MINUTES
BOARD OF REGENTS COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND INNOVATION MEETING
MARCH 4, 2021

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 11:31 a.m. on Thursday, March 4, 2021. 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 Alapaki Nahale-a (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 Tagorda arrived at 11:32 a.m.

Regent Wilson moved to approve the minutes of the November 4, 2020, meeting, seconded by Regent Moore, 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.

IV. AGENDA ITEMS
A. University of Hawai‘i Research: “Pacific Health Analytics Collaborative”
Presentation by Dr. Victoria Fan, Interim Director and Associate Professor, 
Center on Aging – Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health, UHM

VP Syrmos introduced Dr. Victoria Fan, Interim Director and Associate Professor, Center on Aging – UHM Thompson School of Social Work & Public Health, and provided her educational background highlighting numerous accomplishments and awards received during her career. He stated that Dr. Fan also serves as the Director of the Pacific Health Analytics Collaborative (PHAC), a research laboratory that seeks to improve lives through the use of applied analytics and trusted partnerships to advance sound healthcare policy and practices, and that much of her work has contributed to understanding the costs and benefits of health risks and interventions, including pandemic influences, which is timely given the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Fan provided a synopsis of the fields of data science and health analytics stating that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought these scientific disciplines to the fore due in part to increased public demand for healthcare information and the importance of healthcare data in guiding public health response efforts. She reviewed and highlighted a number of projects undertaken by PHAC, including the creation and development of various data dashboards, and recognized the enormous amount of time and energy put into these projects by employees of PHAC, in particular, its student employees and interns.

It was stated that the data analytics difficulties and challenges faced by the State during the pandemic also underscored the need to build the next-generation local health analytics workforce. Of particular concern was the lack of trained data scientists, statisticians, and epidemiologists in the healthcare field, as well as the use of antiquated and fragmented data technology systems. Given current events, PHAC anticipates that the field of health analytics will experience future growth and that there will be a continual need for qualified professionals, which PHAC seeks to address by, among other things, providing practical, hands-on training and experiential, project-based real-world learning to students.

Dr. Fan stated that health analytics continues to be an important aspect of the healthcare and public health disciplines and offered a glimpse into future endeavors being undertaken by PHAC, including new research projects, the creation of a summer health analytics internship program, and the development of enhanced linkages with community colleges and partnerships with interdisciplinary studies programs to enhance research projects and opportunities.

Regent Nahale-a left at 11:48 a.m.

Noting the emphasis on data sciences in the field of health analytics, Regent Wilson questioned whether coursework in this area occurred more during a student’s junior and senior year or earlier in their academic journey. Dr. Fan replied that coursework in data science spans both undergraduate and graduate level curricula to different degrees. While many of the courses specific to data science are considered upper level, they often have a number of prerequisite courses that would be considered introductory level
courses in the data sciences. Regent Wilson followed up by stating that an initiative is currently underway that is reviewing the focus of general education requirements, which are mainly considered lower division coursework, and asked whether it would be relevant to begin a foundational development in data analytics at those levels of education. Dr. Fan responded in the affirmative stating that she was fully supportive of this concept.

Commenting that it appeared PHAC used a large number of student employees to conduct research and analysis work, Chair Bal requested a breakdown of the numbers of students and faculty considered to be PHAC personnel. Dr. Fan replied that of the 81 full-time equivalent positions currently in PHAC, 8 are full-time faculty members, 6 are full-time research associates, and the remaining 67 individuals are students. She reiterated that one of the goals of PHAC was to provide practical, real-world work experience to students and stated that its student employees were an integral part of the PHAC workforce and were responsible for the creation of several of the data dashboards presented.

Chair Bal asked about the number of students employed by PHAC that ultimately chose to pursue and continue their careers in the health analytics field. Dr. Fan replied that approximately 20 percent of the student employees at PHAC either have entered, or intend to enter the healthcare field in some capacity upon graduation and PHAC is continuing its efforts to increase these numbers.

B. Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 – 2021 1st and 2nd Quarter Extramural Awards Update

VP Syrmos reported on the receipt of extramural awards for the first and second quarters of FY 2021 and provided a breakdown of trends, significant awards, and award amounts by campus. He noted that, for FY 2021, the university received $188.3 million in award revenues for the first quarter and $114.6 million for the second quarter, which was 6.9 percent and 44.9 percent higher than the same period in FY 2020, respectively. VP Syrmos also provided information on approximately $47.3 million in both formula-funded and competitively-awarded COVID-19 related extramural awards received by the university as of January 8, 2021. Overall, the university received $340 million in extramural awards to date, an almost 17 percent increase over last year, and is cautiously optimistic that it will receive close to $500 million by the end of the fiscal year.

Vice-Chair Sullivan expressed her concerns about the disparity in the receipt of extramural awards among the various colleges and units of the university and requested clarification as to whether the extramural funding amounts included federal CARES Act funds. VP Syrmos replied that the extramural funding amounts he presented did not reflect formulaic CARES Act funds but did include CARES Act funds that were awarded as competitive grants which did account for some of the noted disparity. Vice-Chair Sullivan opined that counting certain types of CARES Act funding as extramural awards causes confusion about the actual amount of extramural funding received by the university and suggested that, for the sake of accurately reflecting the university’s success in securing extramural funding, CARES Act funds should be segregated in the next report. VP Syrmos responded that those figures could be reported on separately but he believes the university will experience an extraordinary year in extramural
funding even if CARES Act funds are removed from the report. However, he also concurred with Vice-Chair Sullivan that, while some colleges are doing extremely well in securing extramural funding, other colleges are lagging, and there is room for improvement.

C. Review and Update on Metrics and Goals Used to Measure Success in Research and Innovation

VP Syrmos provided a brief historical background on efforts undertaken by the administration to gain a better understanding of the university’s strengths and weaknesses, in addition to its successes and failures, with regard to the pursuit and receipt of extramural funding. He reviewed some of the proposed changes that the administration believes are needed to portray a more accurate picture of the university’s extramural funding as a result of its review of historical data, as well as the various assumptions and parameters used concerning the receipt of extramural awards. Proposed changes included establishing two separate categories for research and non-research when setting targets and tracking the progress of obtaining extramural funding; updating and amending the definitions for start-up support, innovation, and entrepreneurial activities, and setting targets and tracking progress for each sector separately; and updating the start-ups metric to include the total number of active, university start-ups.

Referencing a comment made that the federal funding focus for extramural awards has changed over the last ten to 20 years, Regent Wilson questioned how the focus has changed and the related impacts on the programs and curricula of the university. VP Syrmos replied that the university is a premiere institution in program areas such as ocean earth science and technology, astronomy, and climate change and sustainability and these programs are doing extremely well in attracting extramural funds. However, there are other program areas in which there are opportunities for the university to flourish including data analytics and health sciences, computer sciences, and engineering, particularly regarding the effects on infrastructure due to climate change. He noted that the administration continues its efforts to develop the resources necessary to be extremely competitive in these areas of study as part of its post-pandemic planning.

Regent Moore noted that there were several examples of substantial increases in engagement and support for start-ups during the pandemic and asked whether the administration had learned anything that could be used regarding continued start-up support going forward. VP Syrmos replied that, in general, the administration did not find it difficult to engage with and assist start-ups during the pandemic as presentations, discussions, and meetings could still occur via interactive technology. However, there were challenges and impediments to engaging with start-ups that required the use of facilities, such as labs, as well as in-person interaction with a principal investigator.

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 12:32 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

/S/

Kendra Oishi
Executive Administrator and Secretary
of the Board of Regents