

Science Division Meeting Minutes

September 14, 2009

(send corrections to coahranm{at}cs.grinnell.edu)

Announcements

Marge Coahran will continue to take minutes this year.

Sam Rebelsky will continue to bring food to the meetings this year.

Peter Patrikis' visit to Grinnell (Doug Cutchins)

The Churchill scholarship provides funding for 14 students (nationwide) to study in a one year Masters program at Cambridge University in math, science, or engineering fields. (This does include neuroscience, but not general psychology.) Cutchins distributed an informational handout regarding the scholarship.

In the last few years, several of our best science students have submitted applications – these have been top scholars with outstanding GPA scores and research experience – and yet they have not won the competition. We would like to gain more insight into what the scholarship committee is looking for.

Peter Patrikis, the Executive Director of the Winston Churchill Foundation, has been invited to visit Grinnell College on Monday September 21. The agenda for his visit includes dinner with Department Chairs, lunch and meetings with interested faculty members, a tour of the science building with Jim Swartz, and a meeting with third and fourth year students who are eligible to apply for the scholarship (ie, science students with 3.8 or higher GPAs).

Please ask students of this caliber to attend the meeting! This is also a good opportunity to encourage students to apply for the Churchhill scholarship.

Katrina Koenigs ('08) was one of our excellent students who applied for, but was not awarded, the Churchhill scholarship. Nevertheless, she was accepted at Cambridge, and she spent last year studying there, earning a one-year M.Phil. Degree. Koenigs will return to Grinnell College to give two talks on Monday September 28: a noon math seminar, and a more general talk at 4:15pm regarding her graduate school experience.

Library: Review of journal subscriptions (Richard Fyffe)

Many libraries conduct subscription reviews annually. These reviews are important because scholars' interests change, journals' foci and reputations change, and journals get more expensive over time (7-9% annual inflation rate). The last time the Grinnell College libraries conducted such a review was ten years ago, and much has changed since then. It would be time to conduct another review even without the current fiscal downturn.

The library purchases many of its subscriptions by the calendar year, and needs to place orders in the preceding August. (In August 2010, orders will be placed for calendar year 2011.) Thus, the review needs to be conducted during this academic year, in part to avoid doing so over the summer when faculty are less available.

Science division faculty will hear more from Kevin Engel about the review process soon. In brief,

however, the library wants to hear from each individual faculty member regarding their own personal needs (not aggregate needs). What subscriptions are important to us – regardless of whether the library currently carries them? This information will then be aggregated by department, and departments will be asked to compare the cost of their ideal subscription list with the proposed budget and to prioritize their subscription requests. By May 1 we hope to have a complete list of titles we might add, and ones we might subtract. The list will then be posted for public inspection and comment. The list will then provide guidance for a final set of purchases and deletions once a budget allocation is made.

The current library budget is a bit lower than last year, but the allocation for books was not reduced and we have not canceled subscriptions for this year. Fiscal years 11 and 12 (ending in June 2011 and 2012) are likely to be tighter. It is not certain at this point, but there has been discussion of a 5% budget decrease for FY11.

Q: Suppose I use a journal only occasionally. It might be cheaper to get it through interlibrary loan than through a full-year subscription.

A: True. Subscriptions cost around \$1200 annually, and ILL costs about \$30 per access. Our goal is to determine what we need as subscriptions and what we can get by with through ILL.

Q: What about pay-per-view?

A: We recently went from subscription to pay-per-view for Elsevier. That helped a significant amount, and so far it seems that faculty and students are happy with this service. We had paid Elsevier around \$150K, out of \$1.2M for all subscriptions (databases, journals, etc), so this change saved a noticeable portion of our subscription budget.

Election of Division Representative to Ombuds Committee (Mark Schneider)

Background for new faculty members: last year, a number of faculty expressed concern about events that occurred in the Division of Student Affairs. A committee was formed to look into matters of governance, and this committee brought a motion to the faculty during a spring faculty meeting proposing the creation of an Ombuds Committee. The motion passed, and we are now proceeding to form the committee.

Today each division will elect a division representative for the committee. In our upcoming September 21 faculty meeting an election will be held for two at-large positions on the committee. Nominations and self-nominations will be accepted prior to that meeting; please send nominations to Jin Feng or any FOC member. (No limitations were specified regarding eligibility for membership on the committee.) The newly-elected partial committee of faculty members will then reach out to the student and staff communities to seek additional members from them.

Nominations were taken (Vince Eckhart and Bob Cadmus), an election was held by paper ballot, and Eckhart was elected as division representative for the Ombuds Committee.

Presidential search update (Elaine Marzluff)

Marzluff reminded the division of the recent communication from Chair Paul Risser. The committee continues to move forward in the search process, meeting with representatives from Isaacson-Miller and working on preparing the Grinnell Perspective document, which will be ready by September 24. The committee has found the comments on challenges facing Grinnell and desired traits for a president very

useful. Many nominations have been received, and Marzluff encouraged everyone to send thoughts and nominations if they have not already.

Q: Can you tell us how many nominations have been made so far?

A: Marzluff declined to answer for confidentiality reasons. However, she expects this information will be released officially at a later date.

Role of division members in campus visits by prospective students (Jim Swartz)

Swartz reminded us that the Admission and Financial Aid Committee is a student and faculty committee that advises on policy. The Admissions Board is a committee of three faculty members that advises on admission decisions of individual applicants. Vida Praitis serves on the Committee, and Jim Swartz serves on the Board.

Swartz reported that over the past year several faculty members have asked him questions about the admissions process. One idea that was raised is: should the Admissions Office encourage prospective students to meet with individual faculty members during their visit? If that is what the faculty want, Seth is prepared to do that. Thus, we need to decide whether we are interested in this. However, in order to move forward on this, several people need to be interested in it so the full responsibility does not fall on only a few people. Swartz suggested we begin with departmental discussions to ascertain the level of interest we have in this.

Q: Doesn't admissions already set up appointments between prospective students and faculty?

A: If a student really wants this, they do. But admissions doesn't currently suggest this to students.

Q: Let's ask admissions what percentage of students are already getting individual faculty appointments. How much might this number increase?

We could ask prospective students to name three faculty they would like to meet with, and say they are likely to get to meet with one of them.

Perhaps it is more important that the campus tour guides get trained and given correct information.

In some admissions offices, there are brochures about different departments that can be handed to students (and to tour guides).

Brochures are probably now superseded by departmental websites. These are likely to have more up-to-date information than brochures can.

We could have group meetings with faculty. For example, a time to meet with science division faculty, or the humanities faculty. At present, we have a faculty fair, but there may not be time to meet with faculty from more than one division.

It would be nice to know whether admissions would be willing to work in a more fine-grained way. Perhaps some departments would welcome more individual meetings with prospective students and others would not.

Swartz: Seth agrees. He thinks it would be more effective to be more targeted, and they are working on producing a more detailed database than they have had in the past to help with this.

HHMI update (Mark Levandoski)

We have completed one year of our current four-year grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. The main thrust of the grant is to provide opportunities for faculty to team-teach in the sciences, including interdisciplinary courses that involve science. The deadline for new course proposals is in early October.

Levandoski passed around a few models made by the 3D printer and noted that there will be a “tech-talk” given by the Instructional Technologists on Thursday September 17 in Room 1521 about how to use this equipment.

Faculty at the University of Iowa are planning to submit an application for an HHMI grant that would be similar to (but larger than) ours. They have contacted Mark to ask whether we would be interested in collaboration. For example, would we be interested in a statewide meeting between Iowa colleges and universities where students can showcase their research? Would we be interested in traveling to the University of Iowa to use equipment they have that we don't?

Q: Is their proposal across all science departments?

A: I'm not sure, but the organizer is a biologist, and the HHMI focus is on life sciences.

It's worth noting that U of Iowa's biology department has become narrowly focused. They do mostly biomedical research: they have only one ecologist left.

Would a statewide student research meeting compete with the Midstates Consortium meetings for our students?

Students now do family weekend, the Midstates Consortium, and sometimes national meetings as well. More would be too much.

Perhaps U of I could include a request for funds in their proposal to facilitate having Grinnell faculty spend part of their sabbaticals in the labs of U of I folks. As matters currently stand, Grinnell faculty often write grant proposals to do so, but they're not always funded, and it's difficult to get the timing precisely right to cover the exact year when people are supposed to go on leave.

A: That is a great idea! But it may represent more work to organize than can be done before the grant proposal deadline.

Midstates Consortium (Clark Lindgren)

Lindgren gave an update on the two upcoming Consortium meetings. The meeting for the Physical Sciences, Math, and Computer Science will be held in Chicago on November 6-8. Martin Minnelli will attend. The meeting for Biological Sciences and Psychology will be held in St. Louis on October 30 - November 1. Clark Lindgren will attend.

Other faculty members are welcome to attend if interested. Travel funding is provided by the

Consortium, not (directly) by us. So students can attend the Consortium meeting in addition to the one meeting that can be paid for with MAP funds. It is a good venue for students to practice their presentation skills since the audience will be other undergraduate students and sympathetic faculty members.