

Science Division Meeting Minutes

October 13, 2008
(send corrections to coahranm@grinnell.edu)

Meeting minutes

The September meeting minutes were sent to division faculty via email. In future, minutes will be posted on the Science Division website:

<http://www.grinnell.edu/academic/divisions/science/>

Convocation application process (Shannon Hinsaleasure)

The Convocation Committee has adopted a new streamlined application process, as follows.

- Brief preliminary proposals are due by November 15. Proposals can be submitted online at: <http://www.grinnell.edu/Offices/ce/convocations/proposals/>
- In early December the committee will rank the proposals, and give departments permission to invite the speakers. (Note that very few nominations are rejected. One reason this might happen is if two people are nominated to speak on the same topic.)
- Full proposals are due the first Friday of the first week of spring semester.

In order to be successful in attracting distinguished speakers, the committee has also begun to accept nominations two years in advance. Therefore, in the current application cycle, nominations can be made for next year (2009-2010) or the year after (2010-2011).

Indeed, the committee would like to receive more proposals every year! We want to schedule 6 speakers per semester, but frequently fewer nominations than that are received.

In general, speaker stipends are \$1500. However, the committee is willing to negotiate higher stipends when the speaker's status warrants it.

More information can be found at:

<http://www.grinnell.edu/Offices/ce/convocations/proposals/>

Science Division public relations plan (Clark Lindgren)

Our sense is that the sciences don't get enough P.R. at Grinnell, and that the coverage we do get is not well balanced between the departments. Further, the media seem to focus on "quirky" science stories that do not reflect our reality very well.

Clark proposed a plan to address these issues.

- Each department will identify a public relations liaison. This person should stay informed about interesting projects happening in the department, including both teaching and research activities.
- The Science Division Chair will contact the liaisons from each department on a monthly basis. He will then compile a report on science-related activities across the

- division to send to the collegelevel public relations office.
- The public relations office could use this information to initiate news stories and to assess how well they are representing us.

The goals of the plan are to increase the total amount of science reporting, improve the balance of media coverage across science departments, and change the focus of the coverage. The plan should help us become more pro-active about letting the media know what stories we think should be promoted.

Discussion:

Lyons: Let's aim for 1 science article per Grinnell Magazine issue.

Cadmus: Currently the Grinnell homepage reflects mostly events-oriented articles. It would be good to get more science-oriented articles there too, to give prospective students get a good picture of the sciences at Grinnell.

Lindgren: If you have heard unofficially that you are about to get a grant, the P.R. folk want to know about it before it is announced officially. In that short window of time it is considered newsworthy, and they may be able to get it published in various local newspapers. After that, it isn't news.

Sinnett: A website where faculty could post their own achievements might meet the goal without placing additional burdens on the Division Chair and department liaisons.

Walker: But the current proposal helps remind us to talk about our achievements.

Cadmus: The departmental liaisons can also help publicize the work of the modest folk among us.

K. Jacobson: The college P.R. folk are very easy to talk to. It doesn't take much hom-blowing to get them to run an article on your work.

Rebelsky: Quite separately, newspapers from time to time call the P.R. office asking for the name of a Grinnell professor who can comment on some current topic issue. I think these are reasonable requests – a service we can provide to the community.

HHMI Update (Mark Levandoski)

Mark updated us on the grant, including what it has supported so far this year, as follows.

Speaker series:

So far, only one person has been nominated this year. Remember that we have funds for travel expenses and honoraria for 6 speakers per year (approximately one speaker per department).

Science Learning Center:

Corey Ortiz has been hired to assist Minna. Minna is currently in the planning stages for additional changes in the Science Learning Center.

LACAFI (Liberal Arts College Association for Faculty Inclusion):

David Romano attended the 2008 SACNAS National Conference (Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science) in Salt Lake City, to encourage participants to consider careers in LACAFI-affiliated colleges.

Please think of meetings that you already go to, or that you would like to go to, with LACAFI in mind. If the meeting has a significant focus on issues of diversity, we can fund your travel if you use the opportunity to promote liberal arts colleges to prospective faculty members there.

HHMI retreat:

Over 40 people attended the retreat and began conversations about possibilities for new interdisciplinary teaching at Grinnell. The planning committee will hold a debriefing meeting Thursday (Oct 16), after which we will meet with the Dean's office to discuss staffing implications. Our hope is that there will be at least 2 new courses next year that come from these ideas.

It is not too late to submit ideas, even if you didn't go to the retreat. (While it is true that requests for term faculty have already been submitted, the Dean's office is very interested in interdisciplinary teaching and understands that these proposals are still evolving.) But we would like to make final decisions by the end of this term regarding courses for next year.

Georgetown collaboration:

Leslie Gregg-Jolly, Chuck Sullivan, Bill Ferguson, and Mark Levandoski will travel to Washington D.C. next week to meet with collaborators at Georgetown and other institutions in connection with our policy studies concentration and the Grinnell-in-Washington program. They'll update us on the trip next month.

Neuroscience:

Abby Griffith has been hired as a laboratory technician in neuroscience.

Outreach:

Paul Hutchison and some of his students will attend the NRS 250 Service Learning opportunity in South Tama this year. At his suggestion, we are also funding teachers from Grinnell-Newburg School District to attend this event.

Update on Scheduled Equipment Replacement Proposal (Elaine Marzluff)

Based on input from across the science division, we developed and submitted a proposal in early October to fund major equipment replacements expected over the next 5 years. The plan averaged about \$300k per year. In fact, the initial budget was even larger, but the Dean's office requested that we write separate proposals for the two largest items: one for chemistry, and one for biology.

Report on NITLE Conference at Bard College (Clark Lindgren)

Clark attended a conference related to the use of scientific visualization for teaching

purposes, and he was very impressed. Indeed, he felt that we may be a bit behind the curve on this for once. For example, Vassar College recently bought an island in "Second Life" which they use for modeling and visualizing biology concepts that can't be shown in a real lab setting (e.g, "jumping into a beaker" and viewing the contents at the molecular level). Clark will try to organize a seminar to bring us up to date on this technology.

NITLE is a cool organization. Grinnell already belongs, so folk should go! They also hold remote conferences in between their live ones.

Update on Midstates Consortium for Undergraduate Research

Twelve students will go with Elaine Marzluff to the Physical Sciences meeting in St. Louis, and four students will go with Clark Lindgren to the Biology/Psychology meeting in Chicago. The bus leaves Friday October 31 at noon. Ideas about generating more interest among students for future years would be welcome.

Sinnett: Psychology students have better research outlets, that are closer to home, so this consortium is not likely to see increased participation from them.

Update on Executive Council Activities (Clark Lindgren)

Kathy Jacobson and Joe Cummings are working on re-drafting material in the faculty handbook regarding long-term term faculty positions.

A related issue on council's agenda is how to better accommodate spouses and partners of new faculty members. Clark would like to hear suggestions regarding spousal employment issues.

Student Affairs has raised a proposal to allow student participation on the Committee for Academic Standing, and in particular the Subcommittee on Academic Honesty. They would like to see students get more experience and take on more responsibility for their own governance and policing. (Clark noted that Allegheny College has a completely student-run honor code, which has worked well there, but it is not what is being proposed here.) Please send your feedback on this issue to Clark.

Budget committee is considering adjusting their time cycle to better coordinate with the review process, with the hope of avoiding the current duplication of work. It was noted that at some institutions, there is a built-in salary adjustment when promotions happen, but that is not the case here. Again, please send your ideas on this issue to Clark.

We're also considering position proposals for next year. Note that we are roughly at halfway point with respect to EKI appointments: there are 3 more to go.

Discussion:

Q: What can you tell us about the state of the endowment, given the current financial crisis?

A: Russell tells us that the endowment has been managed quite well: there is enough cash available to continue operations for the next two years while the markets recover.