

Science Division Meeting Minutes
March 03, 2009
(corrections to coahranm@grinnell.edu)

Proposal: Electronic submission for summer research applications (Doug Peterson)

Doug proposed a new process for students submitting their Science Division applications for summer research. The suggested process is for students to send an electronic document (pdf or other format) to the Science Division office by the normal deadline, then Doug will create a pdf if needed and forward it to the faculty whom the student has applied to work with. Doug will also create an aggregate spreadsheet, recording which students applied to which projects and what their preferences were. The spreadsheet would then be available for faculty to review.

The anticipated gains from the new process would be saving paper, increasing legibility in the submitted applications, having proof of the date when each application was submitted, and making the aggregate information more readily available. For example, this information could help us avoid sending one student both a rejection letter from one faculty member and a separate acceptance letter from another.

Questions that were raised include whether there is a confidentiality issue involved in shared access to the aggregate spreadsheet, and whether the requirement to submit applications electronically could make it more difficult for students who want to include graphics in their applications.

We decided that Doug and Stephanie should proceed with detailed planning for the new process, and we will consider it again next fall for final approval.

Proposal: Division-wide "Calendar of Events" (Doug Peterson)

Doug also proposed maintaining a calendar of events for Science Division activities, which would be in addition to the college-wide calendar that already exists. The idea came from Jim Swartz who, when trying to schedule a talk for the Noyce Science Center dedication, found it difficult to determine whether there was already a science division talk already scheduled for that day – or even who to ask.

The initial proposal was to record this information in a spreadsheet and keep it in a publicly accessible place on the storage server, but during the meeting other suggestions including using Outlook or posting the information on a web page were made. Advantages of a web page over the other options are that the information would be accessible to everyone (across all platforms) and that it would be accessible from anywhere, including off campus.

The plan is that Doug will be the "owner" of the calendar. To place something on it, just send him an email. Any events that science division office personnel currently schedule on the college-wide calendar would automatically also be placed on the division calendar.

HHMI grant update (Mark Levandoski)

We have purchased a 3D printer, which is expected to arrive in April. There will be a training session soon after it arrives: after the formal training, those who were trained should be able to train others as well. The printer constructs a 3D object by laying down multiple layers of

resin, and it colors the object with HP ink cartridges. The cost of “printing” such an object is approximately \$3 per cubic inch. We expect that once the printer has arrived, and 3D models start being made with it, many of us will begin seeing new ways to make further use of it.

In addition, we will purchase technology that allows 3D projection, and the details on this system are forthcoming.

Two speakers have been scheduled for the HHMI interdisciplinary speaker series. One will be hosted by biology and the other by computer science. Both visits will be this April.

We also have money to hire a two-year postdoctoral fellow, including money for supplies. The fellowship does have teaching expectations, as well as research expectations, associated with it since the purpose is to promote diversity in the teaching professoriate at liberal arts colleges. Mark will soon ask departments whether they have tenured faculty who could benefit from mentoring a postdoc. Since doing so would represent a substantial time commitment, we want to protect non-tenured faculty from that burden. This fellowship is separate from the postdoctoral fellowships offered through the Coalition for Faculty Diversity.

As has been mentioned at previous meetings, we have been contacted to participate in a multi-college effort to assess interdisciplinary coursework. We hope there are faculty here who would like to participate in that. The overall project includes designing assessment tools and using them; however, assessment experts from other colleges will do most of the survey development. Our main role will be to use the tools that are developed. There may also be a workshop this summer to learn how to do qualitative analysis of student papers – to help us answer such questions as “how do we really know that students have learned the interdisciplinary material we were aiming toward?”

The main focus of the grant has been on developing bridging courses. There are three such courses scheduled for next year:

- Tammy Nyden and Sujeew Wicramasekara will teach a course on Time, Space and Motion, which is a combination history of physics and history of philosophy.
- Vida Praitis and Sam Rebelsky will teach Bioinformatics, and
- Elaine Marzluff will participate in a policy studies seminar course.

Expect to hear another call soon for new interdisciplinary course ideas, to be supported by HHMI.

Update from the concerned faculty group (Vince Eckhart)

Vince read a statement prepared by the group of faculty who have raised concerns about faculty governance precipitated by a personnel matter in Student Affairs. The same statement was also read at each of the other division meetings today.

The letter reviewed the history of recent events, including the emergency faculty meeting held on Feb 4, the letter from the Trustees to the full campus community on Feb 13, a meeting with the President on Feb 18, the rescinding of the cease and desist letter on Feb 19, and a second meeting with the President on Feb 25. The letter described the first meeting with the President as quite promising, including plans for creating an ombudsman service for staff, but described the second meeting as discouraging.

The search to replace Ms. Andrews in Student Affairs is underway, but the concerned faculty group will continue to push for an outside review. They will also prepare a detailed history of events to be made available after spring break.

Some concern was expressed over the use of the word “power” and the language of “taking power from the president” in the letter. Vince responded that the Trustees have agreed the equilibrium between faculty control and presidential control needs to swing toward faculty a bit. It was also noted that the president does have the ultimate authority, that removing power from the president is an unrealistic goal, but that the question of how that power is wielded can still be addressed.

Comments from Chair of the Faculty (Mark Schneider)

Mark Schneider will appoint a group of faculty to work on the issue of faculty governance shortly after break. He would like to involve approximately a half-dozen people, including members of FOC, the executive council, junior faculty members, members of the concerned faculty group, and perhaps some senior members as well. This will be an initial group, whose membership could change over time. The intent is to research different models of faculty governance used by other colleges, and to host a broad based discussion here at home regarding whether changes should be made to our own governance model.

As we know, the budget will be tight next year. We can expect it to be tighter the year after that. Please think about what further reductions might be possible for 2010-2011. At the last update Mark gave, the endowment had dropped by 1/3; by now it has dropped further to ½ its peak value.

Question: Does it look like the President will keep his commitment not to fire staff?

Answer: He wants to avoid doing that, but salary is a big part of the budget. It may be hard not to.

Note that external funding can be extremely important. (Consider that the HHMI funded projects continue to roll ahead). This would be a dandy time to write grant proposals.

Campus Climate Survey (Clark Lindgren)

Although the survey was not yet on-line at the time of this meeting, it can now be found here: <https://online.survey.psu.edu/grinnell> .

Everyone on campus, including students, staff, faculty, and administrators are encouraged but not required to complete the survey. The survey should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. It deals with a variety of issues such as job satisfaction, with an emphasis on diversity issues on campus.

Rankin & Associates were on campus last Fall to design the instrument specifically for us. Rankin & Associates will also analyze the survey data, keeping individual responses confidential. They will be careful not to release any identifiable data, including data from questions where the sample size is small enough that respondents could be identified

indirectly.

Carleton recently did a similar survey, and had a good response rate.

Other business

Katherine McClelland recently purchased 15 solar calculators for use in the prison project. She thanks everyone for the donations that made this possible.