

Committee for Faculty Excellence Annual Report 2014-2015

Due to intense pressures on Teaching and Productive Scholarship (TAPS) grants caused by cuts to departmental travel funds, the committee rejected or provided partial funding for an unprecedented number of grant applications (nearly 20). At the committee's request, the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs authorized a one-time budget increase to TAPS grants above the customary \$125,000 limit. As of the final general faculty meeting of the year, \$126,883 had been awarded for projects in the 2014-15 fiscal year, with at least three more grant applications for FY1415 currently awaiting approval. The committee estimates that awards for this fiscal year will total \$132,000, and we have urged the SVCAA to allocate \$135,000 (or enough for 31% of our full-time faculty members to receive \$1750 grants) in the 2105-16 budget and beyond.

Approximately 105 grants were awarded to 86 faculty. The average grant was \$1208. Of the grants awarded to date, approximately \$110,000 went to domestic travel (includes Canada), \$10,000 was awarded for foreign travel, and \$600 was awarded for equipment and other research support. The vast majority of were research projects (or combined research and service/teaching activities), but 14 supported significant service activities and four funded exclusively teaching-development activities.

For FY 2015-2016, the eligible amount for grants will remain \$1750. Faculty who are travelling internationally are eligible to apply for an additional \$250 (for a total of \$2000) to support their work. This funding level allowed the committee to spread funds to eleven additional faculty members in 2014-15 over 2013-14, without dramatically decreasing the numbers of faculty members whose projects were fully funded.

The committee also converted to an electronic application form and approval/voting process using Sharepoint. When the travel authorization and reimbursement system converts to PeopleSoft in summer 2015, the entire TAPS process will be electronic for all applications, administrative assistants, administrators, and committee members. With this process, TAPS applications can be accepted with rolling deadlines and with approximately 2-week turnaround times during the regular semester and 3-week turnaround times over breaks. All future TAPS grants will be accepted through the online format only.

In addition, relying on electronic budgeting data, the committee eliminated the need for separate final reports, further streamlining the process for faculty members and alleviating some of the paperwork burden placed on committee chairs.

In addition to TAPS grants, the committee reviewed and ranked seven sabbatical proposals and received six nominations for the Annual Award for Faculty Excellence Scholarly and/or Creative Pursuits. Five candidates submitted portfolios, and the committee selected Dr. Andrew Beer as the award winner for 2015. Due to changes in the USC Upstate Foundation funding, Dr. Beer and future award recipients will receive a \$1000 award (up from \$500 in the past).

The committee also created guidelines for the Annual Award for Faculty Excellence in Service (approved by Faculty-Senate in February 2015). Nominations will be accepted beginning in fall 2015, and the first winner will be named in December 2015. This honor will also carry a \$1000 award.

Committee members included Dean Ballas (fall), Warren Bareiss (spring), Stephen Bismarck, Jack Cheng, David Damrel (fall), Tammy Gilliam, Jan Griffin, Celena Kusch (Chair), Nancy Lambert, Andy Myers (spring),

Brigitte Neary, Anselm Omoike, Amanda Schwartz, Angelina Tzacheva. Due to the scheduling difficulties of convening a 12-member group, the committee has maintained and expanded its policy of flexibility in offering opportunities for online attendance and password-protected voting through Blackboard and Sharepoint systems. Through a combination of face-to-face and electronic participation, the members of this committee all achieved high levels of attendance and made significant contributions to the many projects and changes undertaken this year.

Service on this committee ensures that significant faculty development activities and faculty accomplishments are rewarded and supported. The work of this year's unit representatives demonstrates commendable service to supporting faculty development and faculty excellence in teaching, research, and service at USC Upstate.

Dr. Celena E. Kusch, Interim Chair, Committee for Faculty Excellence