

## **A&S Strategic Research Planning Initiative – Continued Divisional Research Discussion for Social Sciences (March 29, 2024)**

Introductions around the room

Introducing meeting purpose and charge

Charge from Dean Christa Acampora to find areas of investment in research excellence in the college of Arts & Sciences

After all of the focus group meetings, faculty survey, and town halls a month ago, we are coming back together to talk today about what everyone cares about. The Dean wants to invest in things that can bring us together collectively. Investing in current faculty and programs to make research even better at UVA. The steering committee has been looking closely at survey results and comments from faculty.

Two pieces: 1) investing in operational matters – administration, reducing barriers to excellent research. 2) investing in research ideas -

Social Sciences operational priorities: seed money, summer funding, conference travel, flexible schedules, better support for pre-award work, how to navigate funding opportunities, navigating complex software, grant documentation, support for administrative tasks (workday or how much money is left in a grant), identifying grant and fellowship opportunities, post-award support.

Dean has committed to funding soon to address these infrastructure challenges

The question of today is identifying ideas and research areas to invest in and elevate existing work.

Discussion

- Unearmarked funding beyond seed money that exists for faculty to do high-risk high-reward research
- Research staff specialized support – ex: GIS specialist for satellite data, etc.
- Need for additional staff support at the department level – concurrent work going on at the dean's office level to create this extra support
- Concern from faculty about communication – committee still in the process of identifying areas of research investment – fall would be earliest time for programmatic requests – understand the need for long lead times
- Overarching conceptual frameworks and previous documentation - 2030 plan, 2013 mission statement, Strategic Planning Website <https://as.virginia.edu/strategic-planning>

- How to make connections with faculty outside of departments
- “Society of fellows” idea – lunches, activities, course buyout, grant funding, faculty club space, semiformal meeting spaces
- Areas of excellence – how can it not be a top-down decision?
- Highlighting that the Dean is expecting some form of measurement – metrics for investment
- What are faculty members excited about? What could put UVA on the map intellectually – could be within a discipline or interdisciplinary institute
- \$25 million is a form of seed money invested with plan of leveraging additional funds
- Steering Committee’s job is to make recommendations for areas of investment - looking for synergies
- Support for Comparative and global social sciences
- Support for Global Humanities in other contexts
- Latin American Studies Program – center to promote interdisciplinarity work and connect faculty currently on a \$1500 budget – would like to be able to have the budget to promote research initiatives or speaker series, finding money has been hard.
- Many people have co-authors or collaborators outside of Charlottesville. Faculty need the funding to go visit their counterparts, buy a dataset, etc.
- Faculty want unrestricted funds money that they can make decisions about for things they actually need
- History \$4000 annual cap isn’t enough to pay for a two-week conference trip to Europe. It’s a serious impediment to research
- Funding for speakers, funding for global travel, funding for conferences
- Theme suggested of “crisis management in 21<sup>st</sup> century”
- Topic: “public scholarship initiative” – share work to engage the public and journalists
- Invest in tech support for research admin – AI chatbots for simple questions around policies etc.
- Appointing faculty member for dept as “research officer” to engage with faculty in their dept.
- Support for unrestricted research funds, and/or universal basic research funds
- Carceral and border studies fits under crisis management or public education
- Noted stress on faculty at every level regarding finances to pay for fundamental aspects of research

- UVA has a strength in quantitative social sciences – the quantitative collaborative has helped to bring people together – how can we take that to the next level?
- Collaboration with other schools – law, batten, education, etc. - they have administrative support to do things A&S can't right now. Possibility for matching grants across schools?
- Grand Challenges – trying to foster inter-school research – great for a few people – not everyone. 3 Cavs worked out much better for grants with colleagues in different schools.
- Desire to invest in people who are already here – not going out to find new hires
- Ways to stimulate cooperation between friends and colleagues - “society of fellows” - could apply as a small group to build the cohort – could work if funds were made available to simultaneously buy people out so they all have time.
- “Society of fellows” feels like another imposed structure that makes things more rigid
- Paradox – cycles of research – at the peak it's easy to get grants, at the low cycle is when people really need support – when the research isn't shiny
- Need to focus on faculty on mid-late career who need a chance or boost
- Peer review now – only about salary increases – not about research support – why doesn't it inform research support for faculty – seems like a missing element
- Having the peer review delegate research funds assumes a functional peer review process – currently unrealistic
- Chairs given a little money from the dean, then must decide what to fund in their dept, and can be penalized for current balance – not topping off research funds – complex issue
- Invest in people who need a push to move forward
- Department managers need direct help – not new structures that create vicious cycles of reports
- Address needs right away – just pay the people who need it now
- Committees meeting to award tiny amounts of money is a waste of time
- **“More money, fewer hoops”**
- Books are important for tenure track faculty – desire for a year off to complete archive research, write a book
- Notes from A&H meeting this morning – IHGC, interlocking graduate studies (support voiced by History dept here)

It was noted that many similar themes arose from these divisional meetings. Next meeting(s) could be open to all faculty – not organized by division. Discussions around

interdisciplinary work benefit from being in interdisciplinary spaces. Astronomy, for example, is specifically interested in interdisciplinary and cross-divisional work.