
**Vice Chair for Research Students
January 2009 Report**

Fall 2008 Summary

Due to the unexpected vacancy of the Vice Chair for Research position, research council did not begin its work until mid October. At that time, the council set an agenda for the rest of the academic year, as well as began addressing the backlog of travel grant requests, reimbursement requests, and applications for academic event funding. The council decided that the most salient issue was obtaining the PhD exit survey data, as it will give us an overview of those issues that have served to either help or hinder students as they worked toward their PhD.

Research Council Membership

Thus far, the research council has had consistent and active representation from The Annenberg School of Communication, The School of Arts and Sciences, The School of Engineering, The School of Nursing, The Wharton School of Business, The School of Social Policy and Practice, and The School of Medicine. However, the Graduate School of Education has provided representation on only two occasions, and we do not have a representative from the School of Design's doctoral program.

PhD Exit Survey

The council determined that obtaining the PhD exit survey data is of great importance and will provide a framework for future advocacy. Accordingly, the research council is currently drafting a statement to be submitted to the university administration in order to obtain this data. While we are uncertain as to the volume and format of the data, we are confident—given the collective knowledge of statistics and analytical software of the research council membership-- that the council would be able to process and effectively utilize these data.

Budget Update

The council approved the following budget for the 2008-2009 academic year. These data are current as of January 13th, 2009.

<u>Fund</u>	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>Allocated</u>	<u>Spent</u>
Research Council			
Academic Events Grants	\$12,025.00	\$12,025.00	\$3800.00
Travel Grants	\$20,000.00	\$7592.00	\$2689.28
Navigating Series	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Office of Provost Funds			
Travel Grants	\$20,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Research Council Surplus			
Available surplus	\$24,467.92	\$0.00	\$0.00

Conference Travel Grants

In October of 2008, the research council awarded 45 travel grants totaling \$15,184. While this represents fewer grants than during the previous fall, the amount requested per grant was greater. This may indicate what research council has heard only anecdotally--individual departments and programs are able to provide less funding, prompting students to seek more support through GAPSAs funds.

Special effort should be undertaken to “get the word out” about the availability of travel grant funding as we are currently under spending what we have available. In addition, we have been contacted by four students who have claimed that they submitted travel grants for the fall of 2008, but of which we have no record. Giving the benefit of the doubt, we have agreed to fund these students. This again raises the importance of a paperless, electronic system for the submission and tracking of travel grant applications.

Academic Event Funding

During the fall term of 2008, the research council approved a total of \$3800 in funding for academic events.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Applicant</u>	<u>Award</u>
PGWISE	Esther Yu	\$1000
Chemical Biophysics Symposium	Diana Cabral	\$1000
Political Science/Scott Nearing Award	Allison Evans	\$500
Dept. of Germanic Languages and Lit.	Kristen Sincavage	\$300
Near Eastern Studies	Leslie Warden	\$1000

Spring 2009 Plans

In the course of the next semester, the research council will work on the following issues:

1. **PhD Exit Survey:** We will continue to work with the administration in order to obtain the exit survey data.
2. **Travel Grants:** Research council has set a goal of paperless grant applications by the end of spring term.
3. **Financial Planning:** Since many PhD’s start careers when they are in their late twenties or thirties, they are often behind on their retirement savings. Currently, we are working to partner with SASgov and TIAA-CREFF to offer a seminar for doctoral students on starting individual retirement accounts. Our goal will be to have the school offer students the option of having money automatically withheld from stipend payments and placed in an IRA.
4. **Funding for Advanced PhD’s:** We have begun a school by school survey to ascertain the number of advanced PhD students and their funding needs. This data, coupled with the PhD exit survey data, will be an important guide for future advocacy by the research council.
5. **Economic challenges:** The research council is concerned about the impact of the economic downturn on student funding and research and teaching opportunities, especially in light of hiring freezes in SAS, a freeze on PhD admissions for 2009



in the School of Social Policy and Practice, and the recent firing of researchers from the Penn Museum. Research Council will continue to work with the individual school governments to monitor potential impacts on research students.

Submitted by Jonathan Lukens, Vice Chair for Research Students