

Meeting of the Research Associates Advisory Committee

March 6, 2014

Meeting Summary

1. Caucus

Time was used by the Committee to discuss today's agenda items and/or any other issues of their choosing.

2. Welcome to New Members

All attendees briefly introduced themselves, including guests from the HR & Equity portfolio.

3. Review of Meeting / Committee Protocol

Angela Hildyard reviewed Committee protocol with the group. Meetings are a place where ideas and opinions should be shared freely and respectfully. Committee members were encouraged to bring forward the views of other RAs / SRAs, even if the Committee member does not personally agree with a particular point of view. The items discussed in the meetings may be shared more broadly by Committee members with RA / SRA colleagues; but it was stressed that specific comments should not be attributed to particular individuals, save for Angela Hildyard, Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity.

4. Discuss Confirmation of Draft Terms of Reference (TOR)

The Committee was encouraged to bring issues and suggestions regarding the TOR forward as soon as possible so the TOR can be finalized. The Committee agreed to let Meredith Sandles know if they have any thoughts regarding further modifications to the TOR. The Committee was reminded that proposed changes are consistent with the changes that were made to the other Staff Advisory Committees' Terms of Reference.

Action Items:

- Committee members to contact M. Sandles regarding comments on the proposed Terms of Reference

5. Childcare Benefits

Angela Hildyard confirmed that RAs / SRAs are eligible for the Childcare Benefits Plan, effective immediately. HR staff have been working to provide this benefit to RAs / SRAs, and are very pleased with the support the Committee has given to this initiative.

6. Updates on Action Items from October 2013 Meeting

- Provide information regarding distribution of RAs across divisions of the University (M. Sandles)
 - Staff list posted to portal and announced to Committee in November 2013
- Committee members to contemplate and provide feedback regarding membership levels
 - In October, members indicated desire to proceed with call out for additional members. This was completed in February 2014. Now have a full committee of 12 members.
- Send link to Policies for Senior Research Associates and Research Associates (Limited Term) to the members (M. Sandles)
 - Sent to members via listserv on October 29, 2013
- Set up listserv and portal page (including list of RA and SRA staff), update links on HR&E website (M. Sandles)
 - Completed November 2013
- Send list of Committee members to Teresa Scannell at ODLC for employee orientation resources (M. Sandles)
 - Sent February 2014
- Members to provide bios as per examples provided (via web link in the agenda) to M. Sandles
 - Most members have provided bios, can add or change at any time. New members will be invited to submit a bio.
- Revise the letter of offer templates for RAs and SRAs to include information regarding this Committee (M. Sandles and K. Francis)
 - Completed in December 2013 coincident with other revisions to the templates
- Committee members to consider other communication tools and send ideas to M. Sandles
 - No comments brought forward prior to March 6 meeting
- Committee members to advise A. Hildyard and M. Sandles whether they believe a separate meeting is required for agenda planning
 - Discussed at this meeting – there was some interest in forming an Agenda Planning Committee.
- Committee members to advise M. Sandles who will be on Agenda Planning Committee, if it is established
- Status of absence tracking on ESS for RAs (M. Sandles)
 - Not currently available on ESS
 - Departmental Business Officers do have a tracking tool

- Can post the tool online so staff can track their own absences as well if they would like; can also ask their Business Officer for a copy of their tracker
- Debbie Ovsenny, Executive Director, Total Rewards explained that a new ESS platform is planned for this summer that will eventually host the vacation tracker and include an online approval process. Before the tracker can be loaded onto the system for RAs / SRAs, there needs to be further investigation into the reporting structure of RAs / SRAs. Once the reporting relationships have been clarified, they will be linked to HRIS, which will allow the online vacation tracker to be launched.
- Develop FAQ / definition of “vacation” (M. Sandles and D. Ovsenny)
 - A memo was sent January 7 to PDAD&C, PMs and RA / SRAs regarding personal leave guidelines and vacation entitlement
 - Angela Hildyard asked the Committee if any issues have come forth relating to difficulty in getting time off work. She stressed that vacation is an entitlement, and concerns should be brought to the attention of Meredith Sandles and / or the Committee. The Committee agreed to let the relevant parties know if any concerns come to their attention.
- CUPE 3902 Unit 3 Job Postings

RAs / SRAs interested in teaching can ask to be included on relevant departmental posting distribution lists. RAs / SRAs interested in these positions also have the option of contacting the department to find out more about position openings. The University is currently exploring centralized online job postings for these opportunities.

The Policies for Senior Research Associates and Research Associates (Limited Term) provide for the opportunity for RAs / SRAs to teach under the terms of the CUPE 3902 Unit 3 collective agreement. The wages earned teaching a course would be separate and apart from one’s RA / SRA appointment. RAs / SRAs should talk to their PI regarding how to time manage a sessional teaching appointment along with one’s regular work, which should remain a priority.

- Explore seminar(s) (A. Hildyard/M. Sandles)
 - For discussion under Item #4.

Action Item(s)

- Update the staff list to reflect changes from the last update (M. Sandles)
- New committee members will be added to the Portal (M. Sandles)
- New members will be sent instructions regarding Bios (M. Sandles)
- Committee members are to discuss the desire for and composition of the Agenda Planning Committee, and will let M. Sandles know which members would like to be part of the committee
- To post the current vacation tracker online (M. Sandles)

4. Professional Development and Continuing Education

The Committee asked for clarification regarding the ways in which RAs / SRAs may access funds to continue their education or pursue professional development opportunities. It was suggested that supervisors be prompted to discuss courses or other professional development opportunities as part of the annual performance assessment process. Rosie Parnass, Executive Director, Organizational & Leadership Development & Work-Life Support and Steve Dyce, Director, Pensions and Benefit outlined the financial support available through the Educational Assistance provisions of the [Policies for Senior Research Associates and Research Associates \(Limited Term\)](#). Some professional programs would not be fully covered (e.g., Executive MBA), as the policy provides for tuition equivalent to an Arts & Science course. Courses are taken on a part-time basis. Rosie Parnass let the members know that professional development is looked at broadly in determining the types of courses that are approved for reimbursement under Educational Assistance. Employees are encouraged to ensure that a course will be approved for reimbursement prior to enrolment.

It was also noted that departments may access the central [Professional Development Fund](#) for reimbursement of conference registration fees, to a maximum of \$500. The Committee members asked whether and how department heads are made aware of this Fund. Business officers should be aware of the Fund. If an RA / SRA is interested in a workshop, seminar or conference, they may download the package, fill it out, and discuss the opportunity with their PI, prior to submitting the documentation to their departmental Business Officer.

Action Item(s)

- Send information to the Committee regarding Educational Assistance and the Professional Development Fund (M. Sandles)
- Explore options relating to linking professional development/continuing education to the annual performance assessment (D. Ovsenny)

7. Items Arising from Committee Caucus

a) Materials for New RA / SRA Orientation

The Committee expressed concern regarding orientation of new RAs / SRAs to the University, specifically regarding their lack of awareness of employment policies (e.g., five (5) year contract limit for Research Associates (Limited Term)). It was suggested that in the interim that a single page outlining some of the major policies and key points could be put together in bullet point format to be distributed to RAs / SRAs during benefits orientation.

Action Item(s)

- Develop an overview page of the relevant policies for discussion (M. Sandles)

b) Job Security

The members raised questions regarding situations where projects dissolve due to lack of funding, and options for those RAs / SRAs who are impacted to continue their employment at the University. In particular, the members wondered if, in these circumstances, preference in hiring for positions at the University could be given to those RAs / SRAs whose jobs no longer exist. In cases where there are two equally qualified applicants, one being internal, and the other external, inquiries were raised regarding whether an internal applicant would be preferred over an external applicant.

Angela Hildyard emphasized that the University reserves the right to hire the most qualified applicant, regardless of whether they are an internal or external candidate. However, it is the case that individuals who have previously worked at the University do have an understanding of our policies, structures and processes which can be an advantage in a job competition.

In respect to how specific circumstances would be handled, relating to RA / SRA contacts and the loss of funding, there are provisions in the current policies. This issue could be one for further discussion..

The committee asked for clarification between Postdoctoral Fellows (PDF) and RAs / SRAs as it relates to unionization and the recent unionization of some PDF positions. The members discussed concerns regarding job security (particularly the dependence on funding) and asked if unionization is something that they should consider. Angela Hildyard stated that the University respects the right of employees to seek representation from a union, should they wish to do so.

Angela Hildyard emphasized the importance of bringing issues and concerns to the Advisory Committee meetings so the HR team / relevant parties are made aware of matters of concern at an early stage.

Action Item(s)

- Share policies relating to entitlements on termination of employment (M. Sandles)

c) Exploring Funding Options/Alternatives?

The Committee inquired about potential research funding sources, either external or internal, that RAs / SRAs might apply to directly. The group was advised that for external funding opportunities, the funding agencies set the requirements. The agencies typically require that the applicant be a faculty member who is employed by the University on an ongoing basis. It was suggested that the Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (VPRI) would be a good resource in this regard. Members also asked why SRAs cannot act as a Principal Investigator (PI), but that a role as a Co-PI was permitted. It was suggested that it might be useful to invite a resource from VPRI to the next meeting to address inquiries regarding research funding.

Action Item(s)

- Resource from VPRI to be invited to the next meeting