



Cornell University

College of Engineering

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To: Professor William E. Fry, Dean
The University Faculty

From: David A. Caughey, Chair
Local Advisory Council

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dave", written over the name "David A. Caughey" in the "From:" field.

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
2008-09

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. Harel Weinstein. 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 131 submissions for 19 programs; a total of 42 submissions were selected to go forward from Cornell for these programs. Summary data for the submissions to these programs are contained in Table 1. As can be seen from the dates in the table, the work of the LAC was spread relatively uniformly throughout the year, and also continued well into the month of June.

The review process for each program is the same. Pre-proposal materials are collected from each candidate and made available to LAC members on a secure web site. These are read by all LAC members (or, in some cases, a subset of the membership; see below), and ranked. The summarized rankings are then presented at a meeting of the LAC, and each candidate proposal is discussed, with the goal of reaching consensus on which proposals should go forward from Cornell. In rare instances, when consensus cannot be reached, the top-ranked proposals will be re-read by all members and new rankings submitted, with the proposals selected to go forward based on summaries of this second ranking.

The committee has been struggling with how to deal with an increasingly intense workload for the past several years. Based on recommendations from previous years' committees, we attempted to reduce the work load by assigning the proposal review tasks by general area, dividing the committee into two groups, corresponding to the (1) Physical Sciences and Engineering; and (2) Life 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 more than half of the programs (Searle, Beckman, Hartwell, Pew, USDA ISE, Ellison, Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar, USAID, Hughes, and NIH Core Facilities) were focused completely, or substantially, on the life sciences and biomedical engineering, and there were no programs for which this group was ineligible. Nevertheless, the committee seemed less stressed this year than last, perhaps because the schedule was not quite so front-loaded as it was last year (with so many reviews required in the first months of the Fall 2007 semester).

Program	Date	Submissions	Limit
Searle Scholars	08/25/08	7+3	2
Beckman Young Investigators	09/02/08	9+3	2
NSF Science & Technology Centers	09/08/08	8	3
Hartwell Individual Biomedical Research	09/29/08	5+6	4
Pew Scholars in Biomedical Sciences	10/06/08	3	1
NSF Major Research Instrumentation	11/24/08	9	3
Jefferson Science Fellows	12/08/08	3	2
NSF Partnerships for Int'l. Research & Educ.	12/16/08	7	3
USDA International Science & Education	12/16/08	9	2
Ellison New Scholar in Aging	12/22/08	5	2
Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar in Chemical Sciences	01/12/09	3	1
USAID - Africa-U.S. Higher Ed. Init. Planning	01/12/09	3	1
Hughes Med into Grad Initiative	01/26/09	1+2	2
NSF Integrated Grad. Ed. & Res. Traineeships	02/02/09	8	4
Packard Fellowships in Science & Engineering	03/09/09	16	2
NSF Graduate STEM Fellows in K-12 Educ.	04/27/09	2	1
Hughes Undergraduate Science Education	05/11/09	6	2
NIH Core Facilities Renovation (ARRA)	05/18/09	3	2
NSF Major Research Instrumentation (ARRA)	06/22/09	10	3
Totals		117+14	42

Table 1: Programs for which proposals and nominations were reviewed by the LAC in the 2008-09 academic year. Second number in Submissions column, when appearing, indicates number of submissions from faculty at the Weill Medical College in addition to those from faculty on the Ithaca campus.

For the review of submissions for the Packard Fellowships in Science and Engineering, 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 plus the Chair. This procedure worked well this time, as the committee members were conscientious regarding their ability to actually complete their reviews and attend the review meeting.

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 several successes:

- (1) Professor Ruth Ley (Microbiology) received a Beckman Young Investigator Award;
- (2) Dr. David Lyden (Pediatrics, Weill) received a Hartwell Foundation Individual Biomedical Research Award;
- (3) Professor Paul Kintner (ECE) was selected for the Jefferson Scholars Program;
- (4) Professor Shu-Bing Qian (DNS) received an Ellison New Scholars in Aging award; and
- (5) Professor Abe Strook (CBE) received a 2009 Camille Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar Award.

The above awards to Professors Ley and Qian represent their first external funding at Cornell.

The work load imposed on committee members continues to be a concern. As can be seen from Table 1, the work load of the committee was more evenly spread out over the year than in previous years (when up to half of the programs required review in the first two months of the fall semester). However, there were several additional funding opportunities associated with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA -- the "economic stimulus" package), and one of these required work well past the end of the academic year (with a meeting on June 22, which will occur after this report is due). 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 (and/or 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 completely 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. Also, it should be noted that, in view of the dearth of programs involving the social sciences, membership of the committee this year included no representation from this group.

Although service on the LAC is time-consuming, it is rewarding to see the unquestionably high quality of the faculty and their associated research programs across the entire range of research areas at Cornell.

*David A. Caughey, Chair
Local Advisory Council
June 10, 2009*

Appendix A

Membership of the 2008-09 LAC included:

Charles (Chip) Aquadro, Molecular Biology & Genetics, CALS
David Caughey, Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering, Engr, *Chair*
Brian Crane, Chemistry and Chemical Biology, A&S
Emmanuel Giannelis, Materials Science & Engineering, Engr
John Hopcroft, Computer Science, Engr.
Sondra Lazarowitz, Plant Pathology, CALS
Dan Luo, Biological & Environmental Engineering, CALS
J. Ritchie Patterson, Physics, A&S
John Schimenti, Veterinary Biomedical Sciences, Vet.
Steve Wicker, Electrical & Computer Engineering, Engr.
Martin Wiedmann, Food Science, CALS

Note: Alice Pell, Animal Science, was elected to the LAC, but withdrew before our first meeting of the year due to her new responsibilities as Vice-Provost for International Relations.