

**To:** Dean Paul Wahlbeck, Columbian College of Arts & Sciences

**From:** CCAS Research Advisory Council

**Date:** April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

Dear Dean Wahbeck,

As an elected standing committee, we feel it our responsibility to share with you the concerns of the faculty and our committee about the potential long-term impacts of the proposed budget reductions for FY 2022. We would also like to offer our support and ideas as a committee for ways to mitigate the impact of the continued and increasingly severe cuts to college-level research support. It is our understanding that the level of reductions requested to the proposed college budget make it impossible to resume intramural competitions such as the Columbian College Facilitation Fund, Dean's Research Chair, and Nick-of-Time awards. They have additionally resulted in the removal of all travel support, including online conference registration funds, from all faculty other than tenure track assistant professors.

These increasing cuts, at a time when the university is targeting an open campus in Fall 2022, are having a devastating impact on morale after an already very difficult year. We are concerned that some of our most gifted faculty may transition to other universities which have protected and prioritized research infrastructure and resources during their mitigation efforts. An additional year of increased mitigation, with no support for conference participation for the vast majority of the faculty, and no ability to perform field research or visit archives, will not only severely inhibit research productivity, and hurt GW's reputation and ranking in that year, but also for many years to come. It is our concerted opinion that we will lose far more in productivity and reputation, which ultimately translates to student tuition dollars and research income, than we will save in employing such severe austerity measures.

We are particularly concerned for those in disciplines where external funding is exceedingly sparse and very small in scale: the Arts and Humanities. Professors in those disciplines are now facing the choice as to whether to meet continuing research costs (archive visits, subvention fees, conference participation, recording fees etc.) from their own personal funds, or face severe detriment to their research progress. This is particularly damaging to faculty with less privileged circumstances, or those facing increased personal costs due to COVID-19. Thus the cuts, while levied equally, may have disparate and disproportionate impact on faculty of color and women faculty, particularly those with children.

We wish to offer some suggestions as to how the impact of these severe restrictions can be assuaged:

- Some faculty may have special reasons to travel in FY22: a recently published book which needs to be presented at a major disciplinary conference; a field work opportunity that is only available at specific times in a multi-year period etc. For these faculty, the

travel restrictions in this fiscal year will have a severe impact over several years to come. Setting aside a modest pot of competitive funding for those in such circumstances could alleviate the most severely impacted faculty. As a committee, we would be willing to invest our time and effort to review such applications on the basis of merit and need to assist in the process.

- Currently, the faculty code only allows deferral of sabbatical without loss of eligibility for university service needs. If this could be extended to allow those whose research is impacted by COVID to defer their sabbatical until e.g. travel is possible to the region they need to visit, or they have had sufficient financial support to visit archives etc. to gather preliminary data in order to make a strong proposal to external funders to provide sabbatical support, it would provide a measure of relief. Under the current system, those faculty would be forced to take an under-productive / under-funded sabbatical and begin accruing eligibility for the next, or delay their activities, pushing their next sabbatical several extra years down the line.
- Allow “no cost” teaching releases where possible, where faculty leave can be covered by their department without the hiring of a TPT to replace them. This could follow a DRC-model with no additional research funding, simply course release.
- As COVID-19 will now result in a two-year lapse in many aspects of research support and ability, provide a 2-year extension on the tenure clock instead of one, as our peer institutions are doing.
- Increase the frequency of sabbatical leaves to allow faculty to “catch up” from COVID-19 detriments. This was already standard practise at peer and aspirational peer institutions such as Northwestern, Wesleyan, Rice, Brown, UPenn and Rutgers.
- Should funding become available again for the FY23, provide a mechanism by which travel and other expenses are possible starting in early summer (ie before the usual July 1st fiscal year date) (ie. those awarded a CCFR could travel in May or June, rather than waiting until July). Such pre-award spending is allowable and normal on federal research grants.
- Allow research expenses accrued in FY22 to be eligible for reimbursement in FY23.
- Look at peer institutions to see if they have developed innovative strategies for support through the fiscal crisis from which we could learn. We are prepared to assist with such research, and could meet with you to discuss which areas you would find most useful.
- In addition to the suggestions above, we find ourselves asking many questions which we think likely to reflect the concerns of our colleagues. We offer a summary of them below as we believe it would be useful to directly address these concerns in policies or direct communication from college or university leadership, as appropriate.

#### **Outstanding Questions:**

- How will the years without conference funding be accounted for in promotion / contract renewal reviews - contract faculty are particularly anxious about renewal reviews, which have not changed cadence, due to COVID-19?
- Are faculty expected to use their own funds to promote their research via registration for remote conferences, or traveling to collect data using their own funds?

- How will both the short- and long-term negative impacts on faculty research be accounted for/addressed in assessment of merit raises?
- Given that some fields especially need to travel to actually perform their research (anthropology, biology, history, field sciences, foreign literature, English, international affairs), what special consideration will be given to people in these fields in the upcoming years?
- While GWU provides continuing support for some aspects of some forms of research, even in this current environment, but is zeroing out the research funds for others, how will the university and college in future years give compensation to those fields that this year are getting especially and unequally impacted?
- Are peer institutions drawing back research funding?
- Are the current actions in conflict with Senate Resolution 21/10, resolving clauses 4, 7, and 8, which call for existing proposals and awards to be allowed to continue, and that the university benchmark itself against peers and aspirational institutions and suggest mechanisms for doing so? <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/0/196/files/2020/08/SR-21-10-adopted-final.pdf>
- GWU has fallen in federal research expenditures in the last couple of years relative to peers and national rankings, HERD rankings as of FY2019 fell to 86th from 80th in FY 2018. This slide in rankings occurred because in that year while GWU's federal research expenditures were essentially flat, others increased their research spending. Therefore question: We should already know what GWU's research expenditures were for FY 20, even if we don't know about the competition. Did we increase our expenditures last year? If not, how far do we expect our research ranking to slide in FY20? We are now thinking about FY22, if we pull back on all research funding, will we further accelerate the slide in our rankings that already began even before Covid started?

In conclusion, we are grateful for the college's outreach to departments and working with chairs to try to tailor the cuts to ameliorate their impact. However, the extent of the budget reductions now being required will result in unavoidable and severe detriment to GW's research productivity and reputation in a way that sets back progress from years of collaborative efforts of faculty and administrators, such as the Research Ecosystem Review. We are writing to you in that spirit, to record our deep consternation and concern about the situation, and to offer our suggestions and partnership in seeking to alleviate the impact of the required budget reduction.