



Committee on Faculty
Compensation and Development

17 October, 2006

Carol T. Christ, President
College Hall
Smith College

Dear President Christ:

The Committee on Faculty Compensation and Development is pleased to forward this letter of intent for consideration.

Letter of Intent

**Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates:
Establishing Student/Faculty and Interdisciplinary Connections**

Smith College is poised to build on an existing excellent program (student summer research in the sciences) and to become recognized for a unique example of its commitment to undergraduate education by developing an active student summer research program across all divisions. The members of CFCD are unanimous in their excitement for and support of such an endeavor.

Each summer an average of 45 science faculty work with 80-90 science majors as partners in research. This student/faculty research during the summer is a hallmark of the Smith College science program, is nationally recognized for its success; it has enabled the sciences to acquire external funding sufficient to support most interested faculty and students.

Studies both at Smith and elsewhere that are summarized in a number of published articles demonstrate that programs like ours have many positive benefits. Students gain confidence in their research abilities and are more likely to pursue graduate degrees and careers in the sciences. Students have opportunities to present oral and written reports, often including reports at scientific meetings, and become adept at these skills. Research results often result in co-authored publications, which not only improve our students' acceptance rates in first-tier graduate institutions but also reflect well on Smith College and our commitment to excellence in education and in providing opportunities for our students that are not common elsewhere. As one example, graduate institutions, because of the intellectual growth and research skills students acquire during a summer research/senior year program, now actively recruit geology majors from Smith and other institutions that participate in the Keck Geology Consortium.

Additional benefits from the research program in the sciences include student-faculty mentoring relationships that typically continue when our students leave Smith College to enter graduate or professional programs, and increase the likelihood of science students pursuing honors or special studies in their senior year.

Another important benefit includes the attitudinal shift that occurs when the majority of faculty in a division are engaged in student/faculty research during the summer and academic year. Not only does the student/faculty research program attract the kind of faculty that Smith wants to hire (those who believe in the integration of scholarship and learning), but the program also instills a habit of mind that tends to produce more courses that are learning-centered rather than teaching-centered. Finally, although difficult to document, anecdotal evidence suggests that the summer program has facilitated and encouraged the growth of interdisciplinary research and furthered collaborations among Smith scientists.

Given the many positive results stemming from the student/faculty research program in the sciences, CFCD is anxious to see a similar program extended across all disciplines. This will not be inexpensive (see below) but such an endeavor could have a significant positive effect on Smith's visibility and prestige in a number of arenas.

Our hope is to develop a campus-wide program that seamlessly expands and integrates the program in the sciences across the departments on our campus. A campus-wide student/faculty research program should be an attractive fund-raising goal. Moreover, the program should be designed to emphasize and reward interdisciplinary projects, especially among various combinations of departments within all three academic divisions. This, in turn, likely would be especially attractive to donors.

Currently, students participating in the sciences' summer research program receive a stipend of \$3600 and research expense support up to \$750. In order for a future program to be adequately supported, the college should project a stipend of \$4000/student and research expense support of at least \$500/student. Currently, faculty in the sciences who participate in the summer research program receive no stipend for the eight to ten weeks of daily interactions with students. As engaging in summer research with student partners is not as well established in other divisions as it is in the sciences, it might be wise to offer participating faculty a stipend of \$1500 (about \$1000 after taxes) as an incentive. Thus, at \$6000/student and assuming that perhaps an average of 140 students/year participate during the early stages of the program, an annual cost in excess of \$800,000 is probable.

In order to encourage faculty participation, the college should, in addition to the \$1500 stipend, award special credit when evaluating Faculty Record Sheets and make a sustained effort to provide special opportunities for those engaged in this endeavor. In order to encourage interdisciplinary efforts, especially between the sciences and other divisions, it might be helpful to offer increased benefits.

Although a “Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates: Establishing Student/Faculty and Interdisciplinary Connections” will necessitate a major fund-raising effort and careful implementation, such a program promises to bring national attention to Smith College. The CFCD believes the potential rewards are worth the effort.