

Internal Academic Review Committee

Report on the Review of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology

The common theme that predominated the internal academic review of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology is the pressing need for rejuvenation, replenishment and rebuilding in most aspects of the departmental endeavour. Despite praiseworthy leadership, as well as a strong commitment to teaching, research and service, the reality noted in the IAR reports is that the unit's strengths in scholarship and learning have been eroded, and there is the potential for burnout among the existing faculty complement. The external consultants and the review team also noted, however, the critical importance of the Department to the institution and to society in general, and recognized both the possibility and the opportunity for a renaissance. The IARC concurs, and knowing the commitment to rebuilding that exists within the Department, joins in urging that efforts that have already been undertaken to begin the process of renewal and revitalization be continued and supported.

Major Recommendations:

1. **FACULTY RENEWAL AND REBUILDING:** Perhaps nowhere is the need for renewal more apparent than within the ranks of the faculty in this Department, due to the age profile of the current complement and exacerbated by the prospect of no foreseeable hires. Moreover, the Department does not appear to have developed a successful strategy that would have allowed it to take advantage of external funding opportunities for the recruitment of faculty members. Although the faculty renewal challenge is acute within

this unit, the IARC has noted that this is a matter of concern across all of the Basic Health Sciences Departments and a collective approach to addressing this issue has been recommended. The IARC recommends that an integrated strategic staffing plan take into account: the ongoing financial and budgetary constraints that continue to challenge every unit in the institution; specific needs in terms of teaching in graduate and undergraduate programs; and research priorities. (see “Common Themes” submission)

2. UNDERGRADUATE LABORATORIES: This Department, like all others in the Basic Health Sciences group, is facing a serious situation with regard to resources in support of the undergraduate laboratories, which are described by reviewers as providing a very important contribution to the quality of the Life Sciences program. This problem is widely acknowledged as requiring immediate attention. The IARC has proposed that a resolution be sought through collective efforts among the five Departments. (see “Common Themes” submission)

3. GRADUATE RECRUITMENT: The issue of the recruitment of graduate students is also one that was raised in the reviews of all of the Departments in the Basic Health Sciences group. Recruitment efforts and plans should have both a national and an international reach, should address the matter of declining enrolments, especially at the PhD level, should focus on attracting students to theme-based, interdisciplinary research initiatives and should be developed in concert with all of the Departments in this group. (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.

I note further that the FHS 2003/04 budget submission requested reinstatement of the upcoming vacancy by retirement that was to be hollowed to meet budget targets.

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).