

The Ohio State Biochemistry Program (OSBP) Present and Future

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There are four life science Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs (IGPs). They are

- Biophysics
- The Ohio State Biochemistry Program (OSBP)
- Molecular Cellular and Developmental Biology (MCDB)
- Neuroscience

Each IGP has a director and an administrative assistant. The directors report to the Council of Life Science Deans which are the deans of 8 colleges. The council is convened by Matt Platz and controls the budgets of the 4 IGPs. The council defines the number of first year students to be admitted by the 4 IGPs. The directors work together to distribute the number of offer made per program each year. Each IGP first year student is supported by a non teaching fellowship. Students beyond the first year are supported either by RA's or TA's.

The total expenses of the 4 IGPs are (a) a month of summer salary of the director and an administrative attachment, (b) the salary of the administrative assistant,(c) office supplies and (d) fellowships for first year students. There is some PBA (recurring funds) and cash (one time funds) associated with the program to offset the costs. The cash is running out (for arcane reasons related to budget restructuring) and will be exhausted after the next fiscal year (FY10). The total net IGP costs are 1551k in FY09 and are expected to increase 1739k in FY10 and jump to 2083k in FY11 after the cash runs out. A spreadsheet is attached.

The net costs are partitioned to the colleges in proportion to the number of beyond the first year students working for faculty in their college. For example, if CBS has 25% of the beyond the first year students in the 4 IGPs then it pays 25% of the net cost. This year MPS is paying 191k to support the 4 IGPs due to 12.4 Biophysics students beyond the first year and 20.5 OSBP students. No neuroscience or MCDB students currently work with MPS faculty. This year (FY09) the CBS bill is 285k. There are currently 22.5 OSBP students working with CBS faculty. The partial numbers result from the fact that some OSBP faculty have split appointments with two or more colleges.

Both MPS and CBS pay the IGP bill directly, it does not come out of a department budget. In other words, each college taxes each of its 6 units. In the case of MPS this means that 6 unit operating budgets were reduced by a total of 185k in FY09. Since most MPS IGP students are in chemistry the other 5 MPS units are subsidizing a program which provides them no benefit. There are other MPS supported programs that are of no benefit to chemistry. Asking the provost to pick up the tab is not a real solution as the provost would pay for it and a multitude of other programs by taxing college budgets which

would then cut unit budgets. The basic funding problem of the IGPs is not the cost of the programs or the funding model. In my opinion, the basic problem is that most deans and some chairs value disciplinary programs more highly than interdisciplinary programs and prefer to fund the former at the expense of the latter.

This prejudice seems to be shared by the faculty. Over half of the 100 plus OSBP faculty are inactive. IGP Directors are frustrated because they have no leverage on faculty to get them to work to support the program. Faculty want access to a pool of students but because the faculty/student ratio is large individual faculty do not think there will be a correlation between their work and recruiting a student to their laboratory. Furthermore, faculty feel that their work for an IGP will not be rewarded by their chair and dean at salary review time which further dampens the enthusiasm to contribute to the program by placing recruiting calls, serving on student committees, IGP committees and attending annual meetings and seminars.

Last year the Council of Life Science Deans recommended that the 4 programs be combined to go from 4 administrative assistants to one and 4 summer salaries reduced to one, and to use some of the savings to hire a graduate student recruiter. That proposal met with fierce faculty opposition. The future of the 4 IGPs is part of the puzzle being considered by the Life Science task Force on Doctoral Education.

There are currently 24 OSBP students working with faculty in the Department of Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB) in the College of Medicine. Neither MCB nor Biochemistry has its own unit based doctoral programs. Both programs were eliminated in the 1990s by the Board of Regents. Politically, there is zero chance that either Biochemistry or MCB will get back a unit based program. Thus, OSBP is essential to faculty in these two departments.

I have heard more than one colleague say that we should merge chemistry and biochemistry and then kill OSBP as it will compete against the merged doctoral program. However, OSBP is too central to MCB for it to disappear. It is possible to rename OSBP and give it to MCB but I personally do not see OSBP as a competitor to a merged department any more than I see Chemical Physics hurting either the Chemistry or Physics graduate programs. Rather I see that OSBP and Chemical Physics strengthen the faculty in the unit based programs and in that way strengthen the unit based programs.

An OSU Institute of Biochemistry

I am supportive of the creation of an OSU Institute of Biochemistry. The Institute would own OSBP which would be managed by an executive committee consisting of the chairs of Biochemistry, Chemistry and MCB rather than a director. The executive committee would report to the Deans of Medicine and Biological, Mathematical and Physical Sciences, rather than the 8 members of the Council of Life Science Deans, who would set its budget and define the number of first year students to be admitted. Initially, first year students will continue to receive non teaching fellowship support but we can later consider offering some first year students support as TAs in either chemistry or biology. To be a member in good standing in the Institute a faculty member must have at least an adjunct appointment in either Biochemistry, Chemistry or MCB. Currently active faculty outside the 3 founding units will be offered an adjunct position in one of the 3 units. Faculty participation would be reviewed every 3 years and inactive

members would cycle out of the Institute and after a year could apply for reinstatement. The Chairs would value service to the IGP as equal to department service during the annual performance review and compensation process. The Institute would have its web site at <http://biochemistry.osu.edu/> and this would be the first site to appear upon searching “biochemistry” at the OSU web site. Initially the BMPS responsibility for funding the Institute would be at the college rather than at the department level.