

Task Force on the Life Sciences

Summary of Activities

The Task Force on the Life Sciences was convened by the provost in July 2008 in response to the highest priority finding from the doctoral review assessment process: there are critical issues about the organization and administration of the doctoral and research efforts in biological and life sciences across the university. These issues must be addressed for Ohio State to achieve the enormous potential it has to be a world leader in these fields. This is a tremendous opportunity for Ohio State and a defining moment for its faculty, researchers, and students in the life sciences.

Co-Chairs and Members

The task force is co-chaired by **Joan Leitzel**, Interim Executive Dean and Vice Provost Designate of the Colleges of the Arts and Sciences, and **Patrick Osmer**, Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School. Members include:

Mark Bennett, Professor, Department of Horticulture & Crop Science

Kathleen Boris-Lawrie, Professor, Department of Veterinary Biosciences

David Denlinger, Distinguished University Professor, Department of Entomology

Jeff Firkins, Professor, Department of Animal Sciences

Michael Ibba, Associate Professor, Department of Microbiology

Bobby Moser, Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Executive Dean of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

Karin Musier-Forsyth, Ohio Eminent Scholar, Professor, Department of Chemistry

Randy Nelson, Professor, Department of Psychology and Neuroscience

Matt Platz, Distinguished University Professor and Interim Dean, College of Mathematical and Physical Sciences and College of Biological Sciences

Amanda Simcox, Professor, Department of Molecular Genetics

Larry Schlesinger, Professor and Director, Division of Infectious Diseases

Chip Souba, Vice President and Executive Dean for Health Sciences and Dean of the College of Medicine

Caroline Whitacre, Vice President for Research

Randy Smith, Vice Provost, serves as the Office of Academic Affairs' liaison to the task force

Task Force Charge

- Identify how Ohio State's graduate level education, especially at the doctoral level, and research in the biological and life sciences should be optimally configured.
- Recommend appropriate organizational processes and arrangements to support high-quality doctoral educational and research efforts. The task force will look at overarching research themes, existing strengths, and opportunities for Ohio State.

The task force has met 10 times since summer 2008. Three working groups were formed: Research Frontiers and Directions, chaired by David Denlinger; Inventory of Existing Programs, chaired by Karin Musier-Forsyth; and Best Practices, chaired by Randy Nelson.

Research Frontiers and Directions Working Group: David Denlinger, chair

- The scope of this working group is broad, looking at where we are going, what are the big questions, what are our strengths, and what are the areas the university should concentrate on.

- The group reviewed NSF's new guidelines to organizing granting panels, *Science's* list of 125 big questions, NIH list of priorities, and other relevant sources.
- The group notes that it is important to look forward and identify where Ohio State can leapfrog ahead in the life sciences. It is critical to provide an environment where people can work together (such as in research centers).
- A brief questionnaire was sent to all life sciences faculty in early January and results are now being compiled.

Inventory of Existing Programs Working Group: Karin Musier-Forsyth, chair

- The group has identified faculty involved in each of the interdisciplinary programs. Heads of the interdisciplinary programs have been added to the working group.
- A list of life science programs was developed and members of the working group met with chairs to further develop the 'sense of science' that is going on in each of these programs. A one-page summary that provides a statement of overall purpose, identifies research themes and research faculty, and lists training grants was written for each.
- The working group has asked an additional five questions of each program: 1) Number of graduates over the past three years; 2) Total number of publications for each of these graduates, and 3) Number of publications for which they were first author; 4) Fellowship status of graduates while enrolled in grad program; and 5) First position following graduation. Responses are being compiled.
- The working group has scheduled pizza lunches with graduate students in the life sciences to gain their input.

Best Practices Working Group: Randy Nelson, chair

- The working group is reviewing organizational arrangements within Ohio State and exploring administrative arrangements at other universities; how do they avoid barriers?
- A faculty questionnaire raised the issues of organizational constraints, funding of students in interdisciplinary programs, indirect cost distribution, inconsistency in the life sciences as to rotations/course requirements, and recognition of faculty effort in teaching students.
- The task force met with representatives of various interdisciplinary programs. Larry Schlesinger, director of the Center for Microbial Interface Biology (CMIB), Ginny Sanders, director of the Integrated Biomedical Science Graduate Program, Matt Platz, on behalf of Council of Life Sciences Deans, and Dave Bisaro, director of the interdisciplinary Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology graduate program, spoke about the challenges and accomplishments of their respective programs, including budgetary issues, faculty ownership of programs, and support for students. It was noted that interdisciplinary programs are "horizontal structures in a vertical world."
- Michael Culbertson, chair, departments of Genetics in the School of Medicine and Public Health and in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has recently met with the task force. He noted that chaos can be a good thing because it maximizes creativity and opportunities. He explained the organizational structure of his department which is housed in two colleges (medicine and agriculture) at Wisconsin. He said for this system to work, chairs cannot see walls around their departments and must be able to invest in the discipline. He said that a first step is the merging of graduate programs.
- Other representatives from peer and aspirational peer institutions will be invited to campus to speak about how they have addressed/solved organizational problems in the life sciences.