



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MEDICINE

L. Trevor Young, MD PhD FRCPC

Dean

Vice-Provost, Relations with Health Care Institutions

March 16, 2015

Professor Sioban Nelson, PhD
Vice-Provost, Academic Programs
University of Toronto
Simcoe Hall, Room 225
27 Kings College Circle
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1

Dear Sioban,

I am responding to your request for a follow-up report to the 2012 review of the Department of Biochemistry in the Faculty of Medicine. This report was created in collaboration with the current Chair of Biochemistry, Professor Justin Nodwell. While the Department was generally viewed at that time as being in a very strong position in terms of both research and teaching, three areas of potential concern were identified. These were:

- 1. Graduate Times-to-Completion**
- 2. Budget**
- 3. Mid- and Long-Term Strategic Vision**

I will address the specific initiatives that have been implemented to deal with each concern since 2012:

- 1. Graduate Times-to-Completion**

As of July 1, 2014, Dr. Angus McQuibban took over as Associate Chair for Graduate Education. He is charged with enhancing the Department's graduate recruitment and training over his 5-year term. Targets are to increase the number of external scholarships held by students (through NSERC, CIHR, and Disease funding agencies) by a steady state of 10%. In addition the Department aims to reduce times to completion by ~3-6 months at the PhD level and to limit the duration of MSc students to 24-26 months. It has become apparent that this will require a shift in thinking on the part of both faculty and students. As an initial step in this direction, Dr. McQuibban is reviewing the frequency of graduate supervisory committee meetings and ensuring compliance with existing rules for PhD students and enhancing the supervisory oversight of master's students. For example, once these new provisions are approved, MSc-level students will be required to have three committee meetings prior to receiving permission to write their thesis or attempt the transfer exam.

2. Budget

As of 1 October 2014 the financial position of the Department had improved substantially, largely due to faculty retirements and strategic cuts to our spending. At that time, the Department forecasted a balanced budget all the way through to 2018. However projected central budget cuts to basic science departments have changed this picture somewhat. This has stirred the Chair and faculty to initiate several significant fundraising initiatives to address the projected deficit. Plans for generating new revenue include:

Online Courses

The Department's online courses will also be expanded to American universities. The Chair and faculty are contemplating additional online courses, perhaps as a collaborative effort with the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology that could be marketed to private sector interests and promoted to undergraduate students at the U of T and at other universities seeking to acquire requisite courses for professional programs.

New "3/2" Program in Biochemistry

The Department is exploring mechanisms for enhancing its offerings in undergraduate education. One possibility is the creation of a 'professionalized' program that bridges a strong theoretical background in biochemistry, a defined term, non-stipend MSc, and opportunities for real-world professional development. Some biochemistry course work would be scaled back to make way for courses in project management (Rotman) and for private sector internships (MaRS). The Department has established relationships with Trin One and Vic One as recruiting vehicles and anticipates that this would take 25 students/annum. The anticipated launch date is September 2017 with income through graduate expansion coming in 2019.

Advancement

The Chair is currently working on several high-profile awards for a senior faculty (Gairdner initially). The publicity from such an award could help attract an endowed Chair for this individual. The Department has also expanded the role of one of the Department's part-time employees; some of the additional time will now be spent on alumni engagement and fundraising.

3. Mid- to Long-Term Strategic Vision

NEW POSITION: Associate Chair for Research and Collaborations

As of July 1, 2015 Dr. Trevor Moraes will take on the role of Associate Chair for Research and Collaborations. This position is intended to keep the members of the Department up to date on funding opportunities, particularly those that are independent of NSERC, CIHR, Heart & Stroke and other well-known (and currently underfunded) funding bodies. He is currently running a twice monthly meeting of all Departmental faculty that serves many functions, including the opportunity to use the time as 'pitch sessions' for grant proposals. He has also used these meetings to invite a number of relevant people to present new opportunities to faculty.

Faculty Expansion 2015-18

At present the Department is below its traditional faculty strength in the core Department and this short fall will grow with the retirements of five faculty members in the next 4 years. The Department will recruit two new faculty members, aligned with the Centre for Collaborative Drug Research (CCDR) where there are likely to be considerable funding opportunities in the coming years. These will be chemical biologists addressing questions in either neuroscience or infectious disease (again aligned with the mandate of the CCDR). Private sector experience would be an asset in both cases. In addition, these faculty members will participate in the development and execution of our planned undergraduate/graduate professional biochemistry program. The Department plans to advertise these positions in fall 2015 with a July 2016 start date. The Department will continue expanding through status-only appointments in the hospitals and institutes. In 2013-15 the Department made five such appointments. In addition there were two new recruitments at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) who are now primaries in Biochemistry. Current plans for expansion include nine scientists at SickKids and one to two new recruitments at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

I believe this adequately addresses the issues identified by the 2012 review of the Department of Biochemistry. Please let me know if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,



L. Trevor Young, MD, PhD, FRCPC
Dean, Faculty of Medicine
Vice-Provost, Relations with Health Care Institutions

cc: Allan Kaplan, Vice-Dean, Graduate and Life Sciences Education, Faculty of Medicine
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