

Meeting notes NCAC-14 February 3-5, 2014

The 2014 annual meeting of NCAC-14 (North Central Administrative Committee for Heads and Chairs of Plant Pathology and related Departments) was held at the Fairmont Inn on E. Ontario Street in Chicago on February 4 and 5. Terry Niblack chaired the meeting, Peter Goldsbrough was secretary, and Caitlyn Allen was local organizer.

In attendance: Terry Niblack (Ohio State), Jim Bradeen (Minnesota), Jim English (Missouri), Jim Steadman (Nebraska), Thomas Baum (Iowa State), Jack Rasmussen (North Dakota State), Peter Goldsbrough (Purdue), Sandy Pierson (Texas A&M), John Leslie (Kansas State), John Sherwood (Georgia), Caitlyn Allen (Wisconsin), Steve Slack (Ohio State, committee administrator), Lawrence Datnoff (Louisiana State), Phil Mulder (Oklahoma State), Tom Mitchell (Ohio State, representing APS Office of Education)

Unable to attend: Ray Hammerschmidt (Michigan State) and Rick Bennett (Arkansas)

Tuesday, February 4

Minutes from the 2013 meeting were accepted with minor spelling corrections. Two items were added to the agenda: discussion of faculty evaluation systems (John Leslie), funding for foundational research grants (English)

Remarks from Steve Slack, Administrative Adviser

The administrative function of this meeting is to review project proposals and provide mid-term project reviews. However, the more important function is for heads/chairs to meet and discuss issues that the discipline and departmental leaders face.

Thomas Baum, Academic Unit Leaders Forum

Baum provided information about the formation of the Academic Unit Leaders Forum (AULF) within APS to provide a formal structure for department heads/chairs to meet, and to facilitate discussions among this group. This has now been approved as a forum by APS Council. Description of AULF is available on APS web site:

<http://www.apsnet.org/about/governance/MoO/Administrative/Pages/AcademicUnitLeadersForum.aspx>

Sherwood suggested expanding the involvement in the AULF to include department leaders from outside the US, especially at the annual meeting. This will reflect the continuing internationalization of both APS and the discipline.

Marty Draper, National Program Leader USDA

Draper joined the meeting via Adobe Connect. A modified version of his slide set was provided to attendees following the meeting. This has been an eventful few weeks at USDA with a new Farm Bill, some changes at NIFA in both policies and people.

- Restrictions on NIFA staff activities (program/dept reviews, travel, etc.) are still in place
- An infrastructure and capacity task force has made several recommendations to improve administration of programs; all recommendations were accepted and are now starting to be implemented.
- REEport (CRIS replacement) is launched and “operational” but still not working smoothly. It is designed to be a standard progress reporting system that will be similar across all federal grant agencies.
- There are several vacancies at NIFA and a significant decrease in overall staffing (20% down).
- IFPS Assistant Director (was Debbie Sheely) is newly vacant and will be advertised shortly, hope to see applicants from the Land Grant community
- In the Appropriations Act of 2014, no individual funding line is lower than in FY 2012, but there are some changes due to consolidation of individual lines under the integrated Crop Protection program. However, these are not the final numbers, there may still be some changes in the level of funding.
- Large increase in AFRI to \$316m from \$277m
- New program for alfalfa research and extension (\$1.35m)
- There will be a short turnaround time for some of these RFPs, reviews and awards.
- FADI includes approximately \$300K increase for NPDN
- AFRI Foundational RFA changes include two new programs:
 - Critical Agricultural Research and Extension (CARE) – 3 year projects to address pressing stakeholder-driven issues, must include R&E from the start, \$150K per award, short to mid-term application
 - Exploratory – new and emerging innovations
- New Crop Protection Program consolidates five programs: regional IPM research, PMAP, pest management alternative programs, E-IPM coordination programs, regional IPM Centers, E-IPM decision support systems (v small)
- Expect new RFA in March
- Stakeholder comment was substantial and heard
- Current grant-holders with 3 year awards will need to reapply
- New Farm Bill about to be passed, has some surprises
 - NIFA mandatory programs reinstated and increased, SCRI at \$80m (but \$25m to citrus health), stakeholder relevance review will be required
 - OREI at \$20m
- \$200m for new Foundation for Food and Agriculture, public-private partnership but details are not clear
- Sun Grants are now competitive, open to more institutions
- Scab initiative funding increased from \$7.5m to \$10m

- Debt ceiling limit will be reached again March and how this is managed may have an impact on all of these changes

Rick Bennett joined the meeting via speakerphone and provided an update from APS Council. His slide set was distributed to attendees following the meeting.

- Academic Unit Leaders Forum has just been approved by APS Council
- More formalized structure and agenda for the department heads/chairs meeting at the annual meeting. A 5 hour morning meeting of the AULF has been scheduled for the 2014 annual meeting.
- The AULF may provide an opportunity for industry interactions.
- 2014 APS annual meeting in Minneapolis is trying to encourage more participation and oral presentations by graduate students, especially those who are within a year of graduation
- APS is promoting new research initiatives focused on the phytobiome, the microbial community in, on and around plants

Tom Mitchell, from the APS Office of Education

- The mission of the Office of Education is to
 - Identify APS member educational needs
 - Evaluate where resources are being allocated
 - Coordinate activities
 - Strengthen educational portfolio
 - Strategic visioning body to meet future APS educational needs
 - Facilitate recruitment (many other groups at APS focus on this issue)
- Current initiatives
 - Redesign of education center
 - Production of first set of RLOs (reusable learning objects), 5-10 minute videos that are peer reviewed to address specific learning objectives, assessment activities)
 - Compile portfolio of current educational activities across the society
 - Engage different APS boards/offices/committees on monthly conference calls
 - Symposia and workshops on educational activities in alternate years at annual APS meeting
- How this group wants to interact with dept heads
 - Participate in discussions on core curriculum
 - Provide feedback to APS about activities in departments
 - Help explore new pedagogy
 - Provide a forum to discuss critical needs and efforts
 - Create synergy between institutions
 - Coordinate APS student recruiting activities
 - Creation of educational resources to fill gaps

- Sandy Pierson asked if this group would develop standardized learning objectives for core disciplinary courses in plant pathology to assist faculty. There was additional discussion on whether there should be a move for accreditation of plant pathology programs.

Jim Steadman led a discussion about the regulation of plant pathogens by the University of Nebraska Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC), which places these organisms in the same category as human and animal pathogens. Similar issues have been encountered at KSU. General trend is for greater oversight and inspection of university research labs. Generic SOPs can make this simpler. Diagnostic labs face particular challenges because they are handling unknown organisms. The environmental health and safety enforcement groups and the biosafety groups at universities have very different remits. Jim will circulate guidelines from Nebraska that will describe succinctly the protocols they use to handle these plant pathogens.

Caitlyn Allen led a discussion on the possibilities for sharing courses across institutions. Examples include Larry Madden's epidemiology course that is taken by students at Ohio State, Cornell and Penn State. Oklahoma State and Colorado State share a course on plant pathogen interactions, led by Jan Leach, taught via Skype. The course is listed at both universities and has professors of record at both institutions. Datnoff expressed concern about this approach as it may compromise the ability to get new faculty positions if teaching needs are covered by courses from other institutions. Allen asked if others were interested in participating in a tropical diseases course that will include a two week field trip to Guatemala. Most of these programs rely on the personal initiatives and connections that an individual faculty member has established. Institutionalizing these programs beyond this individual can be difficult.

Jim English led a discussion on the frustrations many faculty have with the very limited opportunities for research grants in NIFA Foundational programs on Biology of Plant-Microbe Associations. What is promised in funding programs is not delivered in the dollars that are awarded. This led to a broader discussion on the impact of very limited sources of research funding on faculty that raised many questions:

- How have these changes affected faculty hiring decisions?
- How has this affected the success of new faculty?
- How do people adjust, do they search for new funding sources?
- What is the impact on faculty success throughout their career, when they are unable to get funded mid-career? Some institutions have short term bridge funding to keep programs going. Have we all become funding "ambulance chasers"?
- Mentoring is even more critical and more time is devoted to this.
- Does this affect people's career choices? Are people choosing careers in sectors other than higher education?

- What impact does this have on promotion and tenure when an assistant professor does not have a sustained record of grant funding?
- Some faculty are shifting to work on crop pathogens because there are better prospects for funding in those areas from commodity groups and companies.
- At the moment, these problems are less severe for faculty with extension appointments as more funding is available for this type of research, although in smaller amounts.

John Leslie initiated a discussion on faculty evaluation. For most institutions, annual evaluation is separate from P&T discussion. In many universities the evaluation of new assistant professors after three years becomes part of the P&T dossier.

Post tenure review varies from place to place. OSU has an annual review process where every faculty member submits a 4 page document. They then meet with and are reviewed by a committee of elected faculty in the department. Wisconsin uses a five year post-tenure review of all faculty. LSU has a process to identify underperforming faculty and that will lead to development of a new performance plan.

KSU has a process where full professors can apply for a special salary increase once every six years. Texas A&M uses a spreadsheet that uses different measures of productivity and weightings for these measures. Also asks for a half page “impact statement” from each faculty member that provides highlights and talking points about their program. Some use a rolling average of performance over multiple years for performance evaluations.

Project reviews

New project review

NCERA temp 137 - Soybean diseases - Datnoff

Well-defined mission and statement of objectives, good justification of importance of crops and the impacts of these diseases, integration across regions, especially in the southern US, good education plan, tying in with the Plant Management Network, Plant Health Initiative. An active and engaged group, good education program, encourage meetings with southern group that focuses on soybean diseases. Should the soybean rust group be intergrated with this? Unanimous recommendation to approve.

Mid-term reviews

NC1197 - Nematodes in soybean and corn - Bradeen

Three specific objectives listed, very good progress on several of these objectives including screening of germplasm, multistate survey, less progress on development of tools for management of nematodes. Comprehensive project, good linkages, effective at dissemination of information, good attendance at meetings.

Recommendation to continue project with more effort directed at objective focused on management. Passed unanimously

NCERA013 - Soil testing and plant analysis - Mulder

Appropriate objectives and mission statement. There was no report from November 2013 meeting, but a report of a meeting from Feb 2013 was available. The web site and some publications had been updated, including information on phosphorus, soil pH management and lime, sulfur. No other publications listed from 2012 or 2013. It was hard to find details about what had been accomplished to meet the project's objectives, the outcomes and the impact of the committee's work.

Recommendation to continue with revisions to provide clear responsibilities for the remaining work and assessment of impact. Passed unanimously

NCERA 208 - Response to emerging threats: soybean rust - Rasmussen

This committee has been in operation for about 10 years. Very limited genetic resistance is available for Asian soybean rust, and management of the disease relies on fungicides. This committee has coordinated the operation of sentinel plots to monitor for the spread of soybean rust, and there has been in international collaborations with Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico. The committee has good interactions with the southern soybean research group. The disease is still largely restricted to the southern US. The disease has been less of a problem in the last few years because of environmental conditions. There has been strong grower and industry support for the activities of this group. Now the sentinel plots are being used more for assessment of other diseases such as frogeye leaf spot and *Cercospora*, and these have largely been funded by industry. The group won a USDA award for the outstanding multistate team.

Recommendation to continue, passed unanimously. The committee should consider amalgamation with other soybean disease committees in the future.

NCERA 222 – Integrated Pest Management - Goldsbrough

One of the major objectives for this group was the development of a white paper that prioritizes the needs for IPM research and extension, to present this paper at the 2012 International IPM Symposium, and to disseminate these priorities elsewhere. There is no evidence that this white paper has been prepared or presented. They have, however, had two meetings in 2012 and 2013 with very good participation. Participants reported increased collaboration across states, guidance on preparation of E-IPM proposals, use of new technologies for outreach.

Recommendation to continue but with renewed attention to the objectives laid out in the project, passed unanimously.

Next year's meeting was tentatively scheduled to meet in Atlanta, GA from February 3-5, 2015, with meetings scheduled all day Feb 4 and the morning of Feb 5. John Sherwood will manage the local arrangements in Atlanta. Hopefully this will allow greater participation of department heads/chairs from southern states.

Thomas Baum was elected to chair the 2015 meeting, Sandy Pierson was elected as vice-chair and secretary.

Wednesday, February 5, State reports. Electronic copies of state reports were distributed by attendees following the meeting.

Wisconsin, Caitlyn Allen

- Budget issues with the state, stable, little growth
- 1% across the board raise in 2013, first since 2008
- 15 faculty, 2 with split appointments
- 7 faculty from other depts who train in their grad program
- hired 2 assistant professors in 2013
- 39 grad students, holding steady
- encourage more students to apply for NSF graduate fellowships
- 27 undergrad students in their plant pathology major
- developing an interdepartmental plant science major with Botany, Agronomy, Horticulture, launches next year
- developing learning outcomes for their graduate degrees
- retreat to identify new hiring needs, next position in ecology/epidemiology of plant pathogens, someone using more quantitative approaches
- 6 assistant professors out of 15 faculty
- Caitlyn stepping down as chair in July, 2014, Patty McManus taking over

Oklahoma State, Phil Mulder

- 11 plant path faculty, including 1 Regents professor, 4 assistant profs, 2 associate profs, 4 profs
- advertising for one new position in entomology teaching, hope to advertise for a genetics/plant path/wheat position in next year
- 15 grad students in pathology split equally between MS and PhD, ~30 in entomology
- may offer an undergrad minor in plant pathology, likely to be approved in the coming year
- (NIMFAD)??
- 3 options in their undergrad major, including plant bioforensics
- 3% raise pool in 2013, second raise in 5 years

Louisiana State, Lawrence Datnoff

- no budget cut, first in 5 years
- 4% raise in 2014, first in 5 years
- consolidated some higher level administrative positions in the College of Agriculture
- hired 2 new positions, plant pathology of horticulture crops, mainly extension, searching for a mycologist
- 25 grad students, ~half MS, half PhD; students on the PhD track now complete a MS

- 15 faculty, several are likely to retire in next 5 years, replacement strategy is uncertain
- trying to recruit higher quality students with \$25,000 assistantships
- branch satellite campuses starting to offer agriculture programs, with some assistance in teaching coming from the main campus

Missouri, Jim English

- undergrad enrollment on campus has increased substantially in recent years
- 124 undergrad students in Plant Sciences Division
- recent changes in university level administrators (chancellor, provost, VPR)
- ~40 faculty
- plant stress biology program has 21 faculty, 11 of these are working with plant associated microbes
- 85 total grad students in division, 21 in plant stress biology group
- search for research viticulturist and extension viticulturist, both non-tenure track positions, both funded by wine/grape industry in state
- new assistant prof in bioenergy crops has been hired
- new director of disease clinic has been hired, will be supervised by turf pathologist
- retirements – extension crop pathologist and forest pathologist, no news about replacements
- curriculum review each year by individual groups; have 2 courses to help bring students together – journal club, and experimental methods course – and helps broaden the students' perspective on experimental approaches
- 2% salary increase in 2013

Georgia, John Sherwood

- ~20 faculty, 2 upcoming retirements, 3 assistants, 3 associates, expect to see more retirements in next few years
- 40 grad students
- trying to establish a 3+2 BS/MS program, some of these students may still want to continue for PhD
- no general pay raises in last 5 years, 1% raise may be possible this year
- many hires in College, priorities depend on pressure from growers groups and ability to compete for external funding support
- no undergrad program

Kansas State, John Leslie

- 2% merit pay raise, first in last 5 years, committed to raises in next two years
- Plum Island replacement biosafety facility: utility construction under way, more than 50% of the funding for the rest of the facility has been approved and construction is likely to start soon
- Heavily involved in collaborative research with Australia

- 3% budget cut to the university over the last two years, additional budget cuts because of loss of unfilled positions through action by legislature
- hired new bioinformatics assistant professor, new wheat molecular genetics assistant professor,
- 4 assistant profs, 4 associate profs, 10 professors, 2 instructors, looking at a wave of retirements in the next 5 to 10 years
- wheat center has new NSF-industry partnership 5 year award
- 2 minors, plant path and plant biotechnology
- field crops diseases class has increased enrollment to >40 students

Texas A&M, Sandy Pierson

- 18 faculty, 4 faculty at ag centers, 9 extension specialists
- 2 faculty have left the dept, one to the health science center
- 35 grad students, 20 postdocs
- looking at up to 6 retirements in next 5 years
- no current assistant profs
- retreat for planning identified 5 major focus areas, that fit into 4 of the 5 grand challenge areas that the college has identified
- tech transfer and corporate support/relationships are increasingly important
- revised grad curriculum, modular 5-week structure, reduced grad course load by ~50%
- ~240 undergrad students in Bioenvironmental Sciences program

Purdue, Peter Goldsbrough

- 23 faculty, only 1 assistant professor
- 3 hires in the last 18 months – root/pathogen interactions, weed science, maize epigenetics
- 2 ongoing searches, one in root/rhizosphere biology, one in plant hormone biology
- 47 grad students, 40 undergrads in plant science major
- realignment of plant science departments in College is ongoing; basic plant biology that focuses on mechanisms, model systems and is not directed at a specific crop will be in Botany and Plant Pathology; some faculty may move in and out of the department
- plant sciences is one of 10 initiatives selected by new President; this will include 10 new faculty positions, some will likely end up in Botany and Plant Pathology
- this initiative will also upgrade facilities both in academic departments as well as for field research
- Purdue likely to introduce some type of new budget model (resource centered management)

North Dakota State, Jack Rasmussen

- 17 faculty, 7 assistants, 5 associates, 5 full professors

- nematologist position being hired
- 48 grad students, split equally between MS and PhD
- grad tuition waivers are paid by the university, in part to increase number of PhD students
- 30-40 technical staff
- no undergrad program
- introductory plant pathology is the entry level class they teach, required by at least 3 majors, enrollment capped at 80
- just completed a 5 year review
- new research greenhouse complex almost completed
- working to endow potato pathology position; if the university can raise 2/3, state will provide remaining 1/3, for a total endowment of \$10m

Iowa State, Thomas Bauman

- 18 faculty, 13 profs, 1 ass, 2 ARS adjuncts
- 1 opening, systems biology of plant-pathogen interactions
- financial challenges in the college, in part because of the RCM budget model introduced 5 years ago, continuously strapped for cash
- 56 staff members
- 57 grad students, 26 are not plant pathology students but come through other programs such as genetics, sustainable ag, plant biology, bioinformatics, molecular and cellular biology
- plant path grad students are split equally between MS and PhD
- revising their grad curriculum, will require a new lab class on plant pathology methodologies
- low enrollments in some classes
- co-administer microbiology undergrad program with animal science, now have about 120 majors
- renovated a new teaching lab space, added a new lecturer position
- good budget news for the university overall
- salary increases last year and next
- 3 people are committed to retiring, likely more in the near future
- strategic plan for future hiring decisions is being finalized
- university is planning to add more space through the biosciences initiative, \$2m for planning, new buildings will require external, non-state funding
- the plan is that the plant pathology department will move into the new building along with some other life sciences people

Nebraska, Jim Steadman

- 8 full professors, 3 associate profs, 1 assistant prof, plus some others
- 1 search under way in cropping systems disease management
- 3 new faculty to start later this year, partly through the Plant Science Innovation Center

- Doctor of Plant Health program is growing and helping to fill some of the courses that are taught by the department

Minnesota, Jim Bradeen

- Carol Ishimaru has returned to research and teaching duties and is doing well
- Four new positions - fungal vector biologist, fungal taxonomist, extension-research positions in turf pathology, and horticulture and greenhouse diseases, and one non-tenure track position in mycotoxicology, 1 new teaching position that will also supervise the diagnostic clinic, with the aim to incorporate the clinic more into teaching
- 17 state funded faculty, 9 adjuncts, mainly ARS
- about 25 grad students, number is stable
- grad students cost a total of about \$45k per year
- 1 new faculty search is underway in sugar beet disease research and extension
- new interim Dean has been an advocate for the department
- new plant related undergrad majors, with tracks that may bring more undergrad students into the department
- new building for microbial sciences to be shared by 3 colleges, funding to be requested from the state legislature
- the Stakman/Borlaug cereal rust center is looking to rebrand as a sustainable ag center
- BSL3 greenhouse is available for cooperative research
- EMMY for documentary on wheat rust, copies of the DVD were distributed

Ohio State, Terry Niblack

- 3 asst, 3 assoc, 8 professors, one who will retire, 2 ARS adjuncts
- request to share strategic plans
- new OSU President
- new Ag Dean, Bruce McPheron
- 1 to 3% budget cut for several years
- 2 new assistant profs have started, one new position just approved
- MPH, masters of plant health management, is growing quickly, 10 current students, 3 new associateships are supported by extension
- All students in PhD automatically get a MS once they pass their written PhD candidacy exam
- 18 undergrad students in plant pathology major
- new facilities in 10-15 yrs, grand plan is to move all of the ag campus to the other side of the river

Chair Niblack and local organizer Allen were thanked for organizing the meeting and we adjourned at 12 noon on Wednesday, February 5, 2013.