

Chandra's Notes from the LAPA meeting with Director Anastasio on 3/6/07

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 AM. Jason gave a brief intro about LAPA, and presented Director Mike with his Honorary Membership. Michael presented a summary of the issues raised at last year's meeting. The remainder of the time was spent discussing questions and concerns. The following notes are direct quotations or paraphrasing of comments by Director Mike.

Postdocs are "the lifeblood and future of the Lab". LANL is an isolated place (especially compared to Livermore), so we need mechanisms to attract postdocs to come work here.

As Terry Wallace noted in the all-hand meeting, about half of the Lab's new hires are postdoc conversions, and that's "the way it should be". Some groups want to hire "someone with 15 years' experience" who can immediately run an entire project, but we shouldn't encourage that.

Budget concerns are affecting the hiring process at all levels, so if the Lab is going to be hiring fewer people in general, we should hire fewer postdocs so that they don't have false expectations of being converted. The Lab as a whole will need to figure out "how can we get more done with the same amount of money".

Director Mike is working on specific criteria for postdoc conversions, which will be rolled up to the AD level. The entire Lab needs an "integrated view" of staffing needs.

Regarding procurement, "the quality of the [procurement] organization is not what we'd like". DOE doesn't have confidence in our system, so we're improving it by increasing training and implementing the DPR system.

Director Mike has been "extremely frustrated with the bureaucracy" at the Lab. He's looking at revamping the entire policy and procedure system, although he was unsure when and how that would take place. In order to improve things, we need "leadership from the top and involvement from the bottom".

LAPA as an organization should come up with a few high-priority issues, and Director Mike will try to address them. He seemed very receptive to the idea of streamlining training plans.

In response to the question of what is going to get better in 1-2 years, Director Mike has a list of approximately 18 things that will be worked on in that timeframe. He'd "like to make the Lab work better", and there are some issues that will be addressed in the next few months. The 1-2 year timeframe (from the LANS transition in June '06) is an estimate of the time required to recoup the costs associated with becoming a private enterprise by improving efficiency.

In response to a question about behind-the-fence areas, Director Mike thinks that we need a “physical strategy for the site”, not just for individual buildings. He’d like to see a master plan that addresses building security, parking, and pedestrian access.

Regarding funding issues, the Agnew Fellowship issues have already been taken care of, Director Mike stated that we need to “either turn them off or fund them”, and future Agnews will be fully funded. For other postdocs, guaranteed funding for two years is not likely, since “Congress funds once a year” and that funding can be easily zeroed out.

LAPA should be an organization that postdocs can take their concerns, in addition to their supervisors, group leaders, and the STE office (Terry Wallace). LAPA should collect “lessons learned” from negative postdoc experiences in order to help future postdocs. It is group-leader level managers who should be holding mentors accountable for their dealings with postdocs as part of the mentor’s performance evaluation. However, LAPA should collect our own information, including postdoc exit interviews. If there are concerns, we should be able to take them to group leaders or the STE office.

LAPA needs to decide on “two or three simple things” that are of concern, and present them to Director Mike. He suggested including training plans that are “ready when you walk in the door” as a good thing to start with.

Getting converted to a TSM is “meant to be hard”, since the Lab wants to hire the highest-quality people. However, one of the Lab’s obligations in bringing postdocs in is to help them get another job – either at the Lab or elsewhere. The idea of having a career fair was well-received.

Director Mike is looking at what are the right structures for getting things done. One of the proposed changes is moving oversight of work done by contractors (i.e. KSL) under the Lab’s structures.