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the
GIEC *Minutes*

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2006

Notes from the GIEC meeting, 12/6/2006 @ 12:00/KS 211

Attending: Andrea, Kartik Jim, Joe Chavez, Russ, Vikki, Jessica Krick, Carolyn, Xiuqin, Steve S, Anastasia

1) The SSC Oversight Committee Meeting is scheduled for December 12th.

Xiuqin and Vikki will be presenting for the GIEC. Normally, there are presentations to the SSCOC from a non-science technical person (one hour) and from a scientist (also one hour). As an historical footnote, the GIEC came into existence because people were bringing problems with SSC and IPAC directly to the committee, feeling that there was no other forum in which these problems could be addressed. It was hoped that the GIEC would be able to look into these problems and resolve them before outside organizations became involved.

If any other people would like to talk to the Oversight Committee, have them contact their GIEC representative, or just email giec@ipac.caltech.edu to notify all the members.

2) Anastasia explained the status of the protest letter about health care insurance cost increases. Basically, after a statistical analysis (performed by calculator, once the data was finally made available from HR), it turns out that only the people in the PPO program are getting seriously impacted. Caltech determines the amount of money they will contribute per employee (which is constant across all of the plans). If one of the health care organizations significantly raises its rates, the people who choose that plan will wind up largely absorbing the cost of the increase.

For HMOs, Caltech has consistently paid between 79 and 85 percent of the cost, with the remainder paid by the employee. The numbers for the PPO plan are worse --- employees may be paying nearly half of the (much higher) cost. In the case of the Kaiser HMO, the increase to employees this year was high because Kaiser's rate increase was very high, and Caltech's contribution remained consistent with what it paid for other plans.

One open question is whether Caltech's health care contributions are comparable to what other companies and institutions pay. Also left unanswered was whether costs were "quietly" shifted to employees by increasing the copay for visits and prescriptions.

Anastasia will put together a summary with all the actual numbers and will send out a letter.

- 3) The question of travel procedures came up again. Andrea had put together a one page checklist of what's required when travelling, then passed it by Mary Ellen Barba for her concurrence. She suggested instead that the GIEC point people to the three page travel guidelines available on the IPAC website (the URL is: <http://www.ipac.caltech.edu/local/Admin/General/travel.html>, and is only available internally or via the VPN). Because everyone agreed that the checklist was very helpful, Kartik offered to work with Gordon Squires to get the one page checklist published somewhere, possibly by adding it to Gordon's detailed (13+ pages) travel document online. He said that he'd be sure to work with Mary Ellen to be certain we don't run into any legal or policy issues.

In a related topic, a suggestion was made that a separate section be added on travel reimbursements. It was noted that, due to yet another set of changes on JPL's travel system, people who used to have reimbursements direct deposited are now being issued checks, and even checks are sometimes being held up until web-based confirmations are received.

Yet another travel tidbit was that JPL will not pay for a hotel stay if a person would have been able to leave a conference and arrive home by 11 PM on the last day of the conference. For those people going to this winter's AAS meeting in Seattle, that means that if the meeting ends at 4 PM and you choose not to take a flight home the same day, JPL will not pay for the hotel for that evening.

- 4) In a reprise of a note from the last meeting, Kartik announced that postdocs will now have three mentors available with whom they can consult --- Andy Boden, Lisa Storrie-Lombardi and John Stauffer.
- 5) Carolyn asked about putting more supplies in the storerooms in KS and how to get stationary, pens, etc. after Niles goes home. Kartik suggested that she should put together a list of the supplies (pens, A4 notebooks) that she would like to see stocked, and that that can be submitted as a helpdesk ticket (by Niles, probably) so that we can track when the supplies are received.

6) A second item that the postdocs wanted addressed was whether SSC could start paying for page charges for published papers. Given that the charges were \$150 per journal page (and significantly more for color or some kinds of art work), this can be a substantial hit on a postdoc's grant money (the example of a 40 page paper costing \$6000 and taking several months of salary out of a grant was brought up). Kartik said that not paying for page charges seems pretty standard in academia, but that he would bring the idea up with SSC management. Other suggestions were that a rainy-day fund might be used to pay for postdoc publication charges --- talk to Lisa if a postdoc is unable to pay. Russ suggested that IPAC might be willing to pay the charges as part of a reward program --- "publish three, get one free" --- and variants (pay for everything after the first two papers, for example) were offered. Most people seemed to agree that it was crazy that people are being punished monetarily for publishing more papers.

7) The suggestion was made that, in addition to the three people currently part of the postdoc mentoring program, other people from other areas might be added. Russ and Joe Chavez volunteered to mentor people who might be interested in moving to astronomical computer programming; someone suggested that Gordon would be happy to be a mentor for people considering an EPO career direction.

8) What happened to the bike rack upgrade at Morrisroe? Kartik said that he'll talk with Gordon and Rosanne about getting this on track again.

9) As part of the new "town hall" forum for the meeting, Joe Chavez and Jessica Krick were in attendance to hear what the GIEC does and to offer suggestions. Joe had a pretty positive view of IPAC, though he said that the travel reimbursement situation was a mess and that JPL's old system was better. Jessica said that Carolyn does a great job of communicating GIEC issues with postdocs, and made sure to note that she does not want to be the next postdoc rep on the GIEC.

Also, Jessica said that the GISS was the best part of IPAC, since she said that it was a great way to learn who else worked here and what their areas of interest are. This led to an extended discussion about photo directories and web pages listing staff members' research areas and outside interests. Someone asked if Gordon's group could put something like this together. Anastasia pointed out that new people used to be introduced at the weekly donut or bagel sessions and at the monthly Second Friday presentations (and what ever happened to those, anyway?).

Another suggestion, by Vikki, was for a "mini-GISS" (a Lesser Greater IPAC Science Symposium?) --- a once-a-month session as part of the standard IPAC colloquia in which people could talk for ten minutes about what they're working on. She said that she'd work with Tom Jarrett and would be happy to organize the mini-colloquium series.

10) The next GIEC meeting is scheduled for January 17th at 1:15.

It will be held in the Morrisroe building (conference room to be announced, depending on availability). Anastasia and Steve will be charged with finding a couple of Morrisroe people to come to the next meeting and talk about what they like/dislike about IPAC and how the GIEC can help.