

The Brookhaven Council is a group of tenured scientists elected by the scientific staff that advises and makes recommendations to the Director about the Laboratory policies affecting the scientific staff. The Council is particularly concerned with the maintenance of an atmosphere conducive to excellence in scientific research at BNL. The term of this year's Council coincided with the first year of the Laboratory's new director, Dr. Praveen Chaudhari. A working relationship was established with Dr. Chaudhari and he asked the Council for advice on a number of issues.

This Commentary is a summary of the activities of 2003-2004 Brookhaven Council.

Meetings with the Director

The Council met with Dr. Chaudhari immediately after he assumed the Directorship of Brookhaven National Laboratory on April 1, 2003. We welcomed him to Brookhaven and described to him the role of the Council. It was agreed to that the Chair and Secretary of the Council would meet with the Director following the Council's monthly meetings to discuss issues that were brought up with the Council and other issues and concerns of the scientific staff. Dr. Chaudhari stated that he intends to use the Council for advice and assessments on various issues. He immediately asked the Council for an assessment of the quality of research in the scientific departments relative to other national laboratories and universities. He also asked us to identify the top two researchers in each discipline and what would be required to recruit them to BNL. A subjective study was done within each department and a report was submitted to the Director. Dr. Chaudhari later issued a second challenge to the Council that generated intense debate and interaction with the Director: "What action would the Council recommend to terminate some tenure appointments, especially those that are perceived to be under-performing?" The Council responded with a memo emphasizing the importance of tenure at BNL and the need for fairness and objectivity in formulating any new policies in this area.

Director's Interview with the Press

The Council and many of the scientific staff were disturbed by statements the Director made in an interview with the NY Times published on Oct. 23, 2003. Many felt that the Director had insulted the Lab by referring to the perception that BNL is where "second class science was being done" and that BNL has the "potential to become one of the foremost laboratories in the world" and "can be molded to do superb science". The Council drafted a response to the Director, which was distributed to the entire scientific staff, expressing its displeasure that he didn't refute these perceptions and asked him to clarify his position. In his Monday Memo of November 3, 2003 the Director clarified his comments to the Times interviewer.

Tenure Cases

The most important activity of the Council is to perform a comprehensive review of each tenure case that is recommended by the Associate Laboratory Directors, and report to the Director. This year there were 7 cases that dominated the Council's agenda for nearly 5 months. The Director established a new criterion for tenure in that he expects one member of the BSA Science and Technology Steering Committee would be willing to recommend the candidate for tenure at his/her University. The Director excluded Stony Brook since it is part of BSA. The Council attended the July, 2003 meeting of the S&T Committee to provide clarification of the Council's procedures in the tenure reviews.

Ombudsmen

Another important responsibility of the Council is to review termination of any continuing appointments for reasons of financial exigency or major program change. Two cases occurred this year where scientists with continuing appointments were being terminated for reasons of financial exigencies. In one case, the chronology was well documented and the Council concluded that BNL/BSA worked assiduously to protect the interests of the employee. Confusion as to the relation between the notice of termination date and beginning of severance pay was clarified and the Scientific Staff Manual will be updated with this clarification. The Council reviewed the case of another employee who was informed that he was being terminated due to financial exigency. The Council found that this case was not a straightforward “financial exigency” case. The Director appointed a committee to review the case and the individual’s termination date was suspended pending the outcome of the review. As a result of the committee’s investigation, another position for the employee was found at the laboratory.

Presentations to the Council

Several members of the BNL management made presentations to the Council. Bob Hwang, the director of BNL’s new Center for Functional Nanomaterials gave an overview of the new Center. There was considerable discussion concerning the scientific leadership of the Center, impediments to cross-department work at BNL, and importance of attracting a strong user community. Brian Sack, the ALD for Finance, presented a Government Agency and Inter-Lab comparison in regard to total employment, budget, overhead, etc. He compared DOE with other agencies and BNL vs other DOE labs. Michael Goldman, the lab attorney, discussed the legal meaning of tenure at Brookhaven. Recently, Robert Kelly, of HR, discussed the BNL salary structure and its relationships to national averages and compared it to other DOE laboratories.

LDRD

The Council’s participation in evaluating the LDRD applications was expanded from two members to 4 members with one representative from each directorate, HE/NP, BES, Life Sciences, and EENS.

Goldhaber Fellows

The Council has a subcommittee that serves on the Selection Committee of the Goldhaber fellows. This year (FY03) the Council was informed that there would be no awarding of Goldhaber Fellows because of a quota imposed by the financial limitations. However, it was learned that the Directorate awarded a Goldhaber Fellow violating the accepted procedure. A memo was sent to the Director protesting this violation and requesting that it not impact the number of future Goldhaber Fellows.

Your involvement in BNL Council

The BNL Council tries to identify issues that are important to the scientific staff. It is important that the scientific staff bring items of concern to the BNL Council. To learn more about the BNL Council, or to identify your department or division representatives, please see link: <http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/Admin/council.html>

Steve Shapiro, Chair, BNL Council (2003-2004)