COSSA
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COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Policy, November 29 and 30

COSSA
2012 Annual Meeting Colloquium
Social & Behavioral Science and Public Policy
November 29 – 30, 2012
Registration Open

The COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Policy will take place on November 29 and 30. Speakers include: former Census director **Ken Prewitt** (COSSA's current President), Commissioner of Education Statistics **Jack Buckley**, National Science Foundation (NSF) Assistant Director for Social Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) **Myron Gutmann**, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Principal Assistant Director for Science **Philip Rubin**, National Institute of Health (NIH) National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) Director **Griffin Rodgers**, congressional staff, and American Enterprise Institute Scholar **Norman Ornstein**, who will assess the results of the 2012 election. A [preliminary agenda](#) is available. [Register now!](#)

Registration fees increase from $100 to $175 on November 5.

APSA Political Scientists Forecast Election Results

On October 16, the American Political Science Association (APSA) held a panel discussion that brought together four of the political scientists who contributed to the 2012 Election Forecast issue of its journal, *PS*. The issue consists of 13 forecasts for the presidential election (forecasts were for the popular vote). The forecasts ranged from 53.8 percent of the popular vote for Barack Obama to 53.1 percent for Mitt Romney. Eight of the predictions gave the advantage to Obama (though six of these were close to a toss-up).

Christopher Wlezien, Temple University, discussed some methods of forecasting, such as polling, citizen forecasting, expert forecasting, and betting markets. The model used for his forecast is "leading economic indicators index," a composite of 10 economic indicators taken during the first quarter of the election year, and some polling results to account for non-economic factors. His forecast gave Obama an 80 percent probability of winning the popular vote.

Michael Lewis-Beck, University of Iowa, contrasted two different forecasting models. One, a "jobs model," which includes indicators like presidential popularity, incumbency, number of jobs created, and economic growth, gave a 75 percent probability of Romney winning the popular vote. The second, a "proxy model," based on empirical correlates of the vote but without grounding in theory, gives Obama a 75 percent probability of winning the popular vote. Lewis-Beck cautioned that forecasting is a murky area, noting that none of the 13 predictions in the PS issue reached 95 percent certainty. Lewis-Beck also discussed the possibility that Obama would pay a "racial cost" (loss of votes due to racism). His research suggested that Obama lost 5 percent of the vote in 2008 and could lose 3 percent in 2012 due to prejudice.

Thomas Holbrook, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, discussed the role of incumbency. He suggested that when the incumbent himself is running (as opposed to a member of the incumbent party) both positive and negative effects of incumbency are felt more strongly. Holbrook's model, based on an index comprised of Americans' satisfaction with personal finances and presidential approval rates, predicts 47.9 percent of the popular vote for Obama, giving him a 27 percent chance of winning the popular vote.

James Campbell, University of Buffalo, discussed a number of factors that could influence the election, including increased partisan polarization, Obama's incumbency, the economic downturn, and Romney's bruising primary battle. Campbell's forecasting models took into account public opinion polls in the summer and second quarter GDP growth. His models predict between 51.3 and 52 percent of the popular vote for Obama with a 61 percent certainty of an Obama plurality.

For more about the event and links to access the forecasting issue of *PS*, visit: http://politicalsciencenow.com/forecasting/.

CNSTAT Public Seminar Discusses Election Polling and Forecasting

The Committee on National Statistics at the National Academy of Sciences (CNSTAT) held a public seminar on October 19 on "Reflections on Election Polling and Forecasting from Inside the Boiler Room."

Scott Keeter, director of survey research at the Pew Research Center, discussed some of the challenges of pre-election polling. He noted that a third of US households do not have a landline, posing challenges for traditional telephone polls. Declining response rates also pose a challenge. On the analytical side, Keeter noted that identifying likely voters and deciding how to deal with undecided voters can also be problematic.

Joe Lenski, executive vice president of Edison Research, which conducts exit polling for the National Election Pool, spoke about issues unique to exit polling. He pointed out that election-day exit polling is one of the largest one-day survey research projects in the country. Analysts face the challenge of increased early and absentee voting (Washington and Oregon, for example, have moved entirely to voting by mail). Exit polls also have experienced declines in response rates. The security of data presents a big hurdle, as there is increased incentive to leak results online.

Clyde Tucker, head of the CNN Decision Desk, explained how election night estimates are calculated, at both the precinct and county level.

Finally, Robert Groves, provost of Georgetown University, spoke about the lessons that can be learned from election polling, including its use of prior data, multiple and simultaneous estimators, mixed quantitative and qualitative data, mixed methods of measurement, and data gathered on non-respondents.

Future Tense Explores Parties' Science and Technology Policies

Though the ideological polarization between the Democrats and Republicans has never been more extreme, when it comes down to policy specifics-especially for issues that don't regularly grab headlines-it can be difficult to discern where the real differences between the two parties lie. Future Tense, a joint project of Slate, Arizona State University, and the New America Foundation, held an event on October 9 called "It's Science and Tech Policy, Stupid" to explore the presidential candidates' science and technology policies.

Konstantin Kakaes, Bernard L. Schwartz Fellow at the New America Foundation, spoke about the approaches of Republicans and Democrats to science and technology. While the parties differ in their attitudes and rhetoric toward science, there is often little difference in their approaches to science and technology issues. Politicians of both parties tend to focus on the practical applications and benefits of emerging science and technology (often before the science is actually there) rather than promoting research for its own sake. Kakaes also noted that both parties often promote science and technology policies that are politically advantageous, rather than scientifically sound. For example, though there is near-universal consensus among scientists that missile defense is a "waste of time" (a position recently buttressed by a report from the National Research Council), both parties have spent $100 billion on missile defense programs since the mid-1980's. In the case of induced hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), the scientific community is uncertain about the long-term risks, but both parties favor pursuing fracking because the benefits can be collected in the short term.

A panel comprised of Stacy Cline, Counsel for Rep. Mike Enzi (R-WY); Sheri Fink, New America Foundation; and Amanda Ripley, New America Foundation, and moderated by Robert Wright, New America Foundation, discussed the policy differences between the presidential candidates on specific issues. Cline noted that the difficult economic climate means that neither candidate is willing to make funding for science and technology a focus, so it can be difficult to discern their positions on some issues. However, on net neutrality, there is a clear difference: Barack Obama has pushed through net neutrality reform (though not for mobile platforms), while Mitt Romney is

opposed to net neutrality regulation, seeing it as an expansion of the federal government's powers. Fink pointed out that the candidates have clear ideological differences on the issue of stem cell research. Another clear point of division is on the evaluation of cost effectiveness in medical interventions (a key element of the Affordable Care Act), which Republicans argue could lead to health care rationing. Ripley spoke about the state of science and technology education in America, arguing that there is a serious lack of rigor and that students are not learning key critical thinking and problem solving skills. She noted that while both campaigns have similar rhetoric regarding the importance of science and math education, the Obama administration has managed to leverage relatively little power into widespread reform through stimulus money and programs like Race to the Top. A Romney presidency would likely put greater emphasis on school choice and delegating education policy to the states.

More information about the event, including a webcast, can be found at:
http://futuretense.newamerica.net/events/2012/its_science_and_tech_policy.

NCATS Seeks Information on Enhancing Community-Engaged Research through the CTSA Program

The newly established National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) is seeking comments from "all key stakeholders in the scientific and public health communities on the development of a research agenda utilizing the community engagement infrastructure developed through the Clinical and Translational Sciences Awards (CTSA) program.

The CTSA program funds a consortium of medical research institutions to improve clinical and translational research. Since the development of the program, NIH has recognized that community engagement plays a critical role in fostering collaborative research partnerships and enhancing public trust in clinical and translational research. For several years, the agency required that community engagement activities and research were required as part of CTSA applications. Diverse projects supported by the program addressed the need to educate the public and academics about the community engagement process, establish healthy living programs, provide community needs assessments, and develop an infrastructure to facilitate community-based participatory research.

NCATS is currently interested in capitalizing on NIH investment in the development of community engagement partnerships and infrastructure to support and conduct translational research. Accordingly, the request-for-information (RFI) is to solicit input from a variety of key stakeholders regarding the development of a research agenda that would leverage community engagement capability of the CTSA institutions to solve critical roadblocks in the translational research process.

Possible areas for comments include, but are not limited to:

1. Appropriate role and activities of community engagement capabilities of the CTSA institutions
2. Specific population and public health research challenges, such as changing health-related behavior or addressing health conditions of at risk populations that require effective community engaged translational research and the potential for testing of novel approaches
3. Specific research questions and/or types of translational research that the CTSA community engagement partnerships, infrastructure, and/or researchers are best suited to address
4. Techniques and/or tools the CTSA community engagement infrastructure could create or make available that would enhance the conduct of translational research, e.g. practice based research networks, electronic and administrative databases, consent procedures, connections with hard-to-reach patient groups and communities for clinical trials, etc.
5. Translational research questions of most interest to patients, providers, policymakers, researchers and other key stakeholders associated with the community engagement component of CTSA sites
6. The role community-based participatory research can play in addressing high-priority clinical

and translational research questions of critical importance to other NIH-funded research

7. Opportunities to advance studies of dissemination and implementation of new or repurposed therapeutics, behavioral interventions, effective prevention programs, and diagnostics in routine practice settings within CTSA institutions

8. Developing definitions, scientific measures, metrics, and outcomes for community engagement research and model programs

9. Training opportunities within the CTSA infrastructure to prepare researchers in the conduct of translational research in community-based settings and in collaboration with community groups

Responses will be accepted through November 15, 2012, and must be submitted electronically to CTSA-CEInformation@mail.nih.gov. For more information, see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-TR-13-001.html.

AAAS Science and Human Right Coalition Discusses Internet Freedom

On October 10, the Science and Human Rights Coalition at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) hosted Michael H. Posner, Assistant Secretary of State, who spoke about "Science and Academic Freedom in the Digital Age." Posner called for cooperation between the scientific and human rights communities, noting, "When scientists and human rights activists worked together, the results have been historic." He cited Darfur and anticorruption drives in Kenya as areas where scientists and activists have helped achieve progress. One broad goal of such efforts is the implementation of Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts that everyone has the right to participate in and benefit from scientific advancement. Posner observed that while interdisciplinary cooperation among scientist, NGOs, activists, and diplomats has led to intellectual and scientific progress, some countries have used technology to stifle expression and intellectual freedom. "There is a connection," he argued, "between personal freedom, intellectual freedom, and political freedom."

Posner cited the internet as one area where this connection is clear. Because the internet has become the realm in which scientific discourse exists, Posner argued, "scientific freedom will not exist without internet freedom." Forty-seven percent of all internet users (960 million people) live in countries that impose illegitimate restrictions on content. In addition, some countries impose restrictions on the availability of the internet. In Cuba, for example, only government officials have access to high-speed internet. And in countries like Syria, the internet has been used to track down and silence dissenting voices. The U.S. has responded to these threats to internet freedom by promoting open access to the internet in the United Nations, creating programs to expand infrastructure and bring the technology to impoverished parts of the world, and stopping the transfer of technologies to countries where it would be used to oppress citizens. Posner concluded by imploring the scientific community to use its expertise to advocate for internet freedom.

Information about the event, including links to a recording and transcript, can be accessed at: http://shr.aaas.org/coalition/Meetings/2012/Posner/index.shtml.

Behavior and Personal Health: NIH Releases Videos Highlighting Social/Behavioral Science Research Findings

Today, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) released four video highlighting outstanding behavioral and social science research that demonstrates the role of behavior in personal health. The videos focus on behavior's role in mindless eating, risk-taking, diabetes management and the evolution of skin pigmentation.

OBSSR director Robert Kaplan explained that the short films highlight some of the benefits of social and behavioral science research - "both for us as individuals and for society as a whole." Kaplan emphasized that "understanding our behavior and making better decisions puts us in charge of our

own health."

The videos, called *Research Highlights*, feature prominent researchers describing their work and its implications for society. Each is under seven minutes in length. Transcripts of the videos are also available.

1. Brian Wansink, Cornell University, **Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think**: Small changes in our physical environment can greatly affect our food eating behavior and totally change our eating habits.
2. Carl Lejuez, University of Maryland, **Risk-Taking Behavior and Substance Use**: A person's willingness to take risks and his or her ability to tolerate psychological stress are key to substance use and successful treatment.
3. Charlene Quinn, University of Maryland, **Using mHealth to Manage Diabetes**: Mobile health technologies hold promise in encouraging people to change their behavior and improve their health.
4. Nina Jablonski, Pennsylvania State University, **Evolution of Skin Pigmentation**: Understanding our personal ancestry and the general evolution of pigmentation are essential to our own health and society's well-being.

Kaplan pointed out that "there are personal takeaways in each of these films, but they also demonstrate both the excitement and reward of behavioral and social science research." He expressed his hope that they also serve to engage the next generation of researchers "to enter this dynamic and productive field."

The videos are available on both the OBSSR website (www.obssr.od.nih.gov/video/) and the NIH YouTube channel (http://www.youtube.com/user/NIHOD).

"Kinship Care: Challenges and Opportunities"

On October 17, Women's Policy Inc. hosted a briefing on "Kinship Care: Challenges and Opportunities." Kinship arrangements are characterized by a non-parent relative taking in a child in place of his or her parents. One in 11 children has spent at least three months in a kinship arrangement. Becky Shipp, Health Policy Advisor for the Senate Finance Committee Republican staff, gave an introductory talk and commented on the difficulty of formalizing the relationship between kinship caregiver and child. Many caregivers do not wish to adopt the child because it could terminate the parent's rights but do not feel comfortable becoming a formal foster parent either.

James Gleeson discussed the results of current research into kinship arrangements. There are 2.7 million children living in situations in which a relative is their primary caregiver, and that number is growing: over the past decade, the number of children in kinship arrangements grew six times faster than the child population. Gleeson characterized 81 percent of these arrangements as "private," meaning the child welfare system is not involved. Another 4 percent are "public," where the children are in the custody of the child welfare system, and the remaining 15 percent are "voluntary," where the system is involved but the child is not in state custody. Gleeson noted that while the children in public arrangements are more likely to be those with behavioral problems, children in private arrangements are more likely to live below the federal poverty level, suggesting that some of the neediest children are not being served by the state. Children in kinship care are at least as safe as those being cared for by non-relatives. In terms of mental health and behavioral problems, children in formal kinship arrangements seem to do better than those in non-relative foster care, but not as well as those in informal kinship arrangements or the general population. The impact of these arrangements on caregivers is mixed; caregivers are more likely to face psychological and physical challenges and stress, but report satisfaction with their caregiving.

Sharon McDaniel, President and CEO of A Second Chance, Inc. in Pittsburgh, PA, spoke about her program's work with kinship families. A Second Chance has provided services to over 12,000 children. 91 percent of the caregivers the program works with are female, and 65 percent of the

households have income under $25,000. McDaniel called for greater flexibility in government support and services to meet the needs of diverse kinship arrangements, including more support for female caregivers, and better integration of kinship families into programs and agencies.

Pat Owens, CEO of GrandFamilies of America, shared her experiences as a caregiver for her grandson and explained how they led her to become an advocate for kinship families. She argued for the importance of requirements to notify relatives if a child is put up for adoption and for extending daycare assistance to kinship families. Owens also called for more consistent education of kinship caregivers, who often receive contradictory information from government sources.

Mary Bissell, partner at ChildFocus, offered some recommendations based on a policy report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Stepping Up for Kids" (available here). She recommended increasing financial stability for kinship families by ensuring access to government programs and designing new programs that reflect the needs of kinship families. Second, the child welfare system needs to be reformed to better meet the needs of kinship families. Finally, other government and community responses should better reflect the needs of kinship families by establishing supportive networks that include housing, legal representation, health care, and education.

Slides from presenters can be found at: http://www.womenspolicy.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Briefings.

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