

Dean's Council (DC)

June 18, 2007

Minutes

Present: Dr. Albertsen, Dr. Ford, Dr. Garibaldi, Mr. Gillon, Dr. Lalande, Dr. Pappano, Dr. Simon, Dr. Weber

Excused: Dr. Arnold, Dr. Deckers, Dr. Gould, Dr. Jacob, Dr. Kenny, Dr. Koeppen

The meeting was called to order at 3:35 p.m. In Dr. Koeppen's absence, Dr. Garibaldi chaired the meeting.

1. The minutes of the May 21, 2007 meeting were unanimously approved.
2. Lions Vision Center Review

Dr. Garibaldi explained the procedure for today's meeting. Dr. O'Rourke, Director of the Lions Vision Center, will meet with the DC first. Drs. Albert and Wikel, members of the review team, will then join the meeting. After a period of questions and discussion, Dr. O'Rourke will be recused, and the DC will then meet with the team members alone.

Dr. O'Rourke thought the review report was thorough and fair. He explained that the Lions Vision Center was established in 1998 by the Dean. Two initial aims of the Center were financial stability and recruiting faculty invested in the areas of interest of the Center, which are microvascular research and immunology as they relate to eye diseases. Funding from the Lions, which totals approximately \$50,000 per year, supports these core research fields. The core mission has worked well in recruiting faculty and maintaining financial stability. Currently, the Center has three five year grants among its nine members. He noted that UHC and Yale receive the same amount of funding from the Lions, but there is no overlap of eye research projects at either institution. In the future, Dr. O'Rourke hopes to build the relationship with the Lions organization and preserve the funding stream. He would also like to turn direction of the Center over to Dr. Cone. He also noted his desire to reach out more to clinical ophthalmology, such as retinal imaging, but has not yet been successful in that area. He also noted the Lions' desire to convene an Advisory Board for Vision Research.

One of the weaknesses mentioned in the report is the lack of an ophthalmology residency or fellowship program. Dr. O'Rourke was asked whether he believed there should be one. He noted that this was tried many years ago, but the Hartford community is competitive and densely served by practicing ophthalmologists. However, if a program was to be instituted, he would prefer a fellowship. When asked if the Center would be better served if it more closely collaborated with vascular biology, Dr. O'Rourke indicated that he believes it should remain in the Department of Immunology. He was asked for his thoughts regarding the comment in the report that the Lions Vision Center was more an "interest group" than a true center. He noted that the Center faculty come from very diverse departments and centers. He also feels the Bylaws are too strictly drawn regarding centers and believes there must be freedom to cross departmental lines and interact with others.

Drs. Wikel and Albert (by phone) then joined the meeting. Dr. Wikel reviewed some of the points made in the report, which include the following. The Lions Vision Center is a body of vision-related research being conducted within the institution that is of high quality and provides a focus of opportunity to be developed over time. Productive collaboration exists among the faculty, but the Center does not provide a central organizational structure, and such interactions would be expected to occur among the faculty whether or not the Center existed. However, Dr. O'Rourke has encouraged these interactions over the years. A weakness noted was the lack of participation from the three clinical ophthalmologists in the institution. The review team felt the addition of a new retina specialist could become important relative to the future clinical direction of the Center. Significant opportunities exist to make the Center a catalyst for growth, innovation, and clinical outreach that will be beneficial to the interacting scientists and the Lions. Lack of extended interactions among Center faculty, which occur on an ad hoc basis, was identified as a problem. However, Drs. O'Rourke and Cone maintain a very active collaboration, and the reviewers were impressed with Drs. Sarfarazi and Schenkman's research collaborations. Although funding provided by the Lions is modest, Dr. Wikel does think there is an opportunity for additional funding per their conversation with Mr. Storms, the Past Lions International Foundation Director. They felt that creation of an Advisory Committee could be very valuable and that an individual from the National Eye Institute should serve on the committee. In addition, creation of a seminar series with outside speakers would strengthen the interactions among Center faculty. Also, to secure the future of the Center, they noted the need to groom the next director.

Before leaving the meeting, Dr. O'Rourke stated that because of his clinical background, he feels he should be the liaison between the Lions organization and the Vision Center. He again noted the two main goals of the Center -- to improve interaction among the scientists and to retain funding from the Lions. He also reiterated his desire to remain in the Immunology Department, although Neuroscience and Vascular Biology are suitable alternatives. It was noted that there appears to be two different visions for the Center, i.e. to move the Center in a clinical direction or remain as it currently functions, primarily as a research center. Dr. O'Rourke believes the clinical arm will evolve into an essential part of the Lions Center but did not know the time frame. However, some expressed doubt that the clinical ophthalmologists would become involved in research activities due to lack of time and interest.

Dr. O'Rourke then left the meeting. Dr. Albert concurred with Dr. Wikel's summary of the review team's findings. The need for organizational structure and leadership to help the Center evolve from an interest group into a true center was noted. It was again noted that the activities occurring within the Center would continue to occur if the Center did not exist; the Center structure has not impacted organization, focus, or support in that regard. It was further noted that the Lions organization, which is committed to vision research, is very pleased with their relationship with UConn and have made it clear that they would like the relationship to continue. The reviewers also got the impression that amount of funding received from the Lions might be increased relative to a broader spectrum of activities.

The DC agreed that the review report was excellent and well done. They unanimously agreed that the Center should continue to function as it currently does. They further recommended that the activities of the Center be enhanced by the creation of seminar series, regional workshops, etc. The need for succession planning was also noted.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Monday, July 16, from 3:30-5 p.m. in the Walker Academic Affairs Conference Room, AG-070.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn Donatelli