

Internal Academic Review Committee
Report on the Review of the Department of Biochemistry

Both the external consultants and the review team highlight the excellence of the Department of Biochemistry in both teaching and research, and further, note that it compares well with the strongest Biochemistry Departments in Canada. Among the strengths of the Department are: its high quality undergraduate programs, a key component of which is the strong laboratory component; the well-organized graduate program with high academic standards; the dedicated and committed faculty and staff in the unit; and the success of members of the faculty in attracting external funding in support of research endeavours.

It is also clearly stated in the reviewers' reports that all of these strengths are potentially in serious jeopardy in the face of declining financial resources. Furthermore, the unit faces additional challenges in the area of staffing on both the faculty and technical staff sides.

Major Recommendations:

1. STAFFING ISSUES: The need for faculty renewal is a common theme among all of the Departments in the Basic Health Sciences group and the IARC recommends an integrated approach to developing a strategy to deal with this issue. (see “Common Themes” submission); however, the Department of Biochemistry is facing some unique challenges in this area which should be taken into account in the overall strategy. The IARC noted the marked gender imbalance in this Department as well as the fact that

many senior faculty who will soon be retiring have taken on extraordinary service and teaching responsibilities to allow younger colleagues to develop their research profiles. Both of these factors must be taken into consideration when the collective planning is undertaken.

2. UNDERGRADUATE LABORATORIES: Without exception, everyone involved in the review of this unit spoke of the exceptional quality of the undergraduate programs offered through this Department (Life Sciences as well as Honours Biochemistry). Of crucial importance to these programs is the laboratory component. The IARC recommends that the five Departments in the Basic Health Sciences group work together to develop an integrated solution for maintaining the quality of the laboratories and the laboratory experience for undergraduate students. (see “Common Themes” submission).

Outcomes of the Review:

The following response was submitted by the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and presented at the Basic Science Council:

The continuing evolution of scientific discovery has outgrown many of the traditional disciplines that have comprised the Basic Medical Sciences. Where we once had disciplines based on anatomic, functional or biochemical levels of knowledge, advances in science have moved knowledge and research to a more fundamental commonality.

Furthermore, research increasingly embraces the breadth of inquiry from the gene to the health of populations, involving those from a variety of “traditional” disciplines, no longer so relevant. In fact, many of our research programs cross Faculties and have become thematic, addressing health issues deliberately, such as Cancer, Heart and Stroke, etc.

Reflecting this reality, our educational programs have become collaborative and generic at the undergraduate level, and thematically follow our research programs at the graduate level.

It is within this context that budgetary constraints causing harsh consequences provide an opportunity for optimizing our various functions and responsibilities. The following initiatives have been taken or are being considered:

- 1 The Canada Research Chair allocation process is strategic, non departmental, and vested in the Research Advisory Committee of the FHS. CRCs are the major source of new faculty at present.
- 2 Basic Science Council will discuss further the creation of a Basic Science staffing committee.
- 3 Basic Science Council, Research programs and Departments will be encouraged to develop policies to recruit graduate students from a wider national and international pool.
- 4 Basic Science Council will be asked to create a subcommittee to review all the undergraduate laboratory curricula with the view of further integration and cost-effectiveness.
- 5 Basic Science Council will be asked to consider ways and means of integrating the annual budget preparation, with the goal of avoiding any duplications and improving administrative and academic efficiencies.
- 6 The FHS is dedicated to furthering our existing Research Strategy, which is thematic and programmatic, has been recently reviewed and ratified, and which is firmly embedded in the strategic plan of the Faculty.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place in the annual budget and staffing strategy meetings between the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Vice-Principal (Academic).