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Science Chair's Council
Summary of the 7th Meeting – March 2, 2010
KGL 101

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Attending:
Chairs: David Bercovici, Jeff Kenney, Scott Miller, Tom Pollard, Abraham SIlberschatz, Mitch Smooke, Patrick Sung, Douglas Stone

Divisional Director: Bill Jorgensen

Provosts: Tim O'Connor

Guests: Tom Davis, Michael Donoghue, Robin Hogen, Tom Mattia, Andy Rudczynski

12:00-12:40 Business Transformation (Bob Davis, AndyRudczynski)

Rudczynski, Associate Vice President for Research Administration, and Davis, Director of Research Enterprise Projects, provided the science chairs an overview of 2 new systems, for Grant Proposals and Conflict of Interest reporting.

Davis first made general comments about Yale's research administration. He said after the recent federal investigation, Yale decided that their attitude toward research administration was to "make it better". The initial approach was to "fill in the gaps" in administrative support, but it soon became clear that more was needed, due to growth and increasing complexity of the Yale research enterprise. Two years ago they started to get feedback from faculty. Among the feedback was that some business managers lack management skills, and there is not enough communication among units. The YaleNext project, the University-wide program that is designed to improve the administrative services provided to faculty, staff, researchers, and students, has been slowed down and scaled back somewhat, due to the budget pressures, but it will be completed. He emphasized that they are looking for faculty involvement to get it right.

Yale is rolling out a new online conflict of interest program in May. In a clear example of why a new program is needed, Scott Miller reported that his most recent COI form had 80 pages, and his colleagues with more conflicts have even longer forms. The new program will have a reduced number of pages and some reorganization. The program will remember entries from the prior year, and use these as the default starting point.

Davis and Rudczynski are looking for faculty input on the system, including the choices for different categories, e.g., simple (no conflicts) vs. complex (lots of conflicts).

The chairs told Davis that there needs to be some kind of summary from the COI report for chairs, since it is hard for chairs to evaluate the reports by reading the whole thing.

We discussed: Why should chairs evaluate the COI forms? The chair is generally best one to evaluate conflicts of commitment (i.e., amount of time, scheduling of time), although not the financial aspects of a conflict of interest.

In June, 2010, Grants and Contracts Administration will roll out a new pilot system for the electronic preparation, approval and submission of grant proposals to sponsors. They have decided to test small projects related to the new system in select departments, as this can work better than the single deployment of a large new system. They will choose a pilot group of departments, from both the medical school and FAS. Rudczynski is still trying to figure out who will be in the pilot group.

One issue which will be improved in the new system is many of the current forms are very bio-med-specific, and are not relevant for most of the physical sciences. Another advantage of the new system is that various aspects of proposal preparation can be done in parallel.

Scott Miller reported that the general advice from the Chemistry faculty regarding such administrative changes is "change nothing"! This reflects widespread frustrations over past experiences with program changes, in which major problems with the new programs are discovered after release, as well as wasted time in the learning curve.

Rudczynski emphasized that the YaleNext plan is intended to relieve "pain points" identified by faculty and others, and that the goal is not to 'centralize', but 'integrate'. Proposals will be submitted from departments rather than a central office. They are trying to design a proposal development system which covers the full spectrum of support, from an independent faculty member, to one needing lots of help.

Action Items:
1. (Davis) There needs to be some kind of summary from the COI report to help chairs evaluate the reports.

2. (Chairs) Recommend faculty to Davis to evaluate new COI form

3. (Chairs) Recommend faculty to Davis to advise on proposal development system

12:40-1:15 Press coverage of Yale Science (Thomas Mattia, Robin Hogen)

We discuss press coverage of Yale science and engineering research and education in an introductory meeting with Mattia, Yale's new Chief Communications Officer, who oversees the University's Office of Public Affairs. He is joined by Deputy Director Hogen. Tom has a long-term corporate background, but realizes that the top-down corporate approach is not relevant for a university.

OPA is developing a more robust "Portal" site for the university - (https://portal.yale.edu/render.userLayoutRootNode.uP).
At the current OPA website there is a good video on undergraduate science research: "At Yale, the world is my lab" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQCm7-HDJ10).

Mattia said there were some good and some bad things about the recent Steitz Nobel press conference, which was organized by OPA. We couldn't live stream the press conference, and we should be able to do this in the future.

Yale OPA strives to be pro-active. A recent success is that it got the NYTimes to write its recent article on the color of dinosaur feathers. It also pro-actively makes suggestions for Discover magazine's "Top 100 Science Stories" listing and Popular Science's "Brilliant Ten" listing of outstanding researchers under the age of 35.

Mattia is seeking a "thoughtful & strategic" approach for Yale OPA in this world of modern media in which there are fewer science writers but many writers who need some scientific content for articles. For example, they want Yale to be "higher in the rolodex" when writers look for third party experts.

Yale is participating in the Futurity website (http://futurity.org/) which is a content aggregator for science by 63 leading research universities. The major players in futurity are Princeton, Stanford, Duke, and Penn. Yale OPA chooses among the Yale press releases, seeks the most accessible ones which also have a strong visual, and sends ~3-5 releases per week to Futurity. Yale OPA thinks Futurity is an important endeavor, and hopes it will soon connect to Googlenews, Yahoonews, etc.

Tom Pollard urged Yale OPA writers to include in articles comments from others in the field. This can add to value, make articles more interesting to readers, and be less self-serving.

A good way to help Yale science publicity is to invite prominent science journalists to campus as Poynter fellows. Currently Karl Zimmer of the NYTimes is on campus as a Poynter fellow, and is teaching a class. Having him on campus is helpful for various press issues.

The Council for Advancement of Science Writing will hold its 2010 meeting at Yale (November 5-9). This will be a great opportunity to showcase Yale science. Science writers will be looking for new, bright, talent. They have a program committee to choose the program. Suzanne Taylor-Muzzin (of Yale OPA) knows about this, and might facilitate discussions with the committee on program suggestions. Yale OPA already has a list of "75 faculty suggested for talking to the press", and would welcome suggested additions. In addition, short descriptions of science faculty research would be helpful to OPA.

Mattia and Hogen asked the chairs for feedback on the Yale Daily Clips. Are they useful? Is once per day the right amount? The general feeling among those present was that they were indeed useful, and once per day was fine, and more than that was excessive. Some chairs wondered who gets the Yale Daily Clips: just "leadership"? not all faculty? not UGs? not alumni? Answers were not known by those in the room. Hogen later reported back to me that the Clips are sent to a subset of faculty and administration leaders (not to all faculty and not to undergraduates or alumni). To be added to the distribution for the daily clips, which are free, just send him an e-mail request (Robin.Hogen@yale.edu).

Mattia and Hogen emphasized that Yale OPA is happy to sit down anytime with anyone on possible story ideas. Also, OPA will loan simple FLIP cameras to faculty going on research trips, to make short videos.

Action Items:
1. Hogen will send chairs their list of "75 faculty suggested for talking to the press", for possible additions(chairs)

2. Will send Hogen suggested additions to the list "faculty suggested for talking to the press" (Chairs)

3. Circulate the news that OPA will give people simple FLIP cameras to faculty going on "research trips", to make PR videos (Chairs).

1:15 – 1:25 Unproductive faculty (Tom Pollard)

We discuss the question: Might disclosure of faculty effort make it easier to justify a strong policy of coupling compensation to performance?

Several years ago the Women's Faculty Forum proposed that the University publish each year the activities of each faculty member. We don't have the WFF document (perhaps Joan Steitz does?), but the proposed profiles probably included some of the following:
Space provided by the university; hours of teaching undergrads and graduate students; amount of research funding; numbers of graduate students, post-docs, research staff, publications; committee and advising service; speaking engagements, etc.

Their motivation was to expose inequities among the faculty. These profiles would be an unbiased way to put the facts out the in open and reveal disparities in resources and productivity. This public information might quell any negative complaints arising from a stronger policy to link compensation to performance.

MBB and MCDB already do much of this in their annual reports.

Avi Silberschatz expressed concern that making this information public could be "a big mistake", as it opens the possibility of negative publicity from the broader world. Another concern is that there are some differences across campus that are better not to publicize.

Nonetheless, colleagues need to know about unproductive faculty, so we discuss but do not resolve the question of where such "productivity" information should be distributed. One suggestion is that we publicize standard criteria for raises among the provosts and the chairs.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 13, 12 – 1:30 pm –KGL 101