

RPES Advisory Committee Meeting

FY 16 – Q3, June 29-30, 2016

Meeting Schedule and Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 29, 2016	Steinbeck Room	8:00 am – 5:00 pm
Thursday, June 30, 2016	Steinbeck Room	8:00 am – 12:00 pm
Thursday, June 30, 2016	Tour of Salinas Lab	1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Membership:

Chair – Brian Wienhold, PA	Christi Swaggerty, PA
Ann Callahan, NEA	Jim Harnly, NEA
Jungmin Lee, PWA	Peter Follett, PWA
Cynthia Henson, MWA	Claire Baffaut, MWA
Kyoung Ro, SEA	Arthur Hinton, Jr., SEA
Amy Hegarty, RPES	Dana Lamberti, RPES

Agenda:

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| • Call to order, welcome, and Overview of agenda | Brian |
| • Status report of old business | Amy, Brian, Ann |
| • New business | Brian, Amy, Jungmin |
| • Decide on next meeting/adjourn | Brian |
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Black font = original agenda text

Blue font = discussions from the meeting

Status Report of Old Business:

Status of RPES Team - FY 16 Activity:

- Draft FY 17 panel schedules issued to Area Offices May 13; we expect finals to be ready by July 29.
- Researchers with cases due in FY 17 are being invited to a summer case writeup session, by/with Area Office.
- New Panelist Orientations were held November and April for a total of 45 new panelists.
- New Panel Chair training was held in March with 21 participants
- Amy and Dana travelled to Ft. Collins (March) and will travel to Stoneville to meet with Area Office and Cat 1s
- Two panels have been moved to teleconference (reduced panel load from changes)
- **Action Item:** Amy add RPES Advisory Committee to invitations to Case Writeup sessions being held 7/7, 7/23, and 8/2

- **Action Item:** Dana add link to panel service refresher training to future share point sites (to the share point site template)
- **Action Item:** Amy add to memo to Area Directors (with other info that is already pending) to remind them of the policy when management differs from researcher's request on case writeup (refer to Manual); that the case will proceed as AD dictates with a statement of difference from the researcher.
- Consider adding a separate summer session to invite panel members to, to review panel service requirements, IDR checklist and tips for conducting a good IDR, discuss leadership accomplishments, etc.
- Consider moving case writeup to a fillable pdf; set margins; set format; eliminate differences in Area requirements. Would have to allow flexibilities in Factors 1-3.
- Consider new technologies in virtual panel operations such as Zoom (multiple users with camera access); consider headphones for virtual panel members to reduce background noise (if so, check with Sharon on product and ordering information)

Year of the RL (Brian and Amy): The next Summit is being held July 19-21 in Ames, Iowa, and the topic is the Role of the RL. This is the committee that proposed allowing RLs to include additional information into their PD, pending collaboration with the RPES Advisory Committee. What is our stance on this proposal?

- This discussion was to bring the RPES Advisory Committee up to date on YRL activities, especially for an awareness of how the activities may/may not impact the RPES program, and to be prepared for any questions that may come in from the Areas.
- This time was also spent describing the RL Advisory Council (RLAC) which has become more active since the YRL efforts, so this committee was asked to stay tuned to the RLAC activities for important information the RLAC may be generating.
- This committee was asked to stay tuned for more information being generated by the Grand Challenges initiative, again, in the event that any of those efforts impact policies and procedures under the RPES program.
- The YRL Subcommittee for the Role of the RL has proposed adding another page to the position description (Factors 1-3) to provide the RL an opportunity to identify duties that are outside of what is currently reflect and that are identified in his/her performance standards, to align the PD with the performance standards.
- The discussion provided support for the additional page of the PD (if the Role of the RL efforts decide to pursue) however recommend that the addition be incorporated after the panel meets to reduce confusion on the panel.

Supergrade Positions: Two researchers remain in queue from November 2015 panel waiting on an ST slot to open. The next Supergrade Panel is anticipated for late 2016/early 2017.

- After reviewing the recent activity in Supergrade panels, results, recommendations to ST, etc. the committee requested that RPES publish some of the work being done by our Supergrade employees, to spotlight them, allow others to see their work, hear some career strategies they may have, etc.
- **Action Item:** Amy will email the population of ST/RA employees and ask them if they are interested in being included in this initiative – identified on a website with an opportunity to share their perspectives. If they are willing, Amy will add a section to the RPES website, "Want to Meet a Super Scientist?" and include links to them, information they want to provide (bio, contact information).

GS-15 Subcommittee (Ann):

- The subcommittee (Brian, Ann, and Dana) sent a letter to Dr. Liu asking if he is open to the RPES Advisory Committee revisiting the suggestions proposed a few years ago to streamline the RPES for GS-15s. He supported the proposal.
- The subcommittee will proceed with a survey (launch off the comments collected by the last survey) and suggestions for changes. We'll talk more about this at our next quarterly meeting (in-person) when we have more time.
- The genesis of some of the years-old concerns are based on a few factors: there is such low percentage of GS-15s being upgraded that the request is for a simpler review process in light of the most recent study, about 70% of the GS-15s were not satisfied with the current process.
- The subcommittee needs more help: Peter and Cynthia volunteered to join the effort.
- Results of the 2012 survey show that 2/3 of our GS-15s were not happy with the current system of review; 1/3 were satisfied.
- Of those not satisfied, it seemed to be a cost/benefit issue: why am I doing all this work if my chances for getting promoted are so low? The committee needs to discover if that is the only reason. By looking at the 2012 survey, the subcommittee hopes to determine why the GS-15s want change.
- A few suggestions from the survey were discussed along with their ramifications: case writeup format and content, timing between review, panels consisting only of GS-15 cases, options to skip a cycle, etc.
- What kind of change can satisfy them AND be fair? If GS-15s have a different writeup format, why don't the GS-12s? Also, try to predict the unintended consequences. A few examples were discussed: removing the GS-15 cases from panel operations also removes the exposure the panel members have to interpreting the GS-15 evaluation criteria. Panel members generally agree that reviewing a GS-15 within a variety of other grades can help balance interpretations of the RGEG.
- **Action Item:** before spending time developing another survey, the subcommittee will review the suggestions made in the 2012 survey in more detail to extract the suggestions made so we are not reinventing the wheel. Each subcommittee member will summarize and categorize the responses for the questions they are compiling.
- Once the subcommittee has some results and possible recommendation(s), consider bringing them to the AC for discussion before proceeding. Agency leaders may want to have a voice in any possible proposals.

The ARS Grand Challenge: From those who've been "listening," are there any implications for the RPES Program that we need to consider?

- We agreed that there is importance in researchers identifying their role within a team and reflecting that accurately in the case writeup
- We also agreed to continue to monitor this effort for any further implications on the RPES Program.
- We reviewed background information about the Grand Challenge: special project to highlight ARS; by 2025 to increase production by 20% and reduce impact on the environment by 20%.

- The reason this was brought into the agenda was to increase the committee’s awareness of this effort and to pay attention to any possible implications for the RPES program. Right now, we don’t see that there are any, but it’s been asked how the researchers can claim credit for RPES within the Grand Challenge.
- The committee agreed that current policy does not prohibit the addition of accomplishments, exhibits, etc. that address the requirements under the Grand Challenge. It will still be up to the researcher to clearly communicate his/her role, accomplishment, impact, stature, and recognition.
- This should be added to the session with the panel members.

(Tabled from last meeting) Questions have come in regarding the use of links in RPES case writeups. The RPES Team has denied the requests because it is thought that this will add layers of resources beyond the scope of the writeup and increased burden to the panel members evaluating the case. We would like the full Committee’s feedback.

- Current policy does not allow website links in accomplishment statements however a link is allowable as an exhibit (the researcher simply identifies the link on a pdf and submits that).
- If website links are allowed anywhere else in the case, we envision an administrative burden with monitoring the accuracy of the sites, appropriateness of the links, etc. in addition to the additional burden on the panel members to investigate this additional information.
- In order to “keep up” with technology, it has been suggested that RPES case writeups include links to referenced documents; not only links in the citations but also links in the accomplishments; these are in addition to the already existing exhibits.
- After discussion around this question, the committee decided to not allow links anywhere except in the list of publications to make it easier for the panel members to find the documents referenced. The practice of including any additional links adds a burden to the panel members by adding resources that are beyond the requirements of current policy, which circumvents current policy.
- **Action Item:** Amy will draft a memo from Brian as Chair, to Area Directors, Panel Chairs, and the Administrator’s Council as a precursor to policy statement on this decision. The memo will include a sample of an acceptable link within “Factor 4. E. Publications” list.

Updates to the P&P and Manual – we’ve had a few over the last year or so and need to finalize the draft together to be sure we’ve caught everything.

- **Action Item:** Amy will have her summer intern convert the old P&P and Manual to current day format and then identify changes that have been suggested over the past few meetings. Amy will then email it to the committee for review and any possible further edits.
- This gives the committee time to incorporate any possible changes from the GS-15 subcommittee and YRL Role of the RL subcommittee, if any are proposed, before submitting for formal updates.

New Business:

RPES Credit for Database Contributions (Brian: request from ARS Workshop)

- Another committee brought this question to Brian as Panel Chair and Amy as Head, RPES, to consider adding language to policy/procedure to allow database contributions to case writeups.

- The committee had a lengthy discussion about this question and reviewed current policy and procedure.
- Ultimately it was decided that current policy does not prohibit inclusion of database contributions in an accomplishment, as an exhibit, as a citation, under Other Significant Information, under Technology Transfer, or as Additional Information. Therefore, a response was provided to that other committee.

Area Mentorship Programs:

- This was discussed in our May 2015 meeting but was also asked during our visit to Ames
- Since a few are already in place, do we need to do anything for those Areas that do not?
- Is this something we can partner with RLAC?
- How do we get more involved in RLAC?
- Does the RPES Advisory Committee have a role in sponsoring any kind of mentorship program? Some of the Areas had programs that incorporated issues well beyond RPES.
- PWA is the only Area with an active mentorship program and theirs is very RPES-focused.
- All Areas expressed an interest in partnering with RPES in leadership meetings, trainings, etc.
- The committee decided to take this one step at a time by adding more resources to the RPES website to help the researchers find helpful information and to work with HR-Leadership Development Team to incorporate RPES into new RL training.
- **Action Item:** Amy will add the link to the Evaluation Criteria next to the two references of the 516 and in the edits to the draft Manual.

Transparency (Jungmin): What are we doing to be more transparent? What can we do better or differently?

- A concern of transparency was brought to one of our committee members by an RL, so it was brought to the full committee for discussion.
- Concerns included a perception that IDRs do not take their role seriously; Remain-in-Grade reports do not “say anything;” and that the RLs should serve on their employees’ panels in an advisory role but without a vote.
- **Action Item:** Amy is going to reach out to this RL to learn more about his perceptions, possibly bring RPES training to the location for all Cat 1s, offer other helpful information, etc. **UPDATE:** This has been completed on 7/6/16.

(New item added) Expiration of terms of members:

- Ann’s and Jim’s terms are both expiring at the end of February and they are both from the Northeast Area. It would be best if one of them agreed to stay on an additional year to allow for transition of only one new Area representative at a time.
- It was suggested that we identify a replacement from the Supergrade ranks.
- **Action Item:** Amy will reach out to one of the ST employees in NEA to see if he/she is interested, and if so, will nominate that person to the Area Director for subsequent nomination to Dr. Liu.

A recent ad hoc panel case: Odd result, committee review documents for any guidance we can provide to Areas/RLs.

- The grades that selecting officials choose to advertise a Cat 1 can affect the process when selecting officials select someone that ends up impacting RGEg at a grade other than that advertised and/or

the grade(s) the candidate was certified. When this happens, it ends up in double work for the servicing HR specialist to have to re-advertise.

- It is also a concern when we hear that selecting officials are selecting their candidates at the GS-12 level to avoid the ad hoc panel process. This circumvents the system and is not fair to the selectee, to be paid at a grade different than he/she truly deserves.
- We reviewed a sample ad hoc case where the result was not what the selecting official had hoped.
- The committee's consensus was that the RPE System worked as it should in the sample case; that avoiding this kind of situation rests with the selecting official along with the servicing HR Specialist.
- **Action Item:** Amy will add "Ad hoc panels" to the box on the home page, with a subpage for information, links to the ad hoc advisory documents, etc. to make it easier to find this helpful information.

(New item added to Agenda) RPES Video

Meeting adjourned, with an **Action Item:** Amy will email a doodle poll to everyone to schedule our 4th quarter meeting in September.

Next Meeting:

FY 16 Q4 –date/time?