

# QoL Meeting Minutes

Chaired by John Rearick (rearick@fas.harvard.edu) and  
Patrick Charbonneau (pcharbon@fas.harvard.edu)  
in Mb-217

January 21th, 2005 at 12h

## 1 Psychological Management Update

The psychological management firm has been hired and was given the graduate survey results. RHR International will be conducting more inquiries during the semester which will probably involve students and faculty. Preliminary recommendations should be made throughout their evaluation process. A final report is expected by the end of the 2004-05 academic year. This should give enough time to act upon some of the suggestions for the following year.

## 2 Graduate Course Offering

With the help of the survey results, it was assessed that the amount and variety of graduate level classes in CCB is unsatisfying to many. This is true for the physical chemistry students especially, but also for synthetic and chemical biology students. The recent announcement of the further reduction of the amount of classes offered in these last two subfields led to some students to worry.

Prof. Friend and Prof. Myers stated that many faculty members were also displeased with the state of affairs. However, they explained that having faculty teach more at this point would directly lead to a reduction in contact time with their advisees. Their long-term solution is to increase the number of faculty members in the department. This is limited by many factors, which include a limitation in amount of laboratory space available.

According to the CCB chair, the slow decrease of course offering through the last decade or so is to be blamed on retirements and FAS sabbatical rule changes, both of which reduced the quantity of faculty members available for teaching. A more recent cause would be related to be the transformation of the course offering in the core, which results in fewer faculty being available to teach traditional chemistry courses. Finally, the amount of time devoted to out-of-university activities would be non-relevant to this issue.

The yearly teaching load  $L$  of a CCB faculty member was explained to scale with the log of the number of students in a class  $N_s$  and with the inverse to the

number of faculty members teaching it  $N_f$  a given class.

$$L \sim \frac{\ln N_s}{N_f} \quad (1)$$

This system was not explicitly compared with other top departments in the country, but was judged by the faculty to lead to a similar teaching load.

A temporary solution of hiring lecturers for the coming semesters to address part of the problem was judged impossible. The higher administrative levels of FAS would not allow such a thing for two main factors. First, they expressed worry about quality of teaching done this way. Second, what is known as the *Dartmouth factor* in which sub-par teaching performed by a visiting faculty member makes it difficult for the university to defend temporary hiring.

A longer term solution of hiring non-tenured teaching faculty members was also rejected. This is considered inappropriate at all levels of the administration, since it would create a hierarchy in a given department, which is seen by them as hurtful to the collegiality relations. Other schools are known to use this system with apparent success, but no clear parallels could be drawn.

Finally, hiring post-doctoral fellows for the sole purpose of teaching or with a dual research/teaching mandate is seen as a viable option. Such creative considerations are seen as the only solution in the short term. MIT is known to have teaching positions of that sort.

A list of classes to prioritize was made. For organic/biological chemistry, 206, 215, and 270 are considered essential for a minimal graduate education. For physical chemistry, 242 and graduate level statistical mechanics (disappeared) are considered a minimal offering.

Questions were made about the availability of higher persons to whom we could plead a case for more graduate level teaching. The Visiting Committee and GSAS Dean Peter Ellison were mentioned as possible resources.

### 3 Advising/Multi-Advising System

With the help of the graduate student survey, various criteria were derived as being necessary for a successful multi-advisor system to be in place. It must

- involve more than one advisor;
- be mandatory for all students and all faculty members;
- be effective (i.e. should have a genuine impact on one's graduation);
- be useful (i.e. should be an opportunity for productive discussions);
- be agreed by all faculty members.

The importance of the mandatory aspects was outlined as to be the only way for it to be effective, useful, and to provide a reasonable diversity of available

advisors. However, this would greatly reduce the possibility of getting agreement across the CCB faculty.

Concerns about the student apathy on this issues were suggested as coming from a series of frustrating experiences where students did not manage to form/meet PDACs. These have lead to a significant decrease in the participation rate in these committees. All agreed that changes are necessary to the current system to improve the situation.

The new oral exam system for the organic chemistry students is seen as right step in that direction and could be used as a stepping stone.

## 4 New QoL Co-Chair/Secretary

Starting in March 2005, Melissa Grachan a second-year graduate student from the Jacobsen group will be the new QoL co-chair. Congratulation to her for the mandate.

Patrick Charbonneau, who is stepping down as co-chair, will become the secretary of the organization. In this title he will undertake the responsibility of communicating information more effectively to CCB graduate students, notably through the QoL website.

## 5 Next Career Seminars

The next QoL Career Seminars were announced.

On February 17, Eric Yisroel Brumer, formerly from the Reichman and the Shakhnovich groups, AAAS fellow to the Department of Homeland Security, will come and talk about his experience.

On March 1, Jeffrey Tong, formerly from the Schreiber lab will come and talk about his consulting work.

The project of having a joint HWIC/QoL forum on careers in public policy had to be abandoned for this year, due to the difficulties encountered in synchronizing and recruiting speakers.

## 6 Setup Discussion Groups

In the spirit of what was done with Prof. Knowles last year, discussion groups for the Spring semester are in the workings. Prof. Holm was invited to give one and his final decision should be known in the coming week. Other names were suggested and contacts will soon be initiated.

Meeting adjourned at 13h10.

Notes taken by Patrick Charbonneau (pcharbon@fas.harvard.edu)