Science and Math Brown Bag

Meeting notes

11/9/16

Present: Pat Babington, Matt Beekley, Susanne Biehle, Steven Bogarts, Jeff Hansen, Mary Kertzman, Selma Poturovic, Pam Propsom, Dave Roberts, Jackie Roberts, Brian Wright

IUSE grants. Reminder about IUSE course reform deadline: Dec. 2

Faculty-Student Summer Research. There seems to be a decline in the number of faculty offering summer research opportunities for students. We discussed potential challenges to offering these opportunities:

--Last year faculty had their stipend docked if they took a week off (even if it was to attend a professional conference or a workshop)

--Are there enough resources for the research materials?

--Perception that fewer faculty are putting in proposals for SRF students. Is the new model working well for the program? Now students take the research course in their sophomore year: how is that going? There may be more of an emphasis on matching students with their major rather than just giving them some sort of research experience. Prerequisite courses for students; sometimes sophomores are not adequately prepared for the type of real research the faculty member wants to do.

--Are faculty getting appropriate teaching credit for sponsoring student research, especially during the semester?

--Summer stipend for faculty has not increased in a long time

--Amount of summer money for students doesn’t make it worthwhile for those who need to make money (especially after taxes and if they have to pay for housing and meals) or who have attractive offers elsewhere. They could make more working a regular job over the summer. This is especially an issue if we are trying to assist traditionally underserved students.

--Change in public school calendar (less time in the summer for a faculty member to have a summer vacation). Work-life balance. Could there be options for multiple faculty members to share and supervise students so that faculty could have some vacation? Could there be more flexibility?

--Timing. The deadline to commit to a student is rather early and maybe faculty don’t have a fully formulated idea yet or haven’t decided how they want to spend the summer. Could there be multiple rounds of applications? Also awkward for students who are trying to make summer plans but can’t commit until they know whether the faculty-student research proposal has been accepted.

--Some faculty want to have a longer commitment from students to continue the research, not just over the summer.

--Faculty are getting more senior and if they are fully tenured they may not be as motivated to sponsor student research. This is usually more of a service to the students than a benefit to faculty members’ genuine, on-going research program.

--Cost. Need money to buy materials and there is not sufficient cash in departmental budgets.

--In small departments, sometimes the student might be the “only one” and feel isolated, dreary.

--How does the institution view research with students? Is it teaching (because students often slow down the process)? Service? Research?

Suggestions for improvement?

--Greater flexibility in structuring the summer session and flexibility in departments defining it (as service or teaching or research)

--Need a more organized process for knowing which faculty are sponsoring research, how to direct students to them

--Has to be something tangible for faculty to make research with students worth it (e.g., financial, teaching credit or reassigned time)

--Rotations in departments about who sponsors students so that faculty don’t get burned out.

--Departments could guarantee that they’re going to take X number of students, but then they need to have assured funds for the research.

--Need clarity from the institution regarding how it views faculty-student research. What is the purpose and value?

--Building more of a cohort or sense of community among those doing summer research, among both students and faculty, even knowing who all is doing research

--Need to talk to SRF about what they’re doing and how well it’s working; sense that it is exclusive and those doing research who aren’t in SRF aren’t as good.

**Themes regarding challenges in summer student-faculty research**

***Money***.

Faculty compensation. The stipend to faculty for sponsoring summer research has not increased, perhaps in 20 years.

Student compensation. The stipend for students has also not increased, while housing and meal costs have, and therefore students’ “take home pay” has actually declined. In addition, the compensation may not be attractive enough to compete with other summer job options that might pay considerably more, especially for those who really may need the money (e.g., underserved students).

Cost of materials. For some departments, the money for equipment/materials is not sufficient to cover the costs of conducting the research.

***Flexibility***.

Calendar is currently rigid and this makes it hard for faculty to sponsor students and attend conferences, workshops, or to have a much needed summer vacation.

Early deadline for submitting FDC Student-Faculty Summer Research proposals; oftentimes neither faculty nor students really know what they want to do over the summer in February. Could there be multiple rounds of applications?

Could faculty “share” students or have teams of faculty working with teams of students?

***Equity and incentives***.

How does the university view student-faculty research? Is it research (if so, students often slow down genuine research)? Is it teaching (if so, how is it compensated and valued)? Is it service (if so, how is it compensated and valued)?

Senior faculty who are fully tenured may have little incentive to sponsor student-faculty research, either during the summer or semester, and therefore the burden falls on junior faculty and there are fewer and fewer of them.

***Community***.

Summer student researchers may be the only one in their department. How do we create more community?

Potential elitism of SRF. How can all summer research students be better integrated into a community?

**Suggestions for improvement/questions for continued discussion with administration & FDC**

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