

Senate Column
Steven G. Craig, President

The disadvantage of having good people in key positions is that everyone else wants to hire them. Thus, Art Vailas' tenure as VP for Research is coming to an end, as he heads off to Idaho to be President of Idaho State University. His leaving, however, has stimulated a lot of conversation in the Faculty Senate (and elsewhere) about the VP for Research position, and the kind of person that would best advance the interests of UH.

As a result of some of these conversations, the Senate passed a Resolution outlining three key features it seems a VP for Research should have. One, the VP for Research should be interested in facilitating research across campus. Second, the VP should be interested in attracting other good researchers to campus. And third, the VP should facilitate attracting significant research resources to campus.

The first key characteristic is that irrespective of what may have been true in the past, it is now true that research pervades virtually all of the departments on campus. As such, the VP for Research should have the resources and interests to stimulate research across campus. Over the past several years, the efforts to facilitate research through internal grants have broadened. Nonetheless, the main internal grant program for established faculty, the GEAR program, is supposed to result in an external grant proposal. Yet, external funding is not appropriate for all fields, which effectively precludes internal resources for some of our productive faculty. Further, there are significant unmet research needs that are not traditionally solved by external grants, such as travel funds (to bring scholars here as well as to send our people to national and international conferences) and book subventions (required for many of the most prestigious .university presses). Thus it appears that the recent efforts to broaden the GEAR and the small grant program need to be continued.

A second key attribute of the Research VP is to provide start-up funds to attract new faculty. On our campus, this has traditionally meant building labs for new scientists. Recent years, however, have again seen a considerable broadening in the definition of research support, although it is not yet as prevalent as is required to build a balanced university. For example, faculty in many disciplines receive summer salary support as a start-up bonus package, and so providing more such funds would allow better faculty to be recruited. Similarly, travel and other supplemental support can again attract new faculty that would improve our average quality. In many fields, the required funds are significantly less than are required for start-up lab packages that have been the traditional area of VP support, which may indicate that a broadening of the definition of start-up funds may have a disproportionate impact on attracting a wide range of new scholars, consistent with the strategic initiatives at UH.

While no more important than the first two attributes, it is also nonetheless true that the VP for Research needs to be of sufficient stature to assist in attracting grant funds to the University. Fields in which outside grant funds are required do not earn the University "profits," in that start-up packages, laboratory support, matching funds, support personnel, and salary levels in a competitive environment mean that general university financial support is required as

well. Further, as the quality of UH improves, and as we are more able to assess students charges consistent with the quality improvements, then it is fully appropriate for general university funds to be directed in part toward the VP for Research area. These funds would support all three of the activities discussed here.

A final point is that because research is not confined to a few select fields, but pervades the entire campus, a legitimate question is whether the VP for Research should instead be a Vice Provost. The counter argument is that research is clearly the number one goal of our campus, and so requires a Vice President to promote research to both internal and external constituencies. Irrespective of the title, however, the VP for Research needs to work closely with the Provost. Thus the final point of the Senate resolution is that as the research function is more fully integrated into the everyday activities of the University, the closely intertwined functioning of the Provost and the Vice President for Research are essential for the continued health and growth of UH.