

Brookhaven Council Commentary 2006

The BNL Council represents the scientific staff and reports to the laboratory director. General goals are to continue to assist in making and keeping BNL an excellent place to do science and help it to become better where possible. The Council, which is composed of representatives elected from the tenured staff, meets monthly. This is a summary of the Council's activities in 2005-2006.

Tenure Cases

Six tenure cases were brought before the Council. As a guideline for the tenure review, a successful candidate for tenure at BNL will have achievements and/or have demonstrated leadership and creativity in their scientific or technical field equivalent to the scientists who achieve similar recognition at the best research organizations and institutes worldwide. In each case Council members examined detailed written case files and heard oral presentations by department representatives (usually chairs). Often there was vigorous discussion within the Council as well as questions to and discussion with departmental representatives. Then, in each case, the Council prepared a written report and recommendation to the director, including the results of a vote by secret ballot.

Ombudsmen

Another responsibility of the Council is to review termination of any scientific staff appointments for reasons of financial exigency or major program change, should the terminated staff member seek such a review. No cases were referred to the Council this year, which may be a good result of due care by the laboratory management.

Establishment of Emeritus Position

Last year the Council recommended to the Director the establishment of an Emeritus Position. The title could be conferred upon retired staff that held the rank of tenured or continuing scientist/engineer during active service to the Laboratory. This year laboratory management expressed interest in this plan and suggested changes. After debate reflecting a wide range of opinion, the Council accepted most changes, with some modifications. Laboratory management has proceeded to establish this position.

BNL Training

Through comments from BNL staff and through their own experience Council members were aware that staff spend substantial time on mandated training. Because staff evaluate the quality of that training to vary from effective to poorly effective and burdensome, even infuriating, Council found widespread belief that training too often falls short of achieving its intended benefits, and that it could be improved. Conversations with Beth Schwaner of the Training and Qualification Program Office enabled understanding that they have brought the laboratory a long way, from a non-compliant to a coordinated and functioning program. She also explained that much training is DOE mandated and

must sometimes be put in place with little time to develop good training materials. Council recommendations included: Beta testing of all new courses, review and upgrade of existing courses, directed by a new laboratory committee and possible consolidation of training with other National Laboratories. The Council year closed with this still a work in progress. An evaluation process was proposed by director Praveen Chaudhari. This process had not yet begun by the close of the Council year in Feb. 2006, but was expected to continue with the new director and new Council.

Goldhaber Fellows

Each year the Council appoints representatives to a committee with Lenny Newman that advise on the Selection Committee of Goldhaber fellows. This year three Council members participated in the selection process that led to the awarding of the fellowships.

LDRD

Each year the Council appoints a subcommittee that serves on the Selection Committee Laboratory Directed Research grants. In this year, like last, that role is advisory; ALD's have the final say. The Council appreciates director Chaudhari's reason for this change from earlier practice, but continues to feel that better scientific decisions are made with real, binding input from scientific staff.

Council Representation

The Council periodically reviews its representation from various departments and divisions. This year the Council considered a suggestion from the directorate to broaden representation by establishing "at-large" members. The Council hoped that such a plan might mitigate the underrepresentation of some groups, such as persons in very small departments. But solutions to the questions of how to conduct elections and how persons would connect to at large representatives were not evident. To keep roughly proportional representation one member was added to the Council. While an increase in size is not always a wise solution, it was a practical one at that time. Because of recent re-organization at the Laboratory, further realignments on the Council may be considered.

Guidelines for Scientific Staff Appointments

In the interest of transparency, the Council recommended to the BNL Director that the guidelines for the various scientific staff appointments (including tenure appointments) should be posted prominently on the Web, for anyone to see. This recommendation was accepted and implemented. Guidelines pertaining to continuing, tenure, senior, and emeritus appointments are all posted on the SBMS Web site and links to these are now posted on the Council Web site, <http://www.bnl.gov/bnlweb/Admin/council.asp>.

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.asp>

John R. Miller
Chair
BNL Council (2005-2006)