

Dr. Stephen Korn
Director
Office of Training, Career Development and Workforce Diversity
NINDS, NIH

Dear Steve:

Below please find my responses to the issues that were raised concerning the competitive renewal of 2 T32 NS048039-06.

1. “First a requirement. Your RCR was found to be unacceptable. You’ll have to respond to this and make necessary changes. **In particular, you need to have training grant faculty involvement in RCR training.** Please let me know how you are going to handle this.”

RESPONSE: First, UAB will be offering an updated, expanded version of the course GRD 717, “Principles of Scientific Integrity”, effective Spring 2013 (see attachment). This course will utilize team-based learning approaches, and new subject matter has been added. All the sessions are 2.5 hours, and will be held each Friday for a 10 week period. All trainees will be required to attend this course. In addition, each trainee will be required to attend a “refresher” workshop each year of their training at UAB. Thus, the frequency of training in RCR will be on an annual basis. Offerings for “Refresher” topics are listed below, and are usually 2-4 hours in length.

Data Management in Research
Collaborative Research and Team-based Science
Image Manipulation
Ethical Authorship

Second, the major criticism involves training grant faculty participation in RCR training. The first approach to this problem is to require mentor participation in the courses/workshops described above, and make it clear that one of the criteria for being a mentor on the T32 Training Grant in Brain Tumor Biology is active participation in RCR instruction. Second, we will take the lead from Dr. Robin Lorenz, Director, UAB Medical Scientist Training Program, and insist on documented one-on-one interaction between the trainee and mentor on issues related to data handling, authorship on manuscripts, and other topics. This will be discussed when I have my first meeting with new trainees and their mentors. With the combination of T32 mentor participation in formal courses/workshops, and one-on-one instruction, this will ensure that all mentors are actively engaged in RCR activities.

2. “I haven’t looked at the details, but the reviewers all agreed that the postdoctoral outcome was relatively weak, which was why they changed the slot ratio from what you requested. I haven’t read the details of the grant, but will tell you my concerns. First, of course, nobody (postdoctoral) should be supported that you don’t believe will successfully transition to a successful research career. This should receive great attention. As you know, NINDS believes in supporting residents/fellows in research – UAB has an R25 from NINDS for just this purpose. But these need to be chosen carefully, as do their mentors, and a training plan crafted carefully to make sure they succeed. In NINDS’ view, any clinician scientist supported on a T should get to a K. **Especially given that you are receiving an increased number of slots on this award, please be very careful to make sure that the postdoctoral slots are used only for candidates and situations that you are confident will yield success. In our view, mentors should understand that the goal is to get physician-scientists to Ks.**”

RESPONSE: Point well-taken, especially the last 2 sentences. We will be extremely selective in the appointment of postdocs on the T32 Grant, looking for those individuals with promising publication records, the desire to apply for their own individual funding sources (K awards, NRSA, ACS, etc), and those that articulate a desire to pursue academics for their future careers. The appointment committee will pay close attention to these parameters when evaluating CVs and/or interviewing potential candidates.

3. “It’s a bit disturbing that the institution provides no institutional support for this highly successful program. This is not a requirement, but most T32s obtain some support, if only as a show of good faith and commitment. Quite often, this is a major reviewer factor. In this case, the strengths of your program overrode this negative. Nonetheless, it would be beneficial if you were able to obtain some programmatic support of some kind from your institution. The dollar amount isn’t important as much as the commitment to helping you become an even better program. Such support could be for special seminars (this is often not wanted due to how many seminars already exist), retreats, local research days with poster sessions, special programs, whatever. Again, we’re not looking for a lot of dollars – we’re looking for your program to be made even stronger with help from your institution”

RESPONSE: I have spoken with Dr. Ray Watts, Dean of the School of Medicine (SOM) and Dr. Ed Partridge, Director of the UAB Comprehensive Cancer Center (CCC) about this point, and both have pledged institutional support in the amount of [REDACTED]. Uses for this support may include a 1 day, yearly symposium with presentations from the Trainees, as well as presentations from leaders in the field of Neuro-Oncology (2-4 invited outside speakers), and a dinner that evening that would

allow for informal interactions of the participants. This will be a small group, so should foster good discussions, and provide net-working opportunities. This is just one suggested use of the resources, but I will poll the trainees/mentors for their suggestions as well. Importantly, the SOM and CCC will be supporting our T32 activities, and investing in the field of Brain Tumor Biology at UAB.

Thank you for your support of the T32 Training Program in Brain Tumor Biology at UAB. I look forward to your visit next week, and the opportunity to discuss the responses described above.