

Report (Winter 2011)

Academic Senate Grants Review Committee

Ken Griggs, Chair

During the Winter quarter, the grants review committee met on Saturday, February 26th to review 19 Student Research Competition presentations and reports. One student presenter was not available for this meeting and the committee agreed to review his presentation independently. In addition, two students had submitted proposals but withdrew from the competition and their proposals were not reviewed. The committee selected 10 proposals that will be entered into the final competition to be held on May 6-7, 2011 at CSU Fresno. During this Student Research Competition cycle several issues arose-

- Several members of the committee mentioned that they would like to see a formal policy related to situations in which a committee member was also a sponsor of a student currently under review. Presently, there is no policy in this regard. The committee will address the issue during a meeting in the Spring term.
- Several faculty sponsors and students whose proposals were not selected for the Student Research Competition requested feedback by the committee with regard to making improvements in their presentations and reports. The committee Chair drafted a message (below) in response to the requests. In the past, the committee only submits feedback to those students who were selected but the committee will examine this issue in the next meeting.

The committee will review the State Faculty Support Grant proposals in a meeting that will likely be in April.

This following message was sent to those faculty sponsors and students who were not selected during the Student Research Completion for 2011 and who requested feedback from the committee:

A few students and faculty sponsors have requested that the Academic Senate Grants Review Committee send them feedback with regard to those proposals that were not selected. It is important to note that over the last few years awareness of the Student Research Competition has been enhanced and, as a consequence, the number of proposals has increased. This is a positive outcome but it means that the competition has become much tougher, and as I had mentioned in an earlier message, many good proposals cannot be selected because there are others that are better on a relative scale. This year the committee could only select about 50% of the applicants.

The committee only provides feedback to those proposals that were selected. Feedback takes the form of recommendations for changes in student presentations and reports designed to strengthen their performance during the final competition. I'd like to take the opportunity of this message to summarize the types of criticisms that have occurred in past competitions. Note that the following do NOT necessarily relate to any specific proposal judged in the recent competition-

- Chain of reasoning – The presentation contains opening statements about the premises behind the research but the conclusions do not match. This is not necessarily a defect in the work; it is usually a communications problem.
- Report quality – The student presentation may be successful but the committee finds serious grammatical, citation, or content problems.
- Missing a “limitations of the research” component – Good quality research normally has references to its limitations. These references indicate that the researcher has a balanced view of the work, has thought about potential negatives, and serves to defuse criticism.
- Practical aspects of the research – Many proposals contain process enhancements or new techniques that have potential practical implications but the presentation or report fails to convey them. For example, what is the likely cost/benefit of the research? Could this process result in a new product or product improvement?
- Presentation skills – The presenter has poor communication skills, e.g., does not look at the audience, lacks energy, reads directly from the report, uses slides that are visually uninteresting or ineffective, etc.
- Methodology – The research methodology appears flawed, e.g., the sample size is too small, the statistical analysis is not appropriate, the hypothesis is not formed correctly, etc.
- Overly technical for the judging audience – The presentation contains unexplained terminology and is overly technical and complex. Research presentations are intrinsically technical and discipline-specific but the challenge for student presenters is to communicate the research idea to an audience of judges who may not be familiar with their field. The hosting school chooses competition judges and most will likely not be in a field directly related to the research being presented.

I hope that the above will be useful ~~in~~ as a guide for preparing proposals and presentations for future competitions.

On behalf of the committee, I thank you for entering the competition.

Best regards,

-Ken Griggs
Chair
Academic Grants Review Committee
