

# Meeting of the Research Associates Advisory Committee

October 25, 2013

## Meeting Summary

### 1. Overview of Committee Structure and Role of Members

Angela Hildyard provided an overview of the evolution of the staff advisory committees. She indicated that the most recent review was conducted to improve the flow of information between the central administration and members of the Committee. It was acknowledged that non-unionized employees need a stronger voice and although the Committee does not negotiate the terms and conditions of employment for RAs, it is important to hear from staff regarding employment-related issues. Angela urged members to bring to this forum not only their personal views but also the views of their colleagues.

Members were advised that the University would create mechanisms for members of the Committee to communicate and share information. Agenda setting will now be a joint process.

The membership complement of the Committee was discussed. The (draft) Terms of Reference indicates that there be “no fewer than 12 members”. There are currently 8 Committee members and approximately 300 RAs and SRAs at the University. It was noted that the current membership is quite representative of different areas of the University. Angela Hildyard noted that there is no “formula” for determining how many members there should be from each division. The Committee members were asked to consider whether the University should continue recruitment to increase membership, or leave it at 8 members for now. She indicated that the University could provide some data to the Committee regarding distribution of staff in this group across the University to help inform this discussion. It was suggested that perhaps there should be one more member from Engineering and another from a science department within the Faculty of Arts & Science.

#### Action Items:

- Provide information regarding distribution of RAs across divisions of the University (M. Sandles)
- Committee members to contemplate and provide feedback regarding membership levels

### 2. Rules of Engagement

The Committee was both reminded and assured that this forum is a safe place where everyone can and should share ideas openly and respectfully. Members were encouraged to bring forward questions or concerns of colleagues, even in circumstances where the member does not share the colleague’s view. It was acknowledged that there may be times when the subject matter is

controversial, but everyone must remain respectful. Members were asked not to attribute points of view to other participants in the meetings, except statements made by Angela Hildyard.

An inquiry was made regarding the policy development and review process. The group was advised that the most recent revision to the employment policy for RAs was developed in consultation with staff, and then went to Business Board (for approval) and Governing Council (for information). Any changes to benefits, pension, or the like must be presented by the Vice-President Human Resources & Equity to Business Board for approval.

**Action Items:**

- Send link to Policies for Senior Research Associates and Research Associates (Limited Term) to the members (M. Sandles)

**3. Tools for Communication with Research Associates and Senior Research Associates (including website bios)**

The Committee was asked for input regarding ways the University could facilitate communication between members and their RA / SRA colleagues. The group was advised that a listserv and portal page has already been created for each of the other Advisory Committees and that this was in progress for this group. A list of RAs and SRAs will be posted on the portal page and will be updated quarterly. It was suggested that information regarding the Committee be placed into letters of offer for new RAs and SRAs. It was also suggested that the Committee be notified when there is a new hire. Angela Hildyard indicated that the permission of the employee might be required. Committee members each agreed to acting as a possible resource for employee orientation sessions.

Action Items:

- Set up listserv and portal page (including list of RA and SRA staff), update links on HR&E website (M. Sandles)
- Send list of Committee members to Teresa Scannell at ODLC for employee orientation resources (M. Sandles)
- Members to provide bios as per examples provided (via web link in the agenda) to M. Sandles
- Revise the letter of offer templates for RAs and SRAs to include information regarding this Committee (M. Sandles and K. Francis)
- Committee members to consider other communication tools and send ideas to M. Sandles

**4. Agenda Planning Committee – Call for Volunteers**

The Committee was asked to discuss this during caucus time.

Action Items:

- Committee members to advise A. Hildyard and M. Sandles whether they believe a separate meeting is required for agenda planning
- Committee members to advise M. Sandles who will be on APC if it is established

## 5. Compensation Update

The group was advised that the previous Advisory Committee was consulted this past summer regarding possible offsets to the significant wage restraint imposed by the provincial government. In order to facilitate a (pre-approved) 2.3% ATB for this group, the University decreased the number of personal days allocated to individuals each year from 4 to 3, then created a central pool of days that would be made available to those who need them.

The annual process will conclude in October. PIs should be meeting with RAs before the end of the month. Staff should receive their merit increase, retroactive to July 1, in their October pay. Committee members were reminded that they should now be engaged in goal setting for the coming year.

The annual performance assessment process is currently paper based for this employee group. The University is currently negotiating with vendor for online tool. It is anticipated that the same competencies and content in the current tool will be transferred to the online system.

An inquiry was made regarding how merit amounts are determined. The Committee was advised that PIs are given a guideline regarding merit amounts. Chairs are expected to review the assessments with PIs to determine relativity. Divisional HR Offices and Business Officers are also involved in this process. Supporting documentation provided by HR to PIs and Chairs includes examples for varying levels of performance. PIs are expected to compare to prior years' performance. An individual's rating will not necessarily be the same every year.

It was suggested that some RAs may not be receiving enough guidance regarding job expectations. Angela Hildyard indicated that this issue will be taken back to Divisional HR Offices and to PIs.

Angela Hildyard advised that salary increases in 2014 will be guided by government legislation and directives for the public sector. She reminded the group of the offset that was implemented this year to facilitate the ATB increase.

A concern was raised that some RAs and SRAs are not able to take vacation time due to the nature of their research projects. Angela Hildyard emphasized the importance of taking time off to recharge one's batteries. She encouraged Committee members to take vacation, but acknowledged that at the end of the day RAs will make the decision based on individual goals. Committee members were reminded that it is the PI's responsibility to arrange coverage (if required) so that staff can take vacation. It was suggested that a FAQ regarding what constitutes "vacation" would be helpful. The group was also reminded that Divisional HR Offices can facilitate the conversation with the PI to

clarify policy expectations. The Committee was asked to discuss this matter further in caucus and advise if intervention by HR may be of assistance.

Action Items:

- Status of absence tracking on ESS for RAs (M. Sandles)
- Develop FAQ / definition of “vacation” (M. Sandles and D. Ovsenny)

## **6. Hours of Work – HRIS Update**

The Committee was advised of the continuation of implementation of the revised Policies Senior Research Associates and Research Associates (Limited Term), which were enacted in 2012. The standard hours of work for this employee group will be revised on the University’s Human Resources Information System (HRIS) from 40 to 36.25 per week. This change will have very minimal practical implications. For example, a vacation day will be reflected as 7.25 hours, rather than 8 hours. In the highly unlikely event that this change impacts an employee’s Employment Insurance eligibility, the University will take appropriate steps to address the matter.

The group was reminded that staff are expected to flex their time to manage their work and life responsibilities. Where an RA works extra hours in a particular week, she / he should take time off later.

## **7. Aspiring to a Faculty Position**

Angela Hildyard noted that while there is no formal program, nor guarantee that Research Associate positions will lead to a faculty appointment, the University can help RAs to enhance their candidacy for faculty appointments at U of T and elsewhere. She reminded the Committee that teaching opportunities at the University can be accessed under CUPE 3902 Unit 3.

Angela indicated that the University would look into conducting seminars regarding moving toward faculty positions for RAs.

Action Items:

- Share information regarding CUPE 3902 Unit 3 job postings with Committee (M. Sandles)
- Explore seminar(s) (A. Hildyard/M. Sandles)

## **8. Caucus**

Time was set aside for members only, to discuss issues of their choosing.