



Cornell University

College of Engineering

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To: Professor Charles Walcott, Dean  
The University Faculty

From: David A. Caughey, Chair  
Local Advisory Council

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "D. A. Caughey".

Subj.: Annual Report

Attached please find the Annual Report of the Local Advisory Council for the academic year just ending. Please let me know if you have any questions or require further information.

## **Local Advisory Council**

*Annual Report*

*2007-08*

### **Background**

The Local Advisory Council (LAC) is a committee of the Faculty Senate charged to provide advice to the Vice-Provost for Research on issues relating to the research enterprise of the university. In the current year, the work of the committee consisted primarily of evaluating proposals, pre-proposals, or nominations from faculty on the Ithaca campus and the Weill Medical College (WMC) for national or international competitions in which Cornell is allowed to make only a limited number of submissions. For those competitions in which faculty from the Weill Medical College also are eligible, the results of our committee's deliberations are coordinated with those of a companion committee at WMC, chaired this year by Dr. Ralph Nachman. The membership of this year's LAC is listed in Appendix A. Excellent staff support for the committee is provided by Elaine LaRocque in the Office of the Vice-Provost for Research.

### **Activity**

This year the LAC reviewed 130 submissions for 16 programs. Details of these programs are contained in Table 1. As can be seen from the table, the LAC was particularly active early in the fall semester, reviewing proposals and meeting almost weekly through the month of October. The committee has been struggling with how to deal with this increasingly intense workload for the past several years. Based on recommendations from last year's committee, we attempted to reduce the work load by assigning the proposal review tasks by general area, dividing the committee into three groups, corresponding to the (1) Physical Sciences and Engineering; (2) Life Sciences; and (3) Social Sciences; and having all members of only the most relevant group read the proposals, with one-half of the remaining members also assigned to read the proposals (on a rotating basis to equalize the work loads of individual committee members). This did not solve the problem completely, as nearly two-thirds of the programs (Searle, Beckman, Hartwell, Pew, Keck, USDA ISE, Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar, Ellison, Dreyfus New Faculty, NIH-NIBIB) were focused completely, or substantially, on the life sciences and biomedical engineering, and the faculty representing this general area were particularly overwhelmed.

For several reviews later in the year, we attempted to have each committee member read only a fraction of the proposals. This was done in a way that guaranteed that any given pair of proposals would be read by at least two committee members. Unfortunately, this procedure was also only partially successful, due to our inability to guarantee which committee members would actually complete their reviews and attend the corresponding meeting. This problem is compounded by the generally active travel schedules of the committee members and the short deadlines required to complete the reviews in a timely fashion.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Submissions</b>	<b>Limit</b>
Searle Scholars	08/27/07	7+1	2
Beckman Young Investigators	08/27/07	11+1	2
NYSTAR Tech Transfer Incentive	09/17/07	5	2
Hartwell Individual Biomedical Research	09/24/07	7+12	4
Pew Scholars in Biomedical Sciences	10/01/07	11+2	1
KAUST Centers	10/08/07	5	1
KAUST Investigators	10/15/07	3+1	2
Keck Young Scholars in Medical Research	10/29/07	3+3	1
USDA International Science & Education	11/19/07	4	2
NSF Major Research Instrumentation	12/03/07	4	3
Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar in Chemical Sciences	12/10/07	3	1
Ellison New Scholar in Aging	01/28/08	2+2	2
Packard Fellowships in Science & Engineering	03/03/08	21+4	2
NSF Integrated Grad. Ed. & Res. Traineeships	03/10/08	11	4
Dreyfus New Faculty in Chemical Sciences	04/14/08	4	1
NIH-NIBIB for Interdis. Grad. Research Training	05/05/08	2+1	1
<b>Totals</b>		103+27	31

*Table 1: Programs for which proposals and nominations were reviewed by the LAC in the 2007-08 academic year. Second number in Submissions column, when appearing, indicates number of submissions from faculty at the Weill Medical College.*

### **Observations/Recommendations**

The LAC performs a valuable service in advising the Vice-Provost on selecting proposals for the increasing number of limited-submission national and international research funding opportunities. Normally, the LAC does not get much timely positive reinforcement, as the award announcements from the funding agencies and foundations usually do not come until much later in the year. This year, however, we learned of two major successes: (1) the success of 3 of the 4 Cornell nominations for the Hartwell Individual Biomedical Research awards, providing for each recipient \$100K research support over a two-year period; and (2) the success of the proposal to establish the Cornell KAUST Center for Polymers, Hybrid NanoMaterials and Complex Fluids, bringing approximately \$25M in research support to Cornell for this program over a five-year period.

The work load imposed on committee members continues to be a concern. As can be seen from Table 1, half of the programs required review in the first two months of the fall semester. In addition, the review process for each program normally occurs on a very tight schedule, with the committee members typically having less than one week to review the proposals before submitting their ranked lists early on the day of the committee meeting to discuss the proposals. This schedule is imposed by the dual requirements of giving proposers/nominators time to put together their pre-proposals/nominations, while providing decisions back to those selected to go forward in time for them to complete their full proposals/nominations. In some cases this schedule is further exacerbated by having a very short window of time between when the Office of the Vice-Provost for Research first learns of the program and the deadline for applications imposed by the agency or foundation.

As was mentioned earlier, we have experimented with mechanisms to lessen the load, but none has proved very satisfactory. Since the majority of the review activity relates to programs in the life sciences and biomedical engineering, this might argue for greater representation from faculty in those areas, but this imbalance on the committee (which might require Faculty Senate action?) could be undesirable for other issues the committee might be asked to consider in the future.

*David A. Caughey, Chair  
Local Advisory Council  
May 23, 2008*

## Appendix A

Membership of the 2007-08 LAC included:

John Abowd, Labor Economics, ILR

James Brenna, Nutritional Sciences, HumEc

David Caughey, Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering, Engr, *Chair*

Emmanuel Giannelis, Materials Science & Engineering, Engr

Catherine Harvell, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology, CALS

Sondra Lazarowitz, Plant Pathology, CALS

Jeevak Parpia, Physics, A&S

Colin Parrish, Baker Institute, Vet

Ritchie Patterson, Physics, A&S

Alice Pell, Animal Science, CALS

Jeffrey Roberts, Molecular Biology & Genetics, CALS

Christine Shoemaker, Civil & Environmental Engineering, Engr

Note: Susan Christopherson, City & Regional Planning (AAP), and Daniel Lichter, Policy Analysis & Management (HumEc), were both elected to the LAC, but withdrew before our first meeting of the year.