

School of Medicine Research Coordinating Council (RCC)

Minutes for Thursday, January 26, 2006

7:30-9:00 a.m., 301 BRB II/III

Present: Gaulton, Strom, Metlay, Gur, Johnson, Sehgal, Schnall, Winston, Gocke

Absent: Drebin, Kaestner, Lazar, Rader, Simon

Agenda

1. Conclusion of the review of the SOM Research Strategic Plan—Focusing on Fundamental Disciplines and Programmatic Themes
2. Update on Biomedical Informatics (B. Strom)

Conclusion of review of the SOM Research Strategic Plan—Fundamental Disciplines and Programmatic Themes

RCC members continued the discussion from 1.12.06 regarding the impact factor of faculty publications at Penn (measured by the number of articles published in the top 13 cited journals) as a measure of research excellence. Dr. Gaulton noted that Penn's publication impact factor had improved significantly in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and distributed these data to RCC members. While noting that publication impact factor was only one gauge in a range of measures that indicates research excellence, Dr. Gaulton stated that the number of papers published yearly by Penn faculty in the 13 highest impact papers had tripled since FY02.

The RCC discussed the best approach for distribution of this information to the faculty. Members felt this improvement was linked to high-quality researchers who responded to SOM administration to increase publication in high-impact journals as well as an increased number of high-quality faculty. Several RCC members suggested reproducing the initial study (page 38) which provided a comparison of publication impact factor of Penn and its peer institutions. Discussions continued regarding the "correct" way to measure and distribute impact information. Dr. Gaulton recommended for maximal consistency to repeat the study in-house, using data from FY02-FY05 and by comparison to other schools in FY 05. Although the RCC believes it is important that these data be circulated, care must be taken to avoid the mis-impression that journal impact factor is the only useful, or important, measure of research impact.

RCC members discussed the research strategic goal of strengthening fundamental disciplines, and reviewed the specific steps to be taken in that process, including recruiting outstanding senior scientific leadership to augment the disciplines of genetics, cell biology, molecular biology, and biochemistry. It was noted that the recruitment of senior people is difficult, and that in some areas, Penn does not have the core infrastructure available (especially uncommitted space) that will appeal to a senior scientist who will, most likely, bring a large team. Drs. Gaulton and Strom presented the conclusions (p. 61) of specific ways of strengthening fundamental disciplines which included focusing and modifying the number and structure of existing centers and institutes; enhancing graduate, combined degree and postdoctoral programs to ensure the highest number of highly qualified trainees; and appointing a decision-making authority in the position of a Senior Vice Dean. Although the RCC members noted that, while some of these initiatives have had success, senior recruitments have not yet been completed. Further, the process of selecting a senior vice dean with executive authority has not been realized, and yet was essential for more responsive and efficient day-to-day research management.

Drs. Gaulton and Strom lead the discussion regarding the strategic goal of focusing programmatic areas and investing in emerging themes. Of great importance was the need for well-coordinated thematic recruitment, which afforded the University the opportunity to coordinate cross-campus research collaborations and resources.

Finally, the RCC members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of center and institute membership for faculty. Dr. Strom noted that there should be clear advantages and incentives for faculty membership, and also, that a commitment should be made to the center/institute by the faculty member. It was noted that most centers/institutes do not have adequate space or resources to fully accomplish their mission. Members questioned how to encourage faculty to participate in centers, and noted that splitting resources may dilute a center's success.

Dr. Winston questioned whether consultants were routinely brought in to mentor newly-appointed chairs or center/institute directors. It was noted that that bringing in outside consultants is an industry model that should be more fully explored. RCC members will continue to discuss the possibility of engaging external consultants to both mentor newly-appointed chairs or centers/institute directors and to manage high level recruitment.

Dr. Strom's overview of Biomedical Informatics will be placed on the February 9th agenda.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Gocke

The next RCC meeting will be held on Thursday, February 9, 2006 in 301 BRB II/III from 7:30am-9:00 am.