

Summary of ECSA ARG Meeting
Oct 1, 2008

Background talk by Anne Smith (prepared by Sasha Madronich, current ARG Chair).

Presentation available on the ECSA website.

Key points:

ARG Membership

ARG Timeline and schedule:

Nomination Packages due in January

Sub-committees chosen at full meeting in Late January

Seminars in March

Decisions in May

Nomination Packages prepared with candidate

Packages are extremely important.

Criteria is scientific excellence

Letters are also very important

for Scientist III: 8 letters, 3 chosen by candidate (suggest 5 others), 3 international.

recently process for picking names for letters has gotten better and more rigorous

URL: <http://www.ncar.ucar.edu/central/arg>

Discussion Summary:

Discussion participants who have recent experience in the ARG repeated a few themes in different contexts during the discussion. Some follow. Nomination package and the extensive experience of the ARG members are perhaps the most important reasons why the process is equitable and successful. The nomination is prepared by people intimately familiar with the candidate, and are capable of pointing out strengths and elucidating any perceived weaknesses or unique circumstances. The ARG members are experienced and thoughtful enough to deal with unusual circumstances that might include discipline-specific metrics, the changing roles of NCAR scientists and research engineers, and differences in cultural background. They readily look to other institutions for guidance when needed. Finally, the importance of reference letters came up several times.

Specific discussion points:

Eric Barron noted that in many institutions management is not part of peer-reviewed promotion decisions. It was pointed out that conversely, non-voting management participants help maintain continuity in the ARG process.

There were several questions concerning the flexibility of the ARG process, and how 'special cases' were dealt with in many contexts. These cases included numerous examples:

- Social scientists and computer scientists who are often not primarily evaluated in their fields on peer reviewed journal publications.
- People who have done significant amounts of scientific work in another country or in a language other than English
- Cross-disciplinary activities

The discussion of special circumstances indicated that the nomination package needs to do a good job of describing the special circumstances and in highlighting them. The investigative committees were thought by those who have served on the ARG to be flexible and thorough. Recent ARG processes for social scientists were no problem for example. The ARG often looks at other metrics and is flexible.

The nomination package is critical for the candidate. It needs to lay out a case and set the tone for the ARG discussion. The candidate should be careful and help prepare it with the nominating unit. Candidates may want to talk to successful candidates and look at their packets. Letters are also important (note that nearly half of these names are set in the nomination package).

There was also discussion that the ideal situation or goal is that most weaknesses that need to be addressed are addressed within the unit (division) well in advance of the ARG process. In this regard the annual review is critical. Many reviews include some information, but in many cases scientists need to be 'pro-active' to get the information to make them comfortable. Good mentoring before promotion is the key to a successful promotion. Review processes vary among divisions however.

Other issues raised included how Joint Appointments are handled. They are largely transparent to the ARG, but raise other issues of mentoring.

There were several questions on the weighting given to activities beyond just peer-reviewed papers. Senior scientists responded that there is not quota system. It is best to have reached a qualified level in most categories (publications, citation counts), but it is not necessary to excel everywhere (community service, editorships, etc).

There was discussion of how collaborations and co-author papers are handled. Now the nominee can flag particular co-author publications where they are not first author as significant collaborations. For more information please also see: <http://www.ncar.ucar.edu/central/arg/nominations/guidelines.php> "Guidelines for preparing the nomination packet" section of the ARG URL which notes:

"The narrative should include a paragraph which identifies the publications first-authored by a nominee, a student or postdoctoral fellow (identifying each publication by number as presented in their publications list), as these demonstrate the nominee's mentoring skills."

There was lively discussion of the research engineer track. There is a perception that the track is not equivalent to the scientist track, even though it is stated in writing. No one has gone through the ARG process yet to get to a REIII or REIV. There has been no switching into the category.

Project scientists were also discussed. Project scientists are not on a ladder, they are not 'promoted' but 'reclassified' to a higher grade, based on job responsibility and a change in job description. They can also be re-classified to scientist track positions. This was thought not to be an ARG issue specifically.

There was a question about future scientist hires, and whether there would be a general call for positions. Eric Barron thought this was unlikely in the current budget climate.

There was also a question on whether the ARG should be changed to be 'tougher' and bounce people out. This was thought not to be desirable for its own sake: in the current situation, perhaps it means mentoring is working and people going forward to the ARG are mostly successful. The ARG should not be the place where decisions are made, the divisions and programs should try to do this first (and they are).

Finally, stopping the clock was discussed as an option. A policy exists, and people have used it. It is not just for family reasons, but might be done when working on a multi-year project. A leave of absence is possible too. It was thought that for the ARG this was a non-issue, and is not really looked at per-se. Sometimes it comes up to explain why there are gaps in publication records, but in general the ARG does not care the exact path to get there, but focuses on scientific quality. Paths are used only to explain situations. Several people have recently been through the ARG process that have stopped the clock. The number was not known.