South Texas Research Facility

Prompted by a surprisingly lukewarm interest in our faculty members to consider moving their laboratories to the South Texas Research Facility, the Chairs and Interim Dean of the graduate school held a meeting to share notes about our interactions with our respective departmental investigators. The primary purpose of this meeting was to identify recurrent themes in these discussions and propose ideas that might alleviate any disincentives. Although we emphasized possible incentives in our discussions with our faculty, there was a consensus that removing perceived disincentives would be of paramount importance in their becoming interested and excited about moving. This document is the result of this meeting.

Before we begin, it is worth mentioning that the stated goal of the STRF is, where appropriate, to relocate our top faculty. The reason they are our top faculty, one might argue, is because they make careful career decisions based on available information. Thus, they need strong evidence that this “interruption” and complete change of research environment will benefit their careers. Furthermore, again because they are our most successful faculty, we (the chairs) have worked hard to keep them happy so they do not leave UTHSCSA. Therefore, the very faculty we want to be engaged in this exciting new endeavor will be the hardest to convince. Having said that, here are the major issues our interactions with the faculty have uncovered.

Administration and Reporting Line

**Issue.** Clearly the most articulated trepidation on the part of the faculty, was an apparently ill-defined (at this point in time) administrative and support structure at the STRF and a perceived potential change in their reporting lines. For the administrative structure, essentially all were unsure of who they would report to on a daily basis and who would provide them their crucial administrative support. Furthermore, they were concerned that they would fall under the “administrative” (e.g. VPs) rather than “academic” (e.g. Deans) wings of the institution. Their view was that they knew who looks out for their interest in their departments, namely the Chairs, and not only did they not know who would do this in the STRF building, they were uncertain what role the Chairs might play in their “welfare” at the STRF building.

**Solution.** First, there needs to be an on-site leader or director for each thematic group. This could be someone senior who was relocated, or a new hire. This individual would drive the science, deal with day-to-day matters, play a major role in recruiting and hiring new investigators to the group, and be a member of the STRF executive committee (see below). It is critical that this individual be formally given authority over operations in the building to resolve any disputes that may arise. For this reason, this cannot be a rotating or voluntary position, but one appointed with approval of the relevant Deans. In addition, each thematic group needs some type of administrative person to support (orders, scheduling, etc) the on-site faculty. Although it has been suggested that departments supply administrative staff, this is not feasible. First, departments are all facing significant budget
cuts that preclude hiring new staff and in some cases may include a reduction in workforce. And second, in most cases, the STRF investigators in any one theme are appointed in different departments making it unclear how this responsibility would be distributed. It seems imperative that new funds be provided to hire these on-site administrators.

Each Theme’s Scientific Director would be a member of the STRF Executive Committee (EC) with the chair rotating. This group meets to consider general matters related to the building that might supersede the individual scientific programs. Some examples of these issues can be conference room and facility core access, needs for additional resources and equipment, changes in the LAR space, laboratory space redistribution as themes grow or shrink, and other general STRF policy changes and operational procedures. All changes to policy, etc recommended by the EC would have to be then approved by the Deans (see below).

The chairs in the departments where the investigators have their primary appointments would remain responsible for all academic issues, such as teaching responsibilities, promotions and tenure, salary changes, departmental committee assignments, and career guidance. The next level up from the chairs, however, would remain the Deans; most likely the Medical and Graduate Deans since they will have the bulk of the faculty at the STRF. The Deans must approve all changes to policy recommended by the EC and would also become the governing body in cases where the STRF EC were unable to come to a unanimous agreement.

Laboratory Space

Issue. Many faculty members have been in “open” labs such as the STRF and some (although not all) were okay with it. Those that have not existed in this type of environment, however, are leery of this arrangement. Furthermore, most are not clear about the actual physical layout. Although they have seen blueprints, they do not have a clear sense of what to expect. For example, only recently has it been made clear that each module, in addition to containing a certain amount of open bench space, includes a ≈400 square foot equipment room.

Solution. It was felt that a clear representation of a module, as well as supporting office space, should be defined and conveyed. Also, as an example, there are some investigators (e.g. electrophysiologists, behaviorists) that require separate rooms, rather than bench space. There needs to be some indication of how they will be accommodated and some indication of how much flexibility there will be in renovations, if needed. In fact, it seems imperative that the ≈400 sq foot rooms that are available in each module be able to be modified (i.e., walls put up within them, etc.) to the specific needs of the investigator to entice some of our most productive scientists to the STRF building. Furthermore, there needs to be a clear indication that the funds for these renovations will be made available. Again, because of recent and impending budget cuts, departments do not have such funds.

Dollars per Square Foot

Issue. Faculty has been repeatedly informed that there will be an increased expectation of dollars per square foot at the STRF. This is clearly a disincentive and has yet to be justified.
That the operating costs of the building are higher than main campus is not an adequate answer for an investigator that is seeking to move there. Nor is it appropriate to say that costs everywhere will eventually beat this higher level.

**Solution.** Make the ratio at the STRF the same as the Long Campus.

**Transportation and Parking**

**Issue.** Many faculty members have collaborations on the main campus, especially our more productive scientists. While moving to the new building may promote new interactions and collaborations, there is concern that the distance will have a negative impact on those that already exist, particularly with respect to the ease of moving back-and-forth between the STRF and Long Campus. These investigators also have teaching responsibilities and committee responsibilities on the main campus. If they choose to drive, faculty members that visit other campuses sometimes complain of limited Official Business parking spaces.

**Solution.** Obviously a Connector from the Greehey Campus to the Long Campus like they have at Southwestern in Dallas would be fantastic, or some kind of covered walkway, but this would be expensive (although well worth it, in our opinion). Less expensive would be to have a dedicated vehicle that shuttles back and forth just between the Long and the Greehey Campuses. This would be far less expensive. In addition, there needs to be enough parking at all sites for those investigators that move around between the various campuses on their own accord. In particular, this would mean increasing, perhaps substantially, the number of Official Business parking spaces on the main campus for faculty at distant sites and increasing the time limit that one might stay in such spaces to at least 4 hours. Such a parking solution is also essential for other faculty current at the north campus and faculty at the TRP who currently have to face onerous parking restrictions or availability.

In closing, this document seeks to convey the major issues that our faculty members have indicated to us that are contributing to their reluctance to relocate to the STRF Building, although there are certainly other potential problems that need to be addressed such as package deliveries, animal facilities, adequate restaurants, etc. It is our collective opinion that the administration should generate a clear, comprehensive document that formally addresses all these matters, and others. This is essential since available funds, and administrative persons themselves (President, Vice-Presidents, Deans, and Chairs) change over time.