

# **Research Council Report to the Faculty Senate**

J. Douglas Birdwell, Chair  
November 8, 2001

To date, the Research Council has met twice. Much of the discussion involved information related to the Research Infrastructure task force and the High Performance Computing task force. The following section reports work to date in these areas, and proposes a motion to establish the Strategic Planning Group on Computing and Networking. Information on other topics considered by the council appears in section 2.

## **1. Task Forces**

### ***Participation***

The Research Council is listed as a participant in three task forces: Professional Leave Policy (# 5; note that this is not on the draft that was distributed to the Faculty Senate), Contingent Faculty (# 7), and Undergraduate Student Recruitment, Retention, & Freshman Seminar (# 8). I have asked for volunteers from the Research Council to serve on these task forces. Unfortunately, I'm running behind and asked late, so we currently have only one task force representative: Barbara Dewey, who is on the Professional Leave Policy task force.

### ***Coordination***

Two task forces are coordinated by members of the Research Council: Research Infrastructure: F&A Distribution / Carryover of RIF Funds (# 14; Doug Birdwell, [birdwell@utk.edu](mailto:birdwell@utk.edu), is coordinator), and High Performance Computing (#15; Bill Blass, [wblass@utk.edu](mailto:wblass@utk.edu), is coordinator).

Research Infrastructure (# 14). To kick off the subject, Doug Birdwell prepared a document outlining various issues related to the Facilities & Administrative (F&A), or indirect cost, structure on the Knoxville campus. He presented this information to the Research Council at the September 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, and it is available as Attachment D to the meeting agenda on the Research Council's web site (<http://research.utk.edu/rc/>). The Research Council invited representatives from Business & Finance to attend the Research Council's October 8<sup>th</sup> meeting, give a presentation about F&A procedures, and lead a discussion. Denise Barlow, Verna Howard, and Ray Hamilton came, and provided a lot of good information, covering an overview of the F&A process for the Knoxville campus. This included information about the negotiation process that establishes the F&A rates, an assessment of how our F&A rates compare to those of similar institutions, a break down of the activities and facilities on campus that influence the F&A calculations, how and when F&A charges are billed to and paid by sponsors, and how the Research Incentive Funds (RIF) are calculated and distributed. A lengthy discussion followed, and I think everyone left with a better understanding of both the process and

the diversity of issues raised by the various stakeholders. The Research Infrastructure committee of the Research Council, augmented by representatives from ORIT, the Provost's Office, the Budget Committee, and Business & Finance, will work to develop a complete report, with recommendations, for submission to the Faculty Senate in the Spring.

High Performance Computing (# 15). Issues related to high performance computing have been discussed at two meetings to date. Doug Birdwell provided a document to the Research Council at their September 10<sup>th</sup> meeting that provided his perspective, after discussions he had with Jesse Poore (Director, Science Alliance) and members of the Joint Institute for Computational Science (JICS), on the move of JICS from the Knoxville campus to ORNL. This sparked a discussion between Birdwell and Poore at the meeting, where Poore asserted that the document was not accurate and requested that it be withdrawn, but refused to provide any details about its possible inaccuracies. The document was not withdrawn, and is available as Attachment E to the meeting agenda on the Research Council's web site (<http://research.utk.edu/rc/>). The fundamental issues highlighted by the document were the process which led to the decision to move JICS, which allowed minimal input by university faculty and the researchers impacted by the move, and the momentum toward committing university funds and resources to support and use high performance computing resources at ORNL, again without significant faculty involvement in the decision process.

Jesse Poore and Tom Zacharia (Director, Computer Science and Mathematics Division, ORNL) subsequently held a luncheon meeting at the University Club on October 19<sup>th</sup>, where they provided an overview of the ORNL high performance computing program and of opportunities for collaboration between UT and ORNL, including a proposed Computational Science Initiative, and solicited input from the faculty who attended. Doug Birdwell and Bill Blass described the Faculty Senate's initiative to establish a task force to address high performance computing, and invited the any faculty who were present and interested to participate. This has been followed up by some e-mail exchanges.

The High Performance Computing task force's primary charge is to revive the Technical Advisory Committee on High Performance Computing. Subsequent discussions, however, have made it clear that the faculty need to play a leadership role in defining the strategic needs of campus computing and networking; high performance computing is only one facet of a range of issues that confront us. Therefore, I plan to ask the Faculty Senate to adopt a resolution establishing a Strategic Planning Group on Computing and Networking, to be managed by the Research Council and open to all interested faculty. The exact wording of the motion will not be determined until the Research Council meets on November 12<sup>th</sup>, so the motion will be distributed at the Faculty Senate meeting.

The short-term goal of the strategic planning group is to draft a strategic plan that can be used to guide improvements to centrally funded computing and networking resources. This plan will address high performance computing, both on campus and at ORNL, and many other issues, such as research and academic support services and training, centrally

managed networked storage resources, the potential of and support infrastructure for cluster and grid computing, meeting undergraduate and graduate student computing and training needs, wired and wireless network infrastructure, computer and network security, software availability and licensing, and other areas identified by the members of the group.

## **2. Other Activities**

Center Administration. The Policies & Procedures committee of the Research Council is working on a revision to the document “A Guide to Center Review and Establishment of New Centers, Institutes, and Bureaus” to strengthen the University’s center processes and provide better services to centers supporting strategic planning, technical evaluation, and business, financial, and marketing planning. Tom Handler ([thandler@utk.edu](mailto:thandler@utk.edu)) is chairing this committee.

IRIS Problems Related to Research. This issue has arisen quite recently. Several faculty who are principal investigators on research contracts have complained that the IRIS reporting system is not meeting their needs. The Research Council will discuss this at the next meeting. It is probable that an ad-hoc committee will be established, which will include faculty from several departments, departmental and college accountants, and representatives of Business & Finance, to examine the issues and determine appropriate corrective actions. At this point, it is not clear whether the problems are occurring due to limitations of the IRIS software, inadequate or inappropriate training, or some combination.

Limitations on US Visas. The September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks have created substantial momentum in both the legislative and executive branches of government to, at the very least, perform more diligence on student visas. At worst, new legislation may restrict the inflow of foreign student to US universities. Several members of the Research Council are following the situation, along with others in the university. As was done at the last Faculty Senate Executive Committee meeting, this university must continue to provide input to the legislative process to reduce the negative impacts that various anti-terrorist proposals may have on the university.