

Dornsife Faculty Council - Research, Policies, and Documentation Caucus
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Support and Incentive Programs for Dornsife Research Faculty

Rationale: Research faculty contribute substantially to the scientific advancements and prestige of the university. Their focus on research fosters collaborative efforts that in turn helps to support and secure extramural funding for multiple groups. Despite performing a vital role, there are limited financial and facilities benefits available to departments to recruit and retain research faculty, and limited support mechanisms within Dornsife for nurturing the careers of these faculty. A more formalized career support structure for research faculty geared to their unique roles would provide career stability and would further integrate these faculty within their departments and the university, to the benefit of all.

Research faculty are expected to secure up to 95% of their salary and fringe benefits from external grants. Moreover, to be eligible for benefits, research faculty must be able to maintain a salary level of at least 50%. Given the capriciousness of funding, over the long-term it is likely that research faculty will encounter periods in which adequate funding is not available, and for which they have no 'safety net'. In addition, grant funding is awarded to complete a specific project, which does not provide research faculty with any discretionary funds to generate pilot data for new grant applications, broaden their training, or explore new lines of research to pursue. In this report we outline several strategies, including developing merit- and effort-based incentive programs, providing additional options for salary support, providing professional training opportunities, and accruing research-related resources, that could markedly increase the likelihood of long-term career stability and success for research track faculty, which in turn will support USC's broader mission to produce excellence in research.

Numbers: All grants include a ~33% direct cost charge on salaries for fringe benefits. Direct costs (except equipment >\$5,000 and subcontracts beyond the initial \$25,000) are charged a facilities and administration (F&A) cost, which is currently 65% for federal grants on campus. Sabbatical leave for tenure track (TT) faculty is covered by the fringe benefit pool; there is currently no sabbatical leave for research faculty, despite the funding they help to secure paying into this pool. Dornsife department funds pay the 5% university contribution (2% beginning in 2010-11 and up to 5% since 2013-2014) to research faculty salaries for non-grant activity including time spent writing proposals or university service. No formal monies or benefits are received by departments for housing or having research faculty in their department (with the exception of the Center for Economic and Social Research, CESR), although research faculty often contribute to the department in research collaborations with TT faculty, guest lecturing in courses and seminars, mentoring of post-doctoral, graduate, and undergraduate trainees, participating in department-level committees, and increasing prestige by contributing to important research.

Within Dornsife in FY2017-2018, there were 11 assistant, 12 associate, and 12 full active research professors (not including outside collaborator and adjunct faculty whose salaries are not paid directly by USC and one research faculty who was on leave). Of these 35 faculty, 9 were part of CESR, which already has a program for internal support of its faculty members during initial years of hire and systems for collaboration that help maintain effort levels, and 5 of the non-CESR full professors headed institutes/served as directors or were former TT professors, who we expect have already negotiated their own support packages. Thus, we anticipate these recommendations will primarily apply to the other 21 Dornsife research faculty, although some recommendations may apply to all 35 active Dornsife research faculty.

Recommendations: Following consultation with Dornsife research faculty and review of policies for research faculty in Dornsife college and in several USC schools and departments with substantial numbers of research faculty, *we are proposing for consideration four new strategic career enhancement policies for Dornsife research faculty* (summarized below). We believe that instituting these policies would have a significant and lasting positive impact on the retention and career success of research faculty, and would also be of broad benefit to individual departments, schools, and the university as a whole.

1. BUILDING “RESEARCH/TRAINING FUND” ACCOUNTS FOR RESEARCH FACULTY: Establish research/training fund accounts for research faculty similar to the discretionary 22 accounts that are established for TT professors when they are hired. Unlike the typical 22 accounts, however, this pool of money could also be used for salary, which would then be subject to fringe benefits. Funds would come from a percentage of F&A brought in by a research faculty. For example, this could be available to faculty bringing in at least \$50,000 in F&A for that FY at a rate of 5%, and those bringing in \$100,000 at an incentivized rate of 8%. The distribution of the F&A among the research faculty on each grant could be determined by a Dornsife-level committee similar to the department-level Faculty Load Advisory Committees. It is also possible this fund would start in the second term of hiring, i.e. after being at USC for more than 3 years. If this were the case, there could be a small initial research fund account to help recruit and support new hires that is similar to those offered at CESR, but perhaps based on a percentage of F&A anticipated in the first 3 years of hire.

2. BUILDING “EFFORT” ACCOUNTS FOR RESEARCH FACULTY: Since all research faculty have to cover their own fringe benefits through their grants and thus pay into the pool of money used to fund sabbaticals, providing research faculty with earned effort that matches the sabbatical program for TT faculty seems reasonable. TT faculty are eligible for one semester (or two half-pay semesters) of sabbatical after 12 semesters (8.3%), and thus effort in this research faculty account would be accrued at a rate of 8.3% effort (regardless of whether maintaining 100% effort). Effort would become vested at the equivalent of 12 semesters, or a total of 54 calendar months of effort, and would be available immediately to research faculty who already have contributed this 54 calendar months of fringe benefits. This accrued effort could be taken however the faculty deems appropriate, whether it be at 100% for something similar to a one-semester sabbatical, which is unlikely given research faculty are funded on multiple grants with different start and end dates, or at smaller amounts to boost lower effort levels between grants to bring one’s salary up to the 50% cut off for benefits or up to 100% effort. Research faculty would report how this effort is being used for additional training, submitting grant proposals, or other research-related tasks. We recommend Dornsife Deans advocate for such funding of Dornsife research faculty at the Provost level.

3. PILOT PROJECT PROGRAMS OPEN TO ALL RESEARCH INVESTIGATORS: There are some internal programs at USC for generating pilot data or supporting small research projects (e.g., Zumberge), but typically only junior faculty or those faculty who have yet to receive external grants are eligible to apply. Offering pilot funds based on internal peer-reviewed merit would give more established researchers a chance to obtain funds to build and expand research programs that already have been shown to be successful in the past or to extend their research focus on new topics. This program could be similar to the Keck Dean’s Pilot Funding Program that contributes \$25,000 to 10 awards per year, but also could be revised to a) allow research faculty salary to be included in the budget, and b) not require department-level cost sharing since Dornsife departments do not receive any financial benefits from having research faculty.

4. DORNSIFE LEVEL SUPPORT TO RESEARCH FACULTY: Allow research faculty to have access to partial effort positions as a) staff in the Dean’s office or Office of Research where research knowledge and expertise is valuable, b) committee members—i.e., serving on internal review panels, serving on graduate student committees, organizing undergraduate research programs or running honors/internship courses, institutional review boards, c) teachers of up to two courses per year when approved by a department for a given year, or d) grant/contract writers for establishing Centers or applying for contracts and large equipment grants, etc. that would be conducted at the Dornsife-level rather than research typically pursued in single grants by individual faculty. Dornsife-level committees or Deans could identify gaps in research-related topics or resources deemed worthwhile to pursue for the broader USC community. For this work, faculty could be paid a portion of effort determined on an annual basis or up to 3-year contract given the scope of the tasks and the need for continuity.