



# Council of Principal Investigators

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Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) Annual Report  
2010-11

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## Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) 2010-11 Annual Report

### Introduction

The second Wednesday of September marks the first meeting of the new Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) session. Traditionally, the CPI invites the President of Texas A&M University to address the Council at the first meeting. Furthermore, on September 1 of each year, the previous year's Vice Chair assumes the role of Chair and newly elected members begin their respective terms on the Council.

One or more CPI meetings may be reserved, at the Chair's discretion, for CPI Members only. At these meetings, CPI members may discuss initiatives the Council will consider for full meeting agenda/discussion items throughout the year and may invite individuals with expertise on those respective items to either present to the Council or participate on a discussion panel. In addition to identifying key issues to address for the duration of the CPI session, the Council may also schedule meetings to address developing/current issues affecting the Texas A&M research environment.

In addition to attending monthly meetings, CPI members serve as liaisons between the Council and their PI constituency. CPI members serve on external committees as representatives of the Council and identify new areas of interest relevant to the CPI mission.

CPI activities and administrative support for the 2010-11 session were funded in equal parts by the Texas A&M University Division of Research, Texas AgriLife Research, Texas Engineering Experiment Station, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M Health Science Center and the Texas A&M Research Foundation. The Council of Principal Investigators greatly appreciates this support.

The following are some key issues addressed during the 2010-11 CPI session:

#### 1. Multidisciplinary/Interdisciplinary Research

**Overview:** As a follow up to a previous panel discussion on "Texas A&M's Relative Lack of Success with Prestigious Center and Training Grants", another panel discussion on multidisciplinary research was held during the December 8, 2010 CPI meeting. In addition to the panel discussion, Dr. Nancy Amato discussed Texas A&M's limited success with prestigious multidisciplinary research awards, and Dr. Charles Johnson presented on the inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary research and graduate studies at Texas A&M University. The December 8, 2010 meeting materials and presentation slides can be found at [http://cpi.tamu.edu/CPI\\_12.8.10.pdf](http://cpi.tamu.edu/CPI_12.8.10.pdf).

**Analysis:** The Office of the Vice President for Research is facilitating several initiatives to advance interdisciplinary initiatives at Texas A&M University. Some of the potential issues affecting the advancement of interdisciplinary research at Texas A&M include: lack of

incentives/rewards for PIs leading the multidisciplinary effort; integration of large, multidisciplinary teams of researchers; logistical challenges when working across TAMUS boundaries; proposal preparation involving significant non-research aspects, e.g. institutional commitments and support; and project administration.

**Current Status:** The council will continue to solicit the Office of the Vice President for Research, as appropriate, on TAMUS multidisciplinary research initiatives. Updates will be provided at monthly CPI meetings and in newsletters as appropriate.

## **2. Undergraduate Research**

**Overview:** On April 13, 2011, Dr. Pamela Matthews, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Studies and Dr. Sumana Datta, Executive Director of Honors and Undergraduate Research presented to the CPI on “Enhancing and Expanding Undergraduate Research”. The presentation included information about the current state of undergraduate research (UGR) at TAMU. Some of the roadblocks that face expanding UGR is that many students don’t understand what research is; or that opportunities existed; or perceive that research is just for graduate students. Dr. Matthews and Dr. Datta also recommended enhancing UGR at TAMU by strengthening existing UGR programs (i.e., Undergraduate Research Scholars; Sigma Xi-UGR Faculty-Student Expo; *Explorations*, REU Summer Programs, Workshops for Student and Faculty). The April 13, 2011 meeting materials (slides, video, etc.) can be found at [http://cpi.tamu.edu/CPI\\_4.13.11.pdf](http://cpi.tamu.edu/CPI_4.13.11.pdf).

**Analysis:** The CPI considers UGR to be an integral part of the undergraduate experience at any Tier 1 research university, specifically at TAMU. Over the past year, the CPI has had members attend numerous UGR activities/events, including participating in and contributing towards the cost of the Sigma Xi-UGR Faculty-Student Expo; engaging in Student Research Week (SRW) activities as reviewers and assisting SRW student leaders in organizing their taxonomies for the week-long event.

**Current Status:** Drs. Matthews and Datta will be invited to update the CPI during the 2011-12 session on the current state of Undergraduate Research at Texas A&M University. The CPI will look for additional opportunities to enhance and expand UGR opportunities at Texas A&M University.

## **3. Promoting the Value of Integrated Teaching and Research**

**Overview:** Recently, some special interest groups with no official affiliation with Texas A&M University have attempted to influence the operating policies of Texas Tier 1 research universities, most notably in the areas of teaching and research. The CPI Officers sent a memo on May 17, 2011 to Dr. Richard A. Box, Chairman of The Texas A&M University Board of Regents ([http://cpi.tamu.edu/Regent\\_Box\\_CPI\\_chancellor.pdf](http://cpi.tamu.edu/Regent_Box_CPI_chancellor.pdf)) that included recommendations for the search of the next TAMUS Chancellor and included remarks about the influence of special interest groups on the teaching and research at Texas A&M University. Those remarks

included the following: “Texas A&M University and its associated institutions, comprising TAMUS, are founded on sound academic and research principles consistent with other higher education institutions across the country...Faculty educate students; those students then continue to press the innovation envelope; and they in turn educate new students. We must ensure that this educational environment remains vibrant and expands to meet the increasing needs of our students.”

**Analysis:** The recommendations that have been made by external special interest groups would have a catastrophic impact on teaching and research conducted at the state’s two Tier 1 research institutions. Because this issue is complex and the effects are wide-ranging, a link (<http://cpi.tamu.edu/pi-resources.html>) has been created on the CPI website to three external websites (The Association of Former Students; the Alliance for Texas A&M University; The Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education) that maintain current articles, papers, news items, presentations and other information related to the current changes being proposed to higher education in Texas.

**Progress:** The CPI Officers and/or Members of the Executive Committee have met regularly with TAMU and TAMUS administrators to discuss current issues affecting teaching and research at Texas A&M. The CPI Chair, Faculty Senate Speaker and Speaker Elect, and Chair of the Distinguished Professors met with two members of the TAMUS Board of Regents to discuss the presumed issues affecting the teaching and research environments at the Tier 1 Texas research universities.

The CPI EC continually meets with administration and other stakeholder groups to discuss strategies and mechanisms to communicate the value of teaching and research at Tier 1 universities and have offered to provide data and resources to support this position. Two members of the Alliance for Texas A&M University and the Texas Coalition for Excellence in Higher Education (TCEHE) attended the June 8, 2011 CPI meeting when an open forum discussion was held on issues affecting higher education in Texas. The TCEHE Executive Committee and the CPI Executive Committee have initiated communication between the two groups and dialogue will continue.

#### **4. Research Administration Shared Services**

**Overview:** Over the past several years, there have been initiatives to identify “cost savings”, specifically in the area of research administration. On February 4, 2011 Dr. Michael McKinney, Chancellor of The Texas A&M University System, was charged by the BOR to: form a research administration shared services entity for the purpose of the pre- and post-award services for all contracts and grants sought by and awarded to all System members; and to present a detailed implementation plan to the Board prior to their March 25, 2011 meeting. As a result of those charges, a broad cross-section of System member representatives who manage or utilize research administration services in College Station and across the state of Texas, met as the RASS (Research Administration Shared Services) Development and Implementation Steering

Committee (DISC). The CPI Chair was a member of this committee; a list of the DISC members and a description of its activities can be found at <http://www.tamus.edu/offices/cro/activities/>.

**Analysis:** The issue of cost savings associated with shared services is nothing new to Texas A&M or the System. The recommendations put forward by the RASS DISC included the formation of an Office of Sponsored Research Services (OSRS) that would take employees of the Texas A&M Research Foundation and other System pre- and post-award offices and house them together in a central location, providing services to System members. Several results will be achieved due to this consolidation of research personnel: sharing of best practices; similar job descriptions and titles; seamless service for PIs using any of the aforementioned entities for research administration; eventual migration to Maestro; and the formation of an OSRS oversight committee with representation from the PI community and each of the System members.

**Progress:** The CPI has a representative on the OSRS oversight committee and reports will be made on the activities of the committee to the full CPI and to the PI community through the monthly CPI newsletter.

## 2010-2011 CPI Members

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