

Brief Report on the Activities of the Research Advisory Board Academic Year 2007/2008

The Research Advisory Board (RAB) is responsible for providing advice and faculty input to the Office of the Vice President for Research. The faculty board members are drawn from a wide range of departments and research disciplines across campus. The RAB is chaired by the Research VP and vice-chaired by a faculty member selected from within the board.

The members of the 2007/08 RAB are:

Clyde Briant, Vice President for Research (Chair)
Robert Hurt, Engineering (faculty Vice-Chair)
Susan Alcock, Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World
Agnes Kane, Bio-Med: Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Michael Steinberg, Cogut Humanities Center
William Warren, Cognitive and Linguistic Sciences
Michael White, Sociology and Population Studies and Training Center
Mathew Zimmt, Chemistry
Kenneth Wong, Education
Joseph Hogan, Community Health

In addition, our regular meetings are open to four *ex officio* members:

Pamela O'Neil, Associate Provost for Policy and Planning
Tim Leshan, Director of Government Relations and Community Affairs
Edward Hawrot, Associate Dean of Biology
Michael Pickett, Vice President for Computing and Information Services

and are regularly attended by members of the OVPR staff.

The RAB meets monthly to discuss current issues facing the VP's office. There is no fixed agenda for these meetings; topics are placed on the agenda by the VP and his staff and can be suggested by any RAB member.

Overview of Activities in AY2007/2008

During this academic year the RAB met five times (as of April 15th), discussed a wide range of topics, and formed several subgroups to consider selected issues at more depth. The following is a partial list of selected discussion topics:

- Membership rotation under Faculty Rules (September meeting). Our appointment practices were reviewed and then modified to put us on a formal and regular rotation schedule, which will reach steady state in AY08/09.

- Brown participation in University of Minnesota study on interdisciplinary initiatives (September meeting). For some years there has been a movement at universities to invest in non-departmental structures such as centers, institutes, university professorships, etc., and a group led by Minnesota has begun a study on the impacts of this organizational philosophy on research and education.
- Status and update on the Plan for Academic Enrichment (October, November, December meetings). The RAB helped the office review the impact of the PAE on research in preparation for calls to provide input for the plan's next phase. A number of important topics came up including (i) the importance of UTRA grants, (ii) the need to accompany faculty growth with growth in graduate students, staff, and infrastructure, (iii) concerns for junior faculty morale due to competition for external funding, tenure policies, and other potential barriers to young faculty success.
- IRB impacts on the social sciences (December meeting). At the prompting of the FEC, a subcommittee was formed to study the impact of the IRB on research in the social sciences with an emphasis on undergraduate projects and theses. The subcommittee consists of RAB members Hurt, Warren, White, and Wong, who are meeting separately to gather information and discuss options for possible revisions of policy or practice at Brown. To date information has been gathered from peer institutions (compliance staff members and faculty colleagues of our members) and individual meetings held with concentration advisors and instructors in thesis seminar courses in the social science departments at Brown. The subcommittee plans to complete its work and write a report with recommendations to Clyde Briant by the end of this academic year.
- Ways to communicate new compliance procedures to the departments (January meeting). The development of training modules for department financial coordinators was discussed as a preferable first step to the direct training of faculty members.
- OVPR support of the humanities and social sciences (January meeting). Many of the issues the OVPR now discusses primarily impact the physical and life sciences. In an effort to better understand how the OVPR can serve the humanities and social sciences, a discussion was held at the January meeting and a follow-up session was held between the chair, vice chair and RAB members Steinberg and Alcock representing the humanities and social sciences. The goal was to understand research needs in these fields and generate new ideas about new support mechanisms, such as sponsorship of semester-long or year-long thematic seminars.

As the RAB looks to next year, discussions were held on ways to make the board more effective. Our current system of regular monthly or near-monthly meetings is useful to provide a sounding board for new ideas and new policies under consideration at the OVPR and provide the OVPR with a sample of faculty response to controversial issues affecting the research environment at Brown. At the same time, many of the issues at

hand are complex and it is difficult to make meaningful progress in a single session. While we can and have formed deliberative subcommittees, it might be useful to extend this approach to the board as a whole by identifying important themes in the fall and assigning members to research these themes and lead discussion at the whole board meetings. By encouraging preparation in this way, and by revisiting topics across multiple meetings one might hope to achieve meaningful resolution on more complex issues. This idea was suggested by VP Briant and is under consideration for implementation in the fall.

Prepared by R. Hurt
Faculty Vice-Chair
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