

Monday, December 12, 2005
W&M Faculty Assembly

**Report of the
Faculty Assembly Ad-Hoc Committee on the Faculty Research Program**

On August 16, 2005, Provost Feiss presented via memorandum to Jim Beers, President of the Faculty Assembly, an outline of a proposed restructured Faculty Research Program, and sought input from the Assembly.

The Assembly discussed the proposal with the Provost at its summer retreat and posted the proposal on the Assembly website. The Assembly also constituted an ad hoc committee to consider the proposed revisions to the Faculty Research Program. The committee members were Christopher Abelt (Chemistry), Clay Clemens (Government), John Lee (Law), David Leslie (Education), Katherine Kulick (Modern Languages), Robert Orwoll (Chemistry), Barbara Watkinson (Art & Art History). David Armstrong (Physics) and Alan Meese (Law) co-chaired the committee.

The committee received and considered input from various sources, including communications from individual faculty members, synopses of discussion of this topic at Arts and Sciences Faculty meetings, meetings of the Dean's Advisory Committee of Arts and Sciences, meetings of the Faculty Affairs Committee of Arts & Sciences, and at meetings of the Assembly.

The committee met twice, and communicated further electronically, and reached a consensus, which is outlined below.

Note: the word "research" used in this document should be broadly construed to mean research, scholarship and other creative activity reflecting the variety of such efforts across the scholarly disciplines.

Preamble

Faculty research and scholarship is a core mission of the university. Faculty Research Assignments are essential to enable faculty to reach and maintain high levels of research productivity. The faculty at the College continues to enhance the amount, depth and quality of its research and scholarly activity, as evidenced by publications, increased external grant and sponsored project support, etc. As the College continues to recruit excellent faculty with high research aspirations this trend will continue. An increasingly large fraction of the tenured and tenure-eligible faculty at the College are truly "research active," and worthy of regular research leaves, with the result that the pressure on the Faculty Research Program continues to rise.

We also note that Governor Warner has made boosting research at higher-education institutions a priority, and last year urged four-year schools to undertake \$1 billion worth of sponsored research projects by the end of the decade. At the same time, President Nichol has challenged the College to become one of the world's "Great, Public Universities." The College will

not be able to rise to these challenges without a strengthened Faculty Research Program. We applaud the Provost's recognition of this fact, his thorough review of the various ways in which the College supports and encourages faculty research, and his thoughtful proposal. Strengthening the Faculty Research Program along the lines we outline below will require substantial institutional commitment on the part of the. Such a commitment will signal that the goal of continued excellence and sustained improvement in faculty research is a priority for the College in a manner that matches its stated aspirations.

The New Faculty Research Program

1. Faculty shall no longer compete with one another for a scarce number of Faculty Research Assignments (FRAs).
2. Instead, all Faculty who are "research active" shall receive an FRA every 6th year, with no exceptions.
3. Faculty shall apply to their Chair/Program Director/Dean for such an FRA. The application shall consist of a brief statement —about one page — summarizing the research project or projects the faculty member plans to pursue during the assignment.
4. Individual departments or schools (as the case may be) shall determine whether faculty are "research active" by applying guidelines that each department or school has adopted for this purpose. Departments or schools *may* choose to employ the research scores generated as part of annual merit reviews in their respective definitions of "research active."
5. A faculty member deemed "research inactive" by his or her department or school shall have a right of appeal to the Faculty Research Committee pursuant to procedures the FRC shall promulgate for this purpose. In deciding the appeal, the FRC shall apply the definition of "research active" adopted by the department or school in question.
6. Faculty who receive an FRA may elect to receive a one-semester research leave at full pay or a one year leave at 80% pay. Faculty who choose the latter option need not offer any special justification for doing so. In this connection, the Committee notes that course loads in many Departments at the College are significantly higher than those at peer institutions. Allowing faculty to take a one year leave at 80% pay partially offsets the additional teaching effort expended in other years. We also note that the 80%/full year option is a valuable recruiting and retention tool for faculty, and that the majority of faculty in recent years have chosen this option over the one-semester at full pay option.
7. Faculty who receive and accept an FRA shall, after the completion of said assignment, forward a report to their Department Chair, Dean and the Provost summarizing the results of the research conducted during the assignment. Failure to submit this report may render faculty ineligible for a subsequent FRA.

Maintenance of Teaching Power

8. Other things being equal, Faculty Research Assignments reduce “teaching power,” that is, the number and breadth of courses offered per semester by instructional faculty. To preserve and enhance the educational experience of our students, the College must irrevocably commit the resources necessary to maintain adequate teaching power in light of regular Faculty Research Assignments. An inflation of average class sizes as a mechanism to deal with faculty members on FRA would be considered, in general, as a reduction in teaching power and an unacceptable result.

9. The “first best” method of assuring sufficient teaching power would entail the expansion of the full time, instructional faculty in each Department and/or school. Additional full time instructional faculty could provide the teaching power necessary to mitigate the impact of regular Faculty Research Assignments. Some Departments have already undergone such expansion and rely upon these additional faculty to support their own research assignment programs. The College should aspire to maintain a full-time faculty large enough to support regular leaves for research active faculty without undue reliance upon visitors and/or adjuncts. In the same way, the College increased the size of the full-time, instructional faculty to implement the freshman seminar requirement. The committee anticipates that such an expansion of the faculty would be phased in over time.

10. The College does not currently maintain a full-time faculty large enough to maintain adequate teaching power in the event of regular research assignments for “research active” faculty. So long as this condition persists, the College must provide Departments and Schools with the financial resources necessary to replace — with visitors and/or adjuncts — the teaching power of faculty who receive FRAs. The Provost and the Deans of the respective schools of Arts and Sciences should work with Department Chairs to determine transparent benchmarks governing measures of teaching power and the appropriate magnitude of such investments. All in all, no faculty research program should reduce teaching power below its current levels.

11. The resources necessary to replace the teaching power of faculty who receive FRAs may in some years exceed the amount generated by indirect cost recovery on external grants. (In other years, the reverse will be true, particularly as the College obtains additional external funding.) Thus, the College should decouple the financial support for Faculty Research Assignments from the level of indirect cost recoveries.

Summer Research Grants

12. The summer research program for junior tenure-eligible faculty is an important feature of the Faculty Research Program and should be maintained, and the FRC should continue to determine awards.

13. Expansion of support for senior Faculty Summer grants (SrSRGs), as well as the creation of additional supplemental grants to support research expenses for faculty on an FRA, are both laudable

and desirable goals for further supporting and enhancing faculty research. However, these goals are considered as lower in priority for scarce resources than the FRA program and the essential requirement of maintaining adequate teaching power.