

## **School of Medicine Research Coordinating Council (RCC)**

Minutes for Thursday, September 21, 2006

8:00-9:00 a.m., 301 BRB II/III

Present: Gaulton, Gur, Kaestner, Metlay, Rader, Schnall, Sehgal, Strom, Winston, Passante, Pomager

Absent: Drebin, Johnson, Lazar

### **Agenda**

#### **• Discussion on Academic Leadership**

Dr. Gaulton began the discussion by questioning the role of the School in managing departments and noting that the institution should empower the department chairs by allowing them to recruit the best, most-qualified faculty. The School and RCC will need to identify areas where there are gaps and weaknesses and then determine how to prioritize and encourage chairs to expand into these new areas.

The members expressed concern regarding the proliferation of Centers and Institutes. It was felt that there is a need to empower the chairs, and to advance strategically important areas without diverting resources away from the departments. Dr. Schnall suggested that the School use existing organizations where appropriate, and only create new centers and institutes when absolutely necessary. It was agreed that the chairs would welcome the opportunity to develop new areas within their respective departments.

Dr. Gur noted that Type I and Type II centers benefit from the support of the chair and that part of the issue relates to how they receive seed money for their initiatives. If an investigator wants to promote a new area, the current perception is that the only way to acquire School funds is to request a new center or institute. It was agreed that in order to change this mindset, the Chairs should be engaged early in the discussions and be involved in planning for new centers and institutes. Dr. Winston noted that if the School provides resources to a center or institute through a department, funds become part of the department portfolio and are not always directed to the program for which they were intended.

Dr. Winston voiced a concern about the inability to recruit graduate students into her multi-disciplinary research program because the current BGS structure is discipline-based, and graduate students are required to have an academic home. Unless research programs, including centers and institutes, are aligned with basic-science departments, the lack of an academic home will continue to be problematic. The SOM and RCC need to consider alternate ways to encourage graduate student participation in interdisciplinary research. Dr. Gaulton felt that this would need to be discussed with the graduate group chairs and BGS leadership, and that new programs would generally need to create a sub-emphasis area within an existing department/graduate group in order to bridge disciplines. At times Centers and Institutes may not align within a single department and a new graduate program may need to be created. An example of this is Genomics and Computational Biology. The decision was made not to create this as a sub-component of the existing Genetics or Cell and Molecular Biology graduate group but rather to create a separate, free-standing graduate group in Genomics and

Computational Biology. Initial efforts to establish the program were difficult and this is an example of a program that perhaps should have started under an existing graduate group and then transitioned to an independent group once established.

Dr. Rader suggested that there is a need for a mechanism by which chairs can legitimately request new resources for a well thought-out, specific program that will benefit the institution. So the question is how does the School engage these other individuals so that there is consistency and discipline in the process moving forward? It was agreed that we need to change the culture by developing a new process, and then hold academic and scientific leaders accountable. This could be accomplished by open discussion with everyone involved when considering a new center/institute and then developing a mechanism for holding key parties accountable. Indeed, it would be best if such a mechanism did not require the establishment of a new center/institute.

The RCC concluded that the Center and Institute process should be revised to require that all new centers and institutes be organized within existing departments unless all parties (relevant chairs and scientific leadership) agree that a new structure would be more effective. In addition, the School needs to foster an entrepreneurial environment and encourage initiative at all levels. Dr. Metlay noted that leadership is key to developing new programs and that the School and RCC need to consider ways to develop/promote strong leaders who think more broadly. The success of future programs will depend more on strong leadership than on structure.

- **Define Key Scientific Areas/Research Priorities**

This agenda item was tabled for this meeting.

- **Obstacles to Scientific Investigation at Penn**

The RCC members felt that the faculty generally do not know how to navigate the SOM system, and that faculty feel as though they are not part of the process. Dr. Winston feels there is little understanding of how things work in terms of building programs and how priorities are set. Faculty become discouraged and disenfranchised when rules appear to be inconsistently applied. Faculty feel that the chairs are no longer empowered to support them. Dr. Strom commented that leaders require a certain level of autonomy and resources in order to be effective.

Dr Gaulton noted an upcoming initiative to raise additional funds for endowed chairs, and questioned the process for selecting recipients. It was suggested that the School should identify faculty who deserve endowed chair designations and work toward raising the necessary funds. The Committee felt that identifying faculty and engaging them in the process would be enthusiastically received and would be a powerful tool for promoting key scientists. Dr. Winston suggested a consideration for proactively retaining faculty which included a program where the most productive faculty member, which would be determined by a benchmark, impact, etc., would be awarded a token sum (possibly \$50,000) to spend at their discretion on their research program. Dr. Strom felt that this did not have to be at the time of promotion and could occur, for example, upon receipt of a new grant.

The discussion will be continued at the next meeting. The members need to continue the discussion regarding the faculty perspective and then move onto other areas.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Pomager

***The next RCC meeting will be held on Thursday, October 12, 2006 in 301 BRB II/III from 8:00-9:00 a.m.***

**Past Action Items:**

Drs. Irwin Levitan and Francisco Gonzalez-Scarano to return to review their proposal for a Comprehensive Neuroscience Center.

Dr. Goldman to return to discuss his proposal regarding nanobiology.

Revisit animal space constraints.

The Committee will also request that Dr. Trojanowski present the status of the IOA at a future meeting.

Drs. Gaulton, Strom, Rubenstein, Rustgi and Johnson will meet to discuss this joint structure and proposed funding for the Type II Center/Institute for Digestive, Liver and Pancreatic Medicine.