Minutes

Faculty Discussion on the Formation of an Interdisciplinary Faculty in Forensic and Investigative Sciences

Wednesday. October 26, 2011. 413-414 Minnie Bell Heep Center

In Attendance: Garry Adams, Jacqueline Aitkenhead-Peterson, Vaughn Bryant, Craig Coates, John Edens, Kevin Heinz, David Ragsdale, Tom Shehan, Cliff Spiegelman, Aaron Tarone, Jeff Tomberlin, Pete Teel, Victor Ugaz, Phillip Williamson (UNT)

Call to Order by Heinz at 12:05 p.m. Welcome to the group and thank you to David Ragsdale (Entomology Department Head) for paying for the box lunches.

Introductions and Acknowledgements. All in attendance introduced themselves to the group and provided a few sentences as to their relationship to the field of forensic and investigative sciences.

Historical Overview and Proposal Outline provided by Kevin Heinz (Attached are Heinz’s Presentation and Talking Points Handout)

Expected Administrative Changes to the Formation of Interdisciplinary Groups Presentation by David Ragsdale who provided an overview of anticipated reorganization of how interdisciplinary groups at TAMU are administered. The guiding documents are currently in draft form and under review by Department Heads (at least within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences). Based upon his read of the changes, it would appear that our group might best be categorized as an “Interdisciplinary Faculty Group,” which would eventually mean we might report to the Dean of Faculties.

Faculty Discussion

• A general discussion of the value and number of hours included in certificate programs was pursued. Phillip Williamson was asked and shared the constructs of both the certificate program and Master of Science degree in Forensic Genetics at the University of North Texas. There were open comments that the scope of constructing a certificate program at TAMU should be relevant to both educational and professional goals with a broad focus on science and its forensic applications. Concepts should be of “overview courses”, perhaps team taught. Students should be able to recognize the limitations of science. Scientists’ roles as expert witnesses should be an important component. Concern related to being too broad vs. remaining specialized without duplication of services provided by others.

• The group discussed the positive potential for “cross-over” opportunities between institutions with recognition that there is little to no overlap in educational programs. They tend to be complimentary and could be made available to students
(undergrad/grad) across institutions. These linkages might be strengthened through MOA/MOU documents. For example, the UNT – TAMU example shows different and complementary strengths. Seed funding may be available from TAMU Provost Watson’s office to facilitate organization of the focus area.

- Leveraging potential between institutions with cooperative support from agencies and organizations was discussed. The question of opportunities to build regional centers of excellence was introduced. One goal would be to serve as a "go to" group for questions linked to aspects of forensics of all types (i.e. bullets, blood, chem, ento, ag, psych, DNA, genetics, etc.).

- It was agreed that there is shared interest in providing training/education for attorneys and judges. It was noted that the Texas Commission on Forensic Science openly supports educational programs in Texas. Vet Med would be interested in providing an overview of the concept to his contacts and the commission.

- There was a suggestion that a list of faculty willing to provide scientific testimony would be valuable to the legal community and provide visibility to the expertise. A sample suggestion was faculty interest in the Innocence Project and identifying those groups who have aligned themselves with its efforts. The name suggested for the list “Aggie Scientists for Forensics On-Call”.

- Discussion about arson investigation and the hot button interest paid by both the forensic commission and Texas Criminal Justice Integrity Unit.

- There was a suggestion that a group of faculty participate in developing a book of best practices linking scientific disciplines to needs in the legal and criminal justice communities.

- The suggestion of developing a state-wide consortium was discussed centered on a meeting of interested institutions, agencies, etc. at an off-site location.

- The development of an NSF/IGERT proposal was discussed. The consensus was most positive, with suggestions linkages to a certificate program and links to undergraduate mentoring.

**Synopsis of Meeting and a Development of a Plan of Action, What’s Next?**

The meeting was summarized by Heinz with the following steps to be addressed (with all in attendance in agreement):

1. Develop a website to provide visibility of the interdisciplinary group.
2. Form an Interdisciplinary Faculty Group.
3. Plan a meeting for spring of 2012.
4. Build on strengthening relationships with other interested institutions, beginning with UNT.
5. Work toward development and submission of an NSF-IGERT.

6. Develop a concept for a graduate certificate program in Forensic Science.

*Adjourn (1:30 pm)*

Meeting notes scribed by Heinz, Shehan, and Teel were compiled by Heinz as of November 3, 2011. Minutes were distributed to those in attendances with modifications or approval returned by November 10, 2011.