORP), convened the meeting at 10 am. Dr. Curl welcomed the Advisory Committee members and introductions were made.

Election of Chair and Vice Chair for 2011

Dr. Masters nominated Dr. Curl to be chair and Dr. Summers seconded. Members elected Dr. Curl as chair of ACORP with only the abstention by the nominee. Dr. Osegueda nominated Dr. Masters to be vice chair and Dr. Summers seconded. Members unanimously elected Dr. Masters as vice chair with the abstention by the nominee.

Consideration of Summary Notes of June 7, 2010 Meeting

Dr. Curl introduced the agenda item and members of the committee asked for follow up on agenda items from the previous meeting.

Staff provided responses to all the Advisory Committee's questions. Staff follow-up included the collection of the roster of students who have participated in an NHARP grant. Not all projects listed participating students, since many of the 2009 grants were just underway.

Staff informed the Advisory Committee that the one-page NHARP overview was posted on the webpage. Staff also explained that the link to NHARP success stories, which had previously been posted, had been restored to the site. Advisory Committee members urged staff to restore the link, noting that the information would be important for legislative decision makers.

Dr. Curl suggested and volunteered to approach the National Research Council, if it could share names from its database for the purpose of finding suitable reviewers, either for NHARP panel chair positions, for the NHARP Merit Review, or the Research Assessment Program (RAP).

Members briefly revisited the issue of recommending revision to the NHARP rider of the General Appropriations Act, which limits to 70 percent the number of grants for the Texas A&M University and The University of Texas system' institution. In reviewing the 2009 funded

projects, the members decided that this would not be necessary given the recent success of other institutions.

Advisory Committee members expressed strong disappointment that staff had not been updated them about the Board's Strategic Planning and Policy (SPP) Committee meetings, agendas, and the Board's discussion of and reaction to the NHARP merit review or the RAP report.

The motion to accept the June 7, 2010, Summary Notes as written was made by Dr. Curl, by Dr. Bowling and unanimously approved by the Advisory Committee.

Distribution of 2010 Research Reports

Staff reported NHARP Merit Review Report and the RAP Report were presented to the Board and sent to the Legislature. Dr. Masters commented that the Merit Review should be distributed more widely.

Members again expressed disappointment about a lack of communication on how their work is received by the Board. Without feedback it would be hard for the Committee to function. Staff said both reports had been received favorably and agreed to provide more detail at the next ACORP meeting.

Members said at issue is the advocacy of the peer-review process and how NHARP could be allied with the emerging technology initiatives. Members observed a diminishing role of the Committee and wondered about how NHARP is championed and how ACORP could serve as liaison to the Board.

Staff explained that the Board looks towards ACORP as experts and receives reports accordingly. Staff explained that the Board has several statutory and non-statutory advisory committees and that both the program, NHARP and the Advisory Committee, ACORP were provided with similar staff support.

Dr. Masters suggested, for example, that a group of NHARP students and their mentors could appear before SPP and report about the program. Dr. Curl said he gave a presentation at the recent Capitol Undergraduate Research Day, but that no legislator stayed to be present for his remarks.

Dr. Curl said that he was not impressed with the reviewer comments of the RAP review. The report also gave the impression of grade inflation and the reviews had not been sufficiently tough. Staff advised that each program was reviewed by two reviewers, one of which had been recruited by staff and the other had been engaged based on the recommendation of the respective institution. Members said that both reviewers should be recruited without input by the institution. Staff further advised that potential reviewers recommended by the institution were retained only after and independent assessment by staff.

Members were of the opinion that there were no consequences to the review. There should be repeat reviews that could incorporate results from previous reviews.

Members were unclear as to why ACORP was involved with RAP and have the opinion that their involvement is not an effective way of management and review. Members asked about the

total appropriation of all special items funded by the Legislature. They observed that while they spend a lot of time on NHARP, that program's funding is diminishing, and the special item funding is not scrutinized equally and with consequences.

[*Staff Note:* The statute for the RAP review, Texas Education Code 144, requires an advisory committee for the Research Assessment Program's guidelines and procedures. However, it does not require that ACORP fill that role.]

Discussion of Legislation related to NHARP

Staff informed the Committee that the draft legislation for the name change of ARP to NHARP had not yet been filed. Members said that this change would be significant and suggested Rep. Dan Branch as sponsor. Kevin Lemoine confirmed with the agency's External Relations Department that it had already given the proposed statute change to Rep. Branch.

Discussion of possible action related to 2011 Norman Hackerman Advanced Research Grant Competition

Staff presented three models on how to adjust the program to different possible funding levels, falling between the Senate version of the appropriation bill, listing \$12 million for NHARP, and the House version of zero funding. The models included ideas of allowing only "junior faculty" to participate or dividing the research panels into groups that are offered alternately every other biennium.

Members advised staff to avoid the term "junior faculty" and instead use, "early career investigator." The Advisory Committee said that staff should draw upon NSF and NIH definitions for early career investigators.

Members came up with several ideas for adjusting the program depending on the amount of funding the program received. The program could be converted to graduate fellowships, but those are difficult to administer and would require statutory changes. The program could be tailored to address aspects of both faculty enhancement and Closing the Gaps by adapting a National Science Foundation (NSF) style career review together with a mentoring program. The program could set up a parallel non-profit organization to provide gifts or endowments for NHARP as allowed by statute. Such an organization could partner with, e.g., the Welch Foundation or TI.

Members discussed comments from the 2009 competition as information for making a recommendation on how to proceed at different possible appropriation levels. Comments had been summarized by staff from surveys to investigators, office of sponsored project representatives, and reviewers.

Members stated that the issue of tuition support is complex. Federal funding requires institutions to adhere to uniformity. If an institution allows tuition and fees to be paid from any federal grants, it must allow tuition and fees from all federal grants. If they allow tuition and fees to be paid from national grants all students have to benefit, if not, no tuition can be paid from grants. It was stated that staff should collect practices at institutions and get a legal opinion on the issue.

To provide better reviewer comments to investigators, reviewer comments should be

restructured to focus on proposal quality and less on quality ranking. Reviewers should list what missing information resulted in a low score. Dr. Masters offered to provide staff with a set of three questions for an informative, constructive, and critical feedback.

Members agreed that setting a maximum budget of \$100,000 was appropriate given the low funding. They discussed if a higher award should be permissible, pending an exceptionally well written request, but abandoned this idea.

Members did not want to define specific research topics to narrow the possible proposal submissions. They would not have a mechanism on how to do this. They did not want to set limiting quotas for research universities and they rejected the idea of creating separate program categories for differently sized institutions. However, members did like a competition focused on early career investigators, at least for the coming biennium.

Members did not have much enthusiasm for restricting investigators from the next competition, after winning a grant. This perhaps could be a restriction after winning two grants in a row, but it should not be implemented for the coming cycle, because of the new focus on early career investigators. The early career stage would be longer than two grant cycles.

Members did not want to change the length of the pre-proposal but approved of the idea of requiring a one-page bio-sketch.

ACORP did not support summer salaries for investigators.

To review goals and criteria, members wish to review both the instructions to reviewers and the instructions to panel chairs. Reviewers and panels should not be overwhelmed by prestige, when evaluating competency and quality of proposals. Panel chairs should be instructed that, if the panel size is unwieldy, they should subdivide their panel into groups. This would be preferable to having the Committee divide the panels into multiple, more narrowly defined sub-areas. Also, success of the panel's work depends to a large part on the panel chair, and staff should select capable chairs who are familiar with the NHARP review process from previous cycles.

ACORP advised staff to generally enforce pre-proposal invitation rates, even if flexibility is allowed in rare cases. Staff should also insist on adherence to scoring parameters as spelled out in the instructions to reviewers and should ensure reviewer presence at panel meetings with stricter guidelines.

Awarding "mini grants" could be an option in an emergency, but the maximum award level should not be less than \$50,000. While mini-grants would be useful for investigators that were "close to pay line" at NIH or NSF, the term "close to pay line" is not well defined.

Committee members summarized their recommendation for strategies with which to adjust the NHARP program to the still undetermined appropriation levels:

1. If the appropriation should be at about the \$4 million level, staff should prepare a program for early career investigators, should set a cap on awards at \$50 thousand, and should only offer one-half of the existing research panels. (The other half would be offered the following biennium.) However, staff could consider a lower award level with full number of panels or a higher award level with half the panels, depending on

the actual appropriation and the outcome of applicable success rate models.

2. If the appropriation should be between \$8 million and \$12 million, staff should prepare a program for early career investigators, should set a cap at \$100 thousand, and should offer all existing research panels. Staff could work with budget caps lower than \$100 thousand, depending on the actual appropriation and the outcome of applicable success rate models.

Review and possible revision of draft 2011 Request for Application and Timeline

Staff explained that the 2011 Request for Application (RFA) would be in a new format, uniform for all proposal requests by the agency. The new format combines announcement and contract into one document.

With regard to the funding allocation among research panels, members suggested adjusting the proportions according to 2009 submission data, to address success rate discrepancies between panels. They asked staff to look at historical data of proposal submission numbers, to reveal trends should they exist.

There was a discussion about the difference between multi-institution and consortium proposals, the latter requiring that funding is given to all institutions. Staff said that a separate budget is required of all institutions for a consortium proposal. Zero-dollar budgets may be submitted.

Given the limited funding that is expected for the program, members advised that the incentive provision for additional small institution/large institution consortium proposals is not necessary and should be abolished.

The Committee approved of the current practice to allow two citations with each pre-proposal in support of the research idea. The one-page bio-sketch (for both, investigator and co-investigator) should include the total number of publications, a list of up to five publications that would be most relevant, and a list of publications from the two most current years.

Members suggested that staff should add descriptive language to the four section headings of the pre-proposal summary, to clarify what needs to be addressed. For example, the section "Project Goals and Processes" would include the novelty or impact of a project and the section "Student Education and Training" could include both, the number of students planned for the project and their role and function. Dr. Curl said that there are two topics that any good proposal would address:

1. If the project succeeds, what would we learn (what would be the impact), and
2. A description of how the investigator is going to succeed.

The Committee advised that no changes be made to faculty salary and capital equipment budget line items.

Discussion and Submission of suggestions for review panel chairs and members

Dr. Curl will investigate whether the National Research Council would share reviewers from its listing. Committee members will send their panel chair and reviewer recommendations to staff. Staff should observe reviewers during panel deliberations and select capable panel

chairs from those previous reviewers it deems suitable.

Future Meeting Date – June 2011

Members agreed on June 7, 2011, 10 am to 2 pm as the date and time for the next ACORP meeting.

Dr. Curl adjourned the meeting at 2 pm.