

MINUTES

BOARD OF REGENTS COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND INNOVATION MEETING

NOVEMBER 4, 2020

Note: On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern, subsequently declaring it a pandemic on March 11, 2020. On March 16, 2020, Governor David Y. Ige issued a supplementary proclamation that temporarily suspended Chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes, relating to public meetings and records, “to the extent necessary to enable boards to conduct business in person or through remote technology without holding meetings open to the public.”

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Eugene Bal called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. on Wednesday, November 4, 2020. The meeting was conducted virtually with regents participating from various locations.

Committee members in attendance: Chair Eugene Bal; Vice-Chair Jan Sullivan; Regent Randy Moore; Regent Michelle Tagorda; and Regent Ernest Wilson.

Others in attendance: Board Chair Benjamin Kudo; Regent Simeon Acoba; Regent Kelli Acopan; Regent Wayne Higaki; Regent Alapaki Nahale-a; Regent Robert Westerman; (ex officio committee members); President David Lassner; Vice President (VP) for Community Colleges Erika Lacro; VP for Legal Affairs/University General Counsel Carrie Okinaga; VP for Research and Innovation Vassilis Syrmos; VP for Information Technology/Chief Information Officer Garret Yoshimi; VP for Budget and Finance/Chief Financial Officer Kalbert Young; UH-Mānoa (UHM) Provost Michael Bruno; UH-Hilo Chancellor Bonnie Irwin; UH-West O’ahu Chancellor Maenette Benham; Executive Administrator and Secretary of the Board of Regents (Board Secretary) Kendra Oishi; and others as noted.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regent Wilson moved to approve the minutes of the August 6, 2020, meeting, seconded by Vice-Chair Sullivan, and the motion carried with all members present voting in the affirmative.

III. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Board Secretary Oishi announced that the Board Office did not receive any written testimony, and no individuals signed up to provide oral testimony.

Regent Acopan arrived at 8:34 a.m.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS

A. University of Hawai'i (UH) Research: Overview of Ocean Sciences by Dr. David Karl, Director of the Center for Microbial Oceanography Research and Education (C-MORE)

VP Syrmos introduced Dr. David Karl, Director of C-MORE, and provided an overview of his educational background highlighting numerous accomplishments and prestigious awards received during his 40-year tenure at the UH. He also stated that Dr. Karl has had tremendous success in garnering extramural funding for the university and was instrumental in the development and building of C-MORE Hale, one of the most celebrated science and technology centers in the nation, thereby continuing the university's long and illustrious reputation as the world leader in oceanographic research.

Dr. Karl noted that UH is one of only four universities that share the land, sea, space, and sun grant designation and provided a historical perspective on the evolution and growth of the discipline of ocean sciences and research at the university. He highlighted the origins of the oceanography program and its establishment as a major research theme of the university, as well as the evolution of the university into the premier authority on oceanography and ocean and marine research in the world. He noted some of the major benchmarks in the development of oceanography as a field of study at the university including the creation of a marine council, which led to the establishment of the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology (SOEST) in 1988, the founding of C-MORE in 2006, and the building of C-MORE Hale, which is a state-of-the-art science and technology center that houses world-class laboratories and supports comprehensive ocean research.

An overview of the importance of oceanographic research on a global scale, as well as to the university and the State, was provided with Dr. Karl citing a number of reasons for the university's excellence in this field of study and research. He highlighted some of the groundbreaking initiatives conducted by SOEST over the last 30 years including the monitoring of atmospheric and oceanographic levels of carbon dioxide, which reaffirmed the science behind global warming and led to a fundamental discovery of the acidification of the world's oceans, and the recent discovery of water in the equatorial region of the moon. While the university has the distinction of being a premier institution for oceanographic research, Dr. Karl stated that it must continue to invest in this field of study and research in order to maintain this reputation, continue to be forward-thinking, and strive to build upon this excellence in ocean research and innovation.

The economic benefits of research activities to the university, as well as to the State, were also touted with Dr. Karl noting that over half of the approximately \$450 million in extramural funding received by the university in fiscal year 2020 was for research-related activities, \$102 million of which can be attributed to SOEST. He also stated that a study conducted by the UH Economic Research Organization in 2013 determined that the overall economic impact of research activities at UH was \$3.6 billion per year.

Regent Moore asked if his understanding that SOEST accounted for approximately half of all research-related extramural funding received by the university was correct. VP Syrmos responded in the affirmative stating that, as a whole, the university received

approximately \$450 million in extramural funding with about 50 percent of this amount specifically attributed to research-related activities. He also emphasized the importance of SOEST with regard to extramural funding by stating that it accounted for one-third of all extramural funding received by UH Mānoa in fiscal year 2020.

Vice-Chair Sullivan noted the foresight and vision of past university leaders with regard to establishing the university as a world leader in ocean and marine sciences and asked what the university should presently be doing to continue this work into the future. Dr. Karl responded that science in general is an underpinning of society that impacts every aspect of human life. As technological advances continue to be made and challenges facing the world continue to increase, there will be a greater reliance on science and the scientific and research communities to guide society. He stated that for science to continue to have an impact on the public good, there must be a concerted effort to increase scientific teaching in the educational curricula, particularly at the grade school level, and greater investment made in scientific research and development. More specific to the university, increased support and funding for research and development efforts and activities will not only assist the university in sustaining its reputation as a world-class research institution but also allow it to forge ahead as a leading scientific institution in the future.

Regent Wilson asked what percentage of the world's oceans is encompassed by the Indo-Asia Pacific region. Dr. Karl replied that the Pacific Basin, which stretches from California to Japan, is an extremely strategic body of water and accounts for about one-third of the global oceans.

Referencing a comment made that the university had enormous potential to increase scientific education through outreach efforts, Regent Wilson inquired as to what steps could be taken so that the university could realize this potential. Dr. Karl stated that he believed the university was an untapped resource for increasing the scientific knowledge of the general public and could use its expertise and strength in the field of science and research to play an even larger role in achieving this endeavor through a variety of outreach initiatives. Simple steps, such as organizing campus open houses showcasing ongoing research activities and arranging for more events such as a distinguished lecture series, could be taken that would increase community engagement and interest in both the sciences and the university. He also highlighted some of the ongoing efforts by various university programs to engage the community in the sciences including events held by SOEST for Hawai'i's grade-school students and an initiative undertaken by C-MORE to provide a microscope in each middle school statewide to instill an interest in science in younger students for a very small investment.

B. Research Corporation of the University of Hawai'i (RCUH): A Historical Overview

Regent Westerman arrived at 9:24 a.m.

Regent Acopan left at 9:25 a.m.

VP Syrmos provided a historical overview of RCUH and the rationale for its creation in 1965 noting that the establishment of RCUH was intended to facilitate the university's rapid and extensive entry into basic and applied research efforts and programs by providing greater financial flexibility and streamlining operational and procurement processes to allow for research activities to be conducted in a timely fashion. He reviewed the organizational structure of RCUH, which is under the general management and control of a Board of Directors (RCUH Board); numerous changes made to the composition of the RCUH Board over a 20 year period and the reasons for these changes; various exemptions from State procurement, civil service, and accounting laws that were given to RCUH to allow it to operate with greater efficiency and effectiveness; the evolution of the mission of RCUH from one that was rooted in ocean and marine sciences research to a more general research mission; the work performed by RCUH over the years including some of the major university construction projects it processed such as the John A. Burns School of Medicine; the importance of RCUH with regard to extramural funding at the university; and the complex relationship between the university and RCUH.

Regent Higaki arrived at 9:35 a.m.

Although RCUH is a tremendous asset to the university, VP Syrmos stated that there are continuing issues that will need to be addressed in the near future. Some of these issues include costs associated with maintaining separate information technology systems for both the university and RCUH as well as maintaining redundant procurement systems. VP Syrmos also noted that RCUH is currently reviewing whether its mission is to primarily support the university with its research efforts or to generate increased research business and funding through diversification of its efforts among numerous agencies in addition to serving as a resource to the university. After this review is completed, RCUH intends to update its strategic plan accordingly.

Referencing the issue of redundant procurement systems between the university and RCUH, Regent Wilson asked if using the RCUH procurement system would be more cost-efficient and effective since it was exempt from certain procurement laws. VP Syrmos replied that the university and RCUH procurement systems could use a similar information technology base but bifurcate at the point where determinations are made as to how goods and services are procured.

Regent Acoba arrived at 9:50 a.m.

Vice-Chair Sullivan remarked that, while RCUH is absolutely essential for the performance of research activities at the university, it is important that it be as cost-effective an operation as possible. She questioned RCUH's budgeting of a significant amount of funds for software costs amounting to approximately \$1 million per year; the provision of retirement and other benefits to RCUH personnel and why it appears that over 2,000 individuals qualify for benefits when RCUH maintains a permanent staff of approximately 40 individuals; and why salaries for researchers at RCUH do not seem to be subject to parameters that are consistent with other university employees. However, due to time limitations, she requested that VP Syrmos and Leonard Gouveia, Jr., Executive Director of RCUH, clarify these issues at a later meeting. VP Syrmos replied

that he will work with Mr. Gouveia to respond to these questions and provide this information to the committee. Mr. Gouveia added that some of the issues raised by Vice-Chair Sullivan are very complex and would require an extensive and lengthy presentation but that he will work with VP Syrmos on providing information to the committee.

Chair Bal requested that Mr. Gouveia collaborate with VP Syrmos on preparing a brief on the issues and questions raised by Vice-Chair Sullivan for presentation to the committee at a later date.

C. Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-2021 1st Quarter Extramural Awards Update

Due to time constraints, Regent Bal requested that VP Syrmos provide an update on extramural awards received by the university for both the 1st and 2nd quarters of FY 2020 – 2021 at the committee's next meeting. It was noted that, to date, the university received \$250 million in extramural awards, which is approximately 10 percent higher than the same period last year.

V. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Vice-Chair Sullivan moved to adjourn, seconded by Regent Moore, and with all members present voting in the affirmative, the meeting was adjourned at 9:57 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

/S/

Kendra Oishi
Executive Administrator and Secretary
of the Board of Regents