

Quantitative Biology Initiative

Executive Committee Meeting Notes

July 20, 2009

Attendees: Bob Hausinger, Peter Bates, Rob Britton, Titus Brown, Wenjiang Fu, Lisa Lapidus, Helen Geiger, Claire Vieille, Bill Wedemeyer

Not able to attend: David Arnosti, Robin Buell, Christina Chan, Bob Cukier, Shelagh Ferguson-Miller, Leslie Kuhn, Charles Ofria, David Weliky

Agenda:

The one order of business was to discuss the possible implications of the current financial situation on the future of QBI and the QB graduate program. The Dean of the College of Natural Science (CNS) anticipates 7% cuts for next year, on top of the 5% cuts that are happening now. This fall, a college-level committee will begin to evaluate all CNS departments and programs in terms of (i) academic excellence, (ii) strength of vision, (iii) student demand, and (iv) centrality to CNS. Presumably based on this information, the college will “eliminate, combine, or greatly reduce some units and programs”. No specifics were mentioned, but the Dean suggested plans to “close small undergraduate and graduate degree programs”, “close small courses”, and “reconceptualize graduate programs”. The QBI Executive Committee discussed how we need to be prepared to defend the merits of the graduate program and the umbrella organization. Examples of points to emphasize include:

- The highly interdisciplinary QB courses fill a critical role in modern graduate student training that cannot be met by courses in traditional programs. For example, students in non-biological programs learn the fundamentals of biology and biologists obtain training in physical/mathematic principles that allow them to bridge these distinct cultures. The QB courses are an asset to the traditional departments (e.g., QB 828 serves students in the Physics, Math, and Statistics departments).
- The QB courses are the only mechanism available for students to bridge the basic knowledge gap and to allow them to later successfully take graduate-level courses in a department outside their own. The QB courses are offered in such a way that, in several cases, they can fill requirements within the home department (e.g., QB 827 fills a grad requirement of CSE students).
- The QB courses help build a network of interdisciplinary graduate students that can help each other during their graduate research.
- Outstanding graduate students have chosen MSU because of the opportunities provided by the QB program.
- The QBI is a great recruiting tool for young faculty who are looking for people with whom to collaborate. Recruitment of many newer faculty members was facilitated by the availability of the QB program. The QB program uniquely allows students from a wide variety of departments, even across colleges, to work in laboratories of the new faculty.

- The Science at the Edge seminar series is highly regarded across campus and by the speakers themselves. It brings together faculty from several disciplines and stimulates interactions among them.
- QBI has provided leadership in organizing groups of faculty to benefit research, teaching, and efforts at training grants. A gathering of those interested in bioinformatics stimulated scientific interactions and led to discussions of how to reduce redundancy in courses. Training grants have been submitted to Howard Hughes Research Institute, NSF (IGERT), and NIH (T32).

Peter Bates is assembling a working document of the positive features of QBI and the QB program for use when the directors meet with the Dean or respond to requests for information from the college review committee. Your comments and suggestions (EC members or other QBI participants) should be sent to him (bates@math.msu.edu) and copied to Helen (geiger@msu.edu).