

Research Excellence: Update for Chancellor's Retreat January 2020

Main Points

- The Research Excellence effort has been guided by the recommendations in the 2017 report.
- This has been supplemented by the Provost's Initiative to have each school and college develop its own research plan.
- The Vice Provost for Research has formed a new research working group to update prior and develop new recommendations for research development at UWM. That group is not ready to make formal recommendations.

Recommendations of the 2017 Research Excellence Report

For the last four years, the 2017 Research Excellence Report has guided the efforts to grow and support UWM's research profile. That report identified a number of action steps; here is a quick review of the progress to date:

- Graduate stipends: Since the 2012 report on graduate support, UWM has closed about two-thirds of the gap between our stipend levels and national norms. This was largely due to the Chancellor's decision to direct new base funding to stipends in FY 2017.
- Graduate student recruitment and retention: The Graduate School has developed new programs to support graduate student recruitment (e.g., targeted recruitment fairs) and successful completion (dissertation bootcamp, 3-minute thesis, etc.). The School has also invested in improving data on student progress, predicative analytics, and a campus-wide survey of the graduate student experience.
- Undergraduate research: Half or more of UWM's graduating seniors have participated in research experience due to the programs run through the Office of Undergraduate Research (SURF) and other opportunities provided by individual faculty projects.
- Collaborative research: The Office of Research is in its third year of programing (workshops, small awards) to develop a collaborative research and to initiate new research groups. Several large awards were submitted, and we have seen a growing number of "self-generated" collaborations emerge in the last year. In addition, various units have begun to conceptualize their research in terms of multiple investigator, cross-cutting themes. This program continues to evolve as we gain experience with various approaches to building collaborative research.
- Hiring around collaborative areas: This remains problematic due to limited faculty hiring, but some units have begun to consider collaborative work in their faculty hiring. For example, L&S considered this in evaluating natural science requests for faculty hires.
- Research outcomes and metrics: Several factors converged to highlight the importance of research outcomes: the recognition of UWM as a Carnegie R1 university, the Regents and System stress on performance metrics, and the desire within UWM to track performance over time. Selected metrics have been built into the new campus budget

allocation system and into school/college level research plans (discussed below). It is worth noting that with the phase-out of Digital Measures, we will lack a framework for tracking some research metrics (publications) at the campus level.

- Workload policies: A more flexible workload policy for faculty is needed to reflect the varied roles of the faculty and how they change over time. This is a priority of the Provost, and unit-level policies are currently in development.
- “Research Professor” and “Teaching Professor” appointments provide titling options for academic staff positions that align more closely with national practice. These titles are included within the new UW-System titling system.
- Communications: University Relations has made research excellence a primary theme in their presentation of UWM, following their plan developed in 2017. This has been successful in increasing the visibility of the university. In addition, the annual UWM Research report was revamped into a more approachable magazine format which is widely distributed among our community partners and other stakeholders.

While these steps represent progress, progress in some areas has been limited due to various factors – three are worth noting. First, the fiscal pressures on the university have resulted in various restrictions: graduate stipends still lag national norms; fewer journals are available in UWM’s library; faculty hiring around collaborative themes has lagged due to the limited numbers of new hires; internal funding for research development projects has been reduced. Second, the research culture has been slow to embrace variable work assignments and value varied contributions, reflecting an understandable hesitancy to change practices that have worked in the past. Finally, the activities for advancing research have been driven by campus-level programs without sufficient opportunities for disciplinary inventiveness.

Provost’s Initiative: School/College planning

In the summer of 2018, the Provost met with the leadership of UWM’s Schools and Colleges to introduce an initiative to develop unit-level plans for the “Outstanding Student Learning Environment” and “Research Excellence”. The research component was placed within two frameworks: (1) what constitutes research excellence in the context of the unit’s discipline? (2) how could the unit contribute to the campus research goals (doctoral awards, funding, etc.)? Units were asked to develop plans with specific action steps to develop their research, and to project outcomes related to the unit and campus goals. The overall intent is to expand the ownership of student and research outcomes to include school/college and to encourage unit-level initiatives reflecting disciplinary values and opportunities.

First drafts of the research plans were due to the Vice Provost for Research in early spring 2019 and returned with suggestions and comments. Second drafts (due last August) also received comments to help units fine-tune their plans. Revised “near final” versions are due in January 2020. While the plans vary, they have developed to incorporate more specific ideas and discipline-specific strategies. Overall, there is a general trend to recognize the need for more collaborative research, flexibility in work assignments, and more stress on doctoral programs. We anticipate that there will be further work on the plans through the Spring semester.

New working group

The Vice Provost for Research recently convened a working group to consider strategies for growing and supporting UWM's research in light of ongoing budget limitations and trends in research infrastructure. This was motivated by a concern that the recommended actions in the 2017 report were not sufficient to retain UWM's high level of research and standing, and that more significant innovations will be required.

The group started meeting in November; the current membership is:

- Bettina Arnold
- Ann Hanlon
- Mark Harris
- Robin Mello
- Kristian O'Connor
- Kari Whittenberger-Keith
- David Petering
- Vali Raicu
- Nigel Rothfels
- Michelle Schoenecker
- AkkeNeel Talsma

The group has been sharing perspectives and identifying areas for discussion. Among the topics identified to date are listed below.

- UWM as an urban public research university: What is the urban aspect of this? What does it mean for our identity, opportunities, and breadth?
- Collaborative Research: This has both internal (cross-unit) and external aspects. Internally, how do we facilitate collaborations and support a focus on problem-based research? Externally, how do we find partners and develop new alignments to address interesting research issues? What are the implications for the impact of our research?
- Structuring our research: How can we accommodate/facilitate collaborations beyond traditional disciplinary-focused topics? Should centers/institutes evolve to be focal points for multi-investigator and collaborative research? Should they be allocated research/scientist appointments? Should we consider some type of research themes or "neighborhoods" that overlay existing formal structures? Would a more radical restructuring be more effective?
- What will the workforce of the future look like? Lots of thoughts here, all requiring some thought about expectations, value of varied contributions, and rewards/recognition.
 - Faculty: How do we best use their time? Accommodate different contributions?
 - Teaching staff: How provide a career pathway? If they will be teaching a large number of lower level classes, how should they be provided a "voice" in decisions about programs and teaching?
 - Graduate students: How do we provide nationally competitive stipends? What is the role of masters vs doctoral students as we move forward?
 - Undergraduate students: Some faculty have figured out how to incorporate undergraduates into their research work. Can we broaden this participation?

- Communication: How can we increase the visibility of the university to the community as well as professionally? Can we make our impact on the community more meaningful? Develop more pride in the institution?