COSSA Washington UPDATE

November 12, 2013 Volume 32, Issue 19

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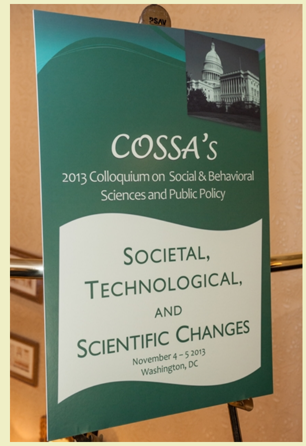
COSSA Holds Colloquium: Warren Pledges Support, Marrett Announces Political Science Changes, Silver Reflects on 30 Years at COSSA

On November 4 and 5, COSSA held its annual meeting, the Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Science and Public Policy. The theme of the Colloquium was "Societal, Technological, and Scientific Changes." More than 100 people attended to participate in a program that included panels on America's political institutions, changes affecting society, changes regarding race, and the press and social science. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), as well as major figures from the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Census Bureau, spoke. COSSA's retiring Executive Director, Howard J. Silver, shared some of the lessons of his tenure lobbying for the social sciences. A reception in his honor was sponsored by Sage Publications. COSSA's President, James Jackson, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, presided over the meeting. A summary of the proceedings is below.



All photographs by Chris Flynn.

Colloquium: Senator Elizabeth Warren: "Social and Behavioral Research is a Key Part of Finding the Answers" to Many Questions Facing America

Addressing a standing-room-only audience Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) expressed her pleasure at "speaking to a group that recognizes the value of academic research and is willing to get out there and fight to defend it."

A former social science researcher, Warren is a past recipient of a National Science Foundation grant to support an extensive empirical research project on the causes of consumer bankruptcy. The Senator described her experience as "one out of so many NSF grantees who have used their funding to change how we think about the economy, human behavior, our communities and our political structure."

Warren pointed out the "tough challenges," and "major issues" the country faces today, including falling behind our economic competitors in educational achievement; families...increasingly being squeezed by stagnant wages and the rising cost of housing, health care, and education; and an aging population that is putting pressure on the labor market, healthcare system, and retirement plans. She underscored the fact that health costs are rising for everyone, "and, even as we pay more, our health outcomes are no better than any other industrialized nation" (See Update, October 7, 2013).

"As a country, we owe it to our children to address these problems," Warren stated. She emphasized that the we know what to do for "a lot of problems" -- including investing more in rebuilding our infrastructure, passing a farm bill and maintaining food stamps, and fixing our "broken immigration system."

"But in a lot of areas," the Senator asserted, "we don't have all the answers. And what we need is not just political will-- but rigorous social and behavioral sciences research to provide insight into key questions:

- How do we best overcome the effects of poverty to ensure that all children get an

education?
- Can we reduce illness by getting more Americans to engage in healthy behaviors?
- How do we encourage young people to save for retirement?"

Social and behavioral research, Warren declared, "is a key part of finding the answers to these and a whole lot more questions that underpin some our most pressing issues." She observed that politicians on both sides of the aisle "have an intuitive understanding of government support for research," pointing out that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has enjoyed such "broad, bipartisan support." The same is true for the physics and engineering research supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and "decades worth of grants from the Defense Department." She noted that "in each of these instances, there is a national consensus around government support for basic scientific research, because everyone understands that our economy and our society thrive as a direct consequence of our improved understanding around us."

Social Science Research: A Compass for Policymakers

Conversely, Warren noted, that "although it isn't always recognized, the same is true for social and behavioral science research. Social science research is a compass for policymakers." She pointed out that the use of "thoughtful, high-quality research points us in the right direction," when the country faces a public policy challenge. Accordingly, she maintained, "our economy and society improve when we have rigorous social science research." She pointed to examples of the impact that research studies have had:

- Research taught us that having pediatricians talk to parents about reading can have a meaningful effect on a child's vocabulary;
- Research taught us that reminder systems for patients increase compliance with drug prescriptions-- and that reminder systems for doctors increase the number of life-saving cancer screenings that they perform; and
- Research convinced the federal government to drastically simplify the application the college student financial aid by showing the challenges families face in completing the forms.

Citing a speech she made the previous week before the Boston Chamber of Commerce, in which she called for a doubling of the "investment in scientific and biomedical research, and for more year-to-year certainty for the funding of these investments," Warren explained that she focused on the NIH, and "the way the agency seeds valuable biomedical research that leads to new treatments and innovations in healthcare." But the NIH "also supports behavioral and social science research because we recognize that understanding the behavioral factors that affect health is just as important as developing new drugs. And all of our scientific research-- whether funded by NIH, the NSF, or other agencies-- is critical to our advancement."

Social science research, said Warren, "is part of the equation. Put simply, if we want to make sound choices for the future-- choices that are based on facts and science, not assertions and assumptions-- choices that will actually solve our most pressing problems, and not just make us feel good about doing something-- we need research in economics, law, education, sociology. Otherwise, we just doing some very expensive guessing," she insisted.

Social and Behavioral Science Research Constantly Under Attack

Warren, COSSA Executive Director Howard Silver, and AERA Executive Director Felice Levine

Warren observed that "given the importance of such work to the effectiveness of policymakers, one might expect that there would be broad support for this work. And yet, federal support for social sciences research is constantly under attack." Without explicitly saying so, Warren pointed to the amendment by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) added to the FY 2013 Consolidated Appropriations Act last March "that limited NSF funding for political science research only to those projects certified as promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States." These restrictions, based on politics, said Warren, "makes as little sense for social science as they do for technical disciplines. Knowledge is knowledge; discovery is discovery. No one should have an interest in perpetuating ignorance."

She stressed that, over time, the targeted efforts to cut the U.S. investment in social science research will "threaten the ability of Congress to make good decisions by cutting off the pipeline of rigorous analysis that is necessary to help identify what policies will and won't work. When policymakers tie the hands of social science researchers, they are tying their own hands as well," Warren maintained.

She concluded her remarks by emphasizing that support for "research is the starting point for all of our innovations, and the federal government must maintain its commitment to funding research in the social sciences." Furthermore, "Social science research is critical to developing a safer, stronger America. I applaud the Consortium for fighting for the social sciences, and I am proud to join you."

Colloquium: Marrett Explains Challenges for NSF and a Resumption of the Political Science Program's Proposal Review

National Science Foundation (NSF) Acting Director Cora Marrett spoke about the state of the social and behavioral sciences at NSF. The Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) has been under fire in recent years, particularly with the passage of the Coburn amendment, which restricts the scope of political science grants (see [Update, June 10, 2013]).

Marrett began by outlining the government's support for social and behavioral science. In 1945, Vaneevar Bush published *Science the Endless Frontier*, which advocated for increased support for the natural and physical sciences and led to the creation of NSF. However, the report also cautioned that "It would be folly to set up a program under which research in the natural sciences and medicine was expanded at the cost of the social sciences, humanities, and other studies so essential to national well-being." This caveat seems to have gotten lost, Marrett observed.

More recently, President Obama, speaking at the 150th anniversary of the National Academy of Sciences, voiced his support for the social sciences and cautioned that these sciences should not be subject to politics. And John Holdren, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, affirmed the administration's full support for basic research in the social sciences, arguing, "The fact is that nobody can predict where new understandings developed in fundamental research will ultimately lead-- and what benefits to society will ultimately result."

Marrett addressed the impact sequestration and the ongoing uncertainty over appropriations has had on NSF. Over 90 percent of NSF's comparatively small budget ($7 billion compared to roughly $30 billion for the NIH) goes out the door to fund research, education, and facilities. So far, NSF has not been hit as hard as other federal agencies by sequestration; it has not had to cut back on existing awards, staff, or programs. However, NSF suffered a two percent cut to its budget, which, Marrett indicated, will result in fewer new awards, decreasing the likelihood of future discoveries.

Marrett also discussed some of the challenges faced by SBE, which she predicted would not go away anytime soon. She referred to NSF's "Rebuilding the Mosaic" report from 2011, which laid out some of the big questions the SBE sciences could pursue in the future, including topics like population change, disparities, communication, and the role of new technologies. Marrett also argued that the future of SBE will be highly interdisciplinary, collaborative, and data intensive.

She also noted the resumption of the solicitation and review process for SBE's political science program (see later story in this issue), despite the continuation of the restrictions placed on it by the Coburn Amendment.

For those who want to strengthen SBE in the face of its detractors, Marrett argued that it is essential to demonstrate effective stewardship of taxpayer dollars. This means making decisions transparent and accountable and ensuring that investments support the national interest as defined by the NSF charter ("to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense"). Marrett asserted that NSF's merit review process is the gold standard and that NSF does not intend to back away from it. She concluded by reminding the audience that these challenges are not unprecedented and that they will pass if we can work together to spread the message of the importance of all scientific disciplines and of investment in fundamental research.

Colloquium: Silver Reviews Thirty Year Career at COSSA

COSSA Executive Director Howard J. Silver, who will leave COSSA at the end of 2013, examined his thirty year career with the organization, the last twenty-five as its leader.

He provided the meeting's participants with a gallery of photos of figures who came to play prominent roles during his tenure. He began with Ronald Reagan and David Stockman, without whom there would not have been a COSSA and Silver would not have had a career there. In 1981, they proposed cutting funding for the social and behavioral sciences by two-thirds, leading the professional associations in these disciplines to decide a political response was necessary and thus COSSA was born as an advocacy group.

In the vein of "the more things change, the more they remain the same," Silver noted that when he first joined COSSA, congressional staff advised him that social and behavioral scientists needed to pay attention to the titles of their grants, since members of Congress would hold some up to ridicule. A few weeks ago, Silver heard the same admonition from a current Senator's staff person.

Silver reminisced about when then-Health and Human Services Secretary Louis Sullivan went after two surveys dealing with sex. One, a project dealing with adults led by University of Chicago sociologist Ed Laumann, actually got canceled. The other focused on teenagers, which, with the intervention of former congresswoman Pat Schroeder (D-CO), became the Survey of Adolescent Health and survives to this day.

He also described the creation of the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate at the National Science Foundation and the important roles played by former University of Michigan President James Duderstadt, the late Carnegie Mellon professor Herbert Simon, and then-NSF director Walter Massey.

The creation of the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research at the National Institutes of Health was another focus of the talk, as was the establishment by then-Presidential Science Adviser Allan Bromley of the position of Assistant Director for the SBE sciences at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, although at that point the "E" stood for education, not economics.

Silver also went through the litany of threats to the social and behavioral sciences from House Science Committee Chairman Robert Walker (R-PA), Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), then-Rep. Pat Toomey (R-PA), up to the current challenges from Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK), current House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX), and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA).

He expressed his deep appreciation to COSSA Deputy Director Angela Sharpe, who has served COSSA for eighteen years now. She leads three COSSA-based coalitions and has been responsible for COSSA's activities with regard to NIH and other health-related agencies.

Silver concluded his talk by thanking four people who have helped COSSA during the past thirty years and who have been significant advisers to him: Katherine Wallman, who was head of the Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics (COPAFS) when Silver arrived at COSSA and who has also worked with him as head of the nation's Office of Statistical Policy; Ken Prewitt, now a Professor at Columbia University, who helped create COSSA, served as a two-time president of the Social Science Research Council, led the Census Bureau, served as COSSA President, and spoke at many COSSA events, including this year's Colloquium; Al Blumstein, "the King of Criminology" and Professor at Carnegie Mellon University, also a COSSA President as well as multi-term Board member, who has testified for COSSA on Capitol Hill, spoken at numerous COSSA congressional briefings, annual meetings, and has guided Silver in COSSA's unique role in justice research advocacy; and finally, Felice Levine, whom Silver first met when she was a program officer at NSF when he first arrived at COSSA, and who subsequently served on the COSSA Executive Committee for over twenty years, first as Executive Director of the American Sociological Association and now in her current position as Executive Director of the American Educational Research Association.

The meeting also included a farewell tribute and reception marking Silver's tenure at COSSA, which included words of praise from many with whom he worked and a coming salute in the Congressional Record from Rep. David Price (D-NC).

Colloquium: Lawrence Tabak: Challenges for NIH

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Principal Deputy Director Lawrence Tabak addressed the challenges facing the agency (slides). Tabak focused his remarks on three particular challenges:

1. Enhancing the translation of data into knowledge - Big Data to Knowledge (BD2K) and Reproducibility activities and pilot programs
2. Ensuring a robust and diverse biomedical workforce - Biomedical Workforce and Diversity Initiatives

3. Supporting the best science through a dynamic and efficient peer review system

Big Data to Knowledge /Reproducibility Activities and Pilot Programs

Tabak began by pointing out the myriad data types that exist today, including genomic, clinical, other 'omic, imaging, exposure, and social media/internet-based. He noted that there are more than 28 million daily page views of the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) website, with approximately four million daily users, 35 terabytes of daily downloads, with peak hits of 7000 per second.

He highlighted the June 2012 report of the Data and Informatics Working Group of the Advisory Committee to the NIH director. Major themes of the report includes a recognition that we are at a pivotal point and are at risk of failing to capitalize on technology advances; cultural changes at NIH are essential; aim to develop new opportunities for data sharing, data analysis, and data integration; and long-term NIH commitment is required.

According to Tabak, starting in FY 2014 NIH's BD2K program will facilitate the broad use and sharing of large, complex biomedical data sets through the development of policies, resources, and standards; develop and disseminate new analytical methods and software; enhance training of data scientists, computer engineers, and bioinformaticians; and establish Centers of Excellence to address biomedical analytics, computational biology, and medical informatics.

Regarding the issue of reproducibility and transparency of research findings, Tabak noted that this has been the topic of concern in multiple publications. It is a problem in all areas of research, he pointed out, and not just specific types of studies.

He explained that the possible causes of difficulties in reproducing data include:

- Misconduct (falsification, fabrication or plagiarism (FPP)), one of the causes, but not the focus of the NIH's effort
- "Cartoon biology" -- Experiments are conducted until desired result is achieved, but prior experiments are not adequately reported
- Chance -- Experiments performed correctly, but without appropriate replication
- Poor experimental design -- Fundamental quality characteristics not reported/performed (e.g., blinded assessment, randomization, sample size calculations)

Tabak noted that the NIH is discussing reproducibility and transparency of research findings with its stakeholder communities to alert them to the issue. He pointed out that things seem to be moving fastest in psychology. The agency's role has included sponsorship of 2011 and 2012 meetings and regular participation in discussions. NIH has also collaborated with the American Psychological Association and the Association for Psychological Science on new and enhanced journal reporting standards (e.g., expanded Methods sections, addition of statistical sections).

Additional trans-NIH actions include: Office of Intramural Research will create and pilot a new module on research integrity as it relates to experimental biases and study design and ethics training courses required for NIH intramural fellows. Once tested, the Office of Extramural Research will make available on the web and encourage adoption (or equivalent) by extramural training programs for fellows and trainees.

NIH will implement pilots to address key concerns, said Tabak. These include: evaluate the "scientific premise" of grant applications; develop a checklist to systematically evaluate grant applications; design changes to bio-sketch requirements; determine approaches needed to reduce "perverse incentives" and support replication studies. Important issues to consider as the pilots move forward, he cautioned, such as one size does not fit all; effects on experiences versus early-career researchers; costs of additional data; and potential added burden to review process. The agency also intends to convene meetings with journal editors, study section chairs, and the Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC) chairs, he explained, and noted that NIH will continue dialogue with stakeholders, including professional societies, industry, academics, and patient advocacy groups.

Biomedical Workforce and Diversity Initiatives

Tabak highlighted the NIH's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BEST) Program. The agency, via its Common Fund program, is currently seeking innovative approaches to complement traditional research training in biomedical sciences at institutions that receive NIH funds. The program allows one application per institution and provides up to $250,000 in direct costs per year. NIH received more than 100 applications for the program. The program encourages institutions to leverage funds with existing institutional offices and programs, local resources outside the institution, or that partner with industry or other entities, said Tabak. Proven approaches will be widely disseminated throughout the biomedical research community and awardees will meet to exchange ideas.

Addressing the issue of diversity, Tabak stressed the challenges the agency must solve. No one set of initiatives will diversify the NIH-funded workforce overnight, he emphasized, noting that the NIH must gain the trust within many communities. This will require that it develop partnerships; success will require collaboration and cooperation of extramural partners. The agency's overarching strategy includes four interrelated approaches that will be implemented:

- NIH Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) Program
- National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN)
- Ensuring fairness in peer review; and
- Increased engagement by all NIH leadership, which also includes the creation of a steering committee working group on Diversity and recruitment of a Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (See Update, June 25, 2012).

NIH Peer Review

Tabak concluded his remarks with a discussion of the NIH review and award process, a process that is "fundamental to the NIH mission." He reviewed the NIH's two-tier review system which is the foundation on which the agency's funding of extramural research is based. Each year, he explained, the NIH issues approximately one thousand funding opportunity announcements, reviews 70,000-80,000 applications, recruits approximately 22,500 reviewers, and runs nearly 2,500 meetings.

He highlighted the recommendations from the Advisory Council to the Director (ACD) Working Group on Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce that the: NIH should establish a working group of the ACD comprised of experts in behavioral and social sciences and studies of diversity with a special focus on determining and combating real or perceived biases in the NIH peer review system (recommendation #9); NIH should first pilot different forms of validated implicit bias/diversity awareness training for NIH scientific review officers and program officers to determine the most efficacious approaches. Once the best training approaches have been identified with NIH staff, pilot these programs with members of the study sections to ascertain if their value is sustained. If they are, provide to all study section members (recommendation # 10) (See Update, June 25, 2012).

Tabak discussed the recent charge to the NIH Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB) to recommend ways to further optimize the process of reviewing and awarding grants. The SMRB is directed to focus on ways in which NIH can:

- Streamline the grant-making process and shorten the length of time from application to allocation of funds, and

- Address the administrative burden on applicants and their institutions, scientific reviewers, Council members, and NIH staff while maintaining a high quality review process.

NIH is increasingly challenged for additional validation of peer review and its funding approach, he explained. A fundamental challenge, he pointed out, is that NIH extramural research support is largely based on prospective review which forces evaluation of the potential of valuable outcomes. The "value" of research, he observed, is "often impossible to predict at inception, and stakeholders less willing to accept the 'promise' of a return on investment." He lamented that there are few interim and/or surrogate markers of research value. The quantitative approaches rely on some form of citation analysis or usage data, and the qualitative approaches are rarely applied in a rigorous manner prospectively, he stated.

The challenge for NIH is does its peer review system optimally inform decision making to support the most important science. Possible approaches are being explored, including quantitative approaches that will analyze the study section "inputs," said Tabak. The analysis will examine the number of new applications; the number of new awards; and the relationship between the two for different study sections, while controlling for their different sizes; and the percent of awardees who submit competing renewals by IRG.

The quantitative approaches under consideration include tracking indicators of emergent fields such as "word bursts" in literature, applications which precede widespread adoption could indicate a new research area; the appearance of new investigators in application to the study section; citation analysis of applications (emerging areas tend to cite interdisciplinary references); and "altmetrics," he said. He concluded his remarks by concluding that that "to date, quantitative approaches are insufficient and must be supplemented with expert qualitative input."

Former NIH Official Wendy Baldwin Responds to Tabak's Presentation

Wendy Baldwin

Responding to Tabak's presentation, former NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER) and president of the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) Wendy Baldwin observed that big data is a "great challenge and a great opportunity," for NIH. It could be transformative and historic, bringing social science and biology together. Social scientists look at the behavior or groups and ask why the outcomes differ. Biologists, on the other hand, she explained, have a different perspective with the mechanisms of disease. They tend to focus down to a minute process. How you see and think about solutions and whether things are working, big data provides the opportunity to bring these sciences together.

Baldwin noted that NIH, like the National Science Foundation (NSF), has repeatedly called for interdisciplinary research, which is hard to do, but with big data the two communities are grappling with the same data. It is what is opening up observational data. She expressed her belief that data sets that different constituencies want to use are the best avenue to interdisciplinary research, emphasizing that she has seen it work. She cautioned, however, that if not done properly, we could end up with new big data silos and the big challenge is to bring the constituencies together.

But NIH and NSF can do this, Baldwin insisted. They can exert the leverage needed to make it happen via how the agencies frame the issues, the challenges, and the questions along with the financial support provided. It is a powerful and empowering approach as these agencies look to draw on the creativity of the community. She pointed to the relentless support of data sharing by both agencies. There is public support as well as an obligation to share the data, said Baldwin.

According to Baldwin, the bigger issue is the one of replication. It requires the community to understand that reproducibility and translation are critical features to the process of science. It is important to the mission both NSF and NIH, she declared.

Colloquium: Changes at Census

Census Director John Thompson delivered a presentation on the societal, technological and scientific changes facing the Census Bureau ahead of the 2020 Census. He laid out some of the prevailing challenges facing the Census Bureau: resources are becoming more constrained, there is a growing demand for more information on a more timely and efficient basis, evolution in technology (social media, mobile technology, etc.) has created new opportunities and challenges, and new workforce demands for Census.

The technological changes, Thompson continued, present an opportunity to fundamentally change many aspects of the Census, beginning with data dissemination. With technology facilitating access to and manipulation of large amounts of data, Census must actively look for methods to improve dissemination. Thompson outlined a few approaches, such as engaging in active listening to foster innovation; in standardizing the metadata Census collects, which would allow the creation of new tools that combine data across the federal government, making it more useful and accessible for researchers and policymakers; and in ensuring that all information collected represents the best methodology so that the data are a respected, reliable, and credible source.

With these challenges in mind, Thompson turned to the 2020 Census and new strategies that the Census Bureau will implement. The most significant changes, he said, will be in increased use of the internet for data collection. In a difficult fiscal climate, internet data collection is of vital importance because of the inherent cost-saving it represents. It would reduce costs in printing, postage, and processing; it would allow the Bureau to move away from address canvasing; and some empirical research has shown that the internet increases the response rate.

Additionally, new technology could increase efficiency for field operations through advanced route plotting and the utilization of other strategies currently employed by companies such as UPS and FedEx. For 2010, the Census Bureau spent $459 million on address canvassing, which is certainly an area where savings are possible if technology is effectively implemented, Thompson said. However, the biggest challenge for 2020 is reducing the data collection workload for non-responses. If the Bureau is able to reduce the number of in-person visits necessary, the process would be much faster and much cheaper.

In a brief question-and-answer session, an audience member asked how the Census Bureau is taking into account privacy concerns, particularly with the possible use of administrative data to supplement the decennial questionnaire. Thompson responded that the "overriding drive of the Census staff" is protecting private information. He went on to say that the data Census collects is vital in supporting the basic rights of the population through informing research and policy. Former Census Bureau Director and past COSSA President Ken Prewitt, now of Columbia University, inquired about the current status of the American Community Survey. Thompson replied that he fully expects it to continue into the future.

Colloquium: America's Political Institutions in Trouble

Aside from the individual talks, the Colloquium included a series of panel presentations. The first focused on "America's Political Institutions in Trouble," Sarah Binder, Brookings Institution; Jeremy Mayer, George Mason University; and Mark Graber, University of Maryland Law School, addressed the challenges facing the Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court, respectively.

Congress

Binder (slides) began her presentation by asking the following

Sarah Binder

questions: Can Congress govern in polarized times? What does social science tell us about this question? A timely discussion, coming only weeks after a government shutdown, Binder sought to determine if this Congress is uniquely dysfunctional or just slightly more dysfunctional than usual-- or, in the words of Thomas Mann and Norm Ornstein, if it's "even worse than it looks."

To begin to answer these questions and create a measurement with which to compare this Congress with past iterations, Binder looks at landmark laws passed-- a concept created by political scientist David Mayhew-- compared to landmark laws that could have passed (in other words, what Congress could have accomplished but didn't). In this case, "landmark laws" refers to major legislation, such as the Affordable Care Act. When using this methodology to create a measurable score, Binder found that this Congress is, in fact, uniquely dysfunctional-- it has the highest dysfunction score in the post-WWII era (for comparison, the least dysfunctional periods were during LBJ's Great Society and immediately after September 11th, 2001).

Having empirically established the deadlock in today's Congress, Binder addressed some potential causes. Chief among them are inter-branch divided party government, intra-branch partisan polarization, and bicameral policy differences (the House and Senate have competing priorities). Binder wrapped up by posing the question: Is this time really different or are these factors simply more exaggerated than in the past? She suggested that the reality is a combination of both, which is exacerbated by a new problem: the current dysfunction is creating bad solutions (such as sequestration), which lead to the creation of new problems. She predicted that eventually electoral forces will reign in the deadlock-- as they have in the past-- but the real question is how much damage will be done before that happens.

The Presidency

Continuing with the dysfunction theme, Mayer sought to examine the Presidency in a comparative lens. He began by stating that he thinks President Obama deserves a "middling" grade. On the one hand, his approval rating is not particularly low, historically speaking. On the other, he has presided over the "worst period of crisis government and he's done nothing about it," Mayer said. Mayer went on to say that while he agreed with Binder's findings on Congressional dysfunction, Obama has not succeeded where some of his predecessors may have.

Jeremy Mayer

For instance, Mayer asserted that Obama's (poor) handling of relations with the Congress should not be too surprising: Obama brought the shortest resume in 100 years to the White House, including very little experience in the legislature. Furthermore, he doesn't have the personality of LBJ or Bill Clinton, which would allow him to work with an intransigent opposition party. Finally, the Obama Administration's legislative agenda has been largely reactive, and most policy has been written on Capitol Hill rather than by the White House. His strengths as an orator, in instilling staff loyalty, and as a politician, combined with an opposition party "prone to error" has kept things from being as bad as they potentially could have been given his weaknesses, Mayer asserted.

He continued with a historical comparison. In his dealings with the Republican opposition, the most ideologically rigid parties since the Civil War, Obama has mistakenly believed that helping the GOP through compromise would lead to more cooperation overall. If Tip O'Neill ran Congress in the same manner under Reagan as Speaker John Boehner runs this Congress, Mayer argued, Reagan would have been a failed president. Thus, while Obama's presidency has been marred by many weaknesses, it would be hugely inaccurate to examine his presidency without considering the unique dysfunction of Congress and the rarely high degree of unity in the opposition party.

Mayer concluded his presentation with some possible solutions-- or ameliorations-- and his hopes for the future. Certain structural changes, such as filibuster reform, electoral reform (in particular gerrymandering), and a unified ruling party are imperative for a functional presidency in the future. He expressed hope that after 2014 Republicans in Congress could act like the Democrats under Reagan and that the Tea Party "outburst" will have subsided. "Systemic anachronisms," Mayer said, "are helping our dysfunctions rather than healing them. The norms of American party politics are broken...Don't hope this will change from the White House."

The Supreme Court

Mark Graber

Graber argued that the Supreme Court is working as it always has-- which is the problem, thanks to recent changes to our political system. Specifically, the hyper-polarization addressed by the two previous panelists is leading to a Supreme Court that will continue to function in a typical manner, but its makeup will lead to fundamentally different outcomes.

To articulate this point, Graber stated that prior to Franklin Roosevelt's Administration, there existed a general agreement surrounding the role of the Court and the role of Congress. FDR changed this system by appointing "civil liberty activists" who were quite divorced from the general public in their views. These elites, as Graber calls them, will always have more extreme views than society-- from either left or right-- and our current Supreme Court reflects that.

Graber continued by stating that Justice Kennedy is the last of the real centrists, and the next confirmation will be a "war," as it will name the fifth "pure breed"-- that is, the fifth purely ideologically aligned Justice. Historically, Graber said, the Supreme Court managed to find the political center in many issues. In our current political environment, with a polarized Supreme Court, the United States will be wholly lacking in centrist institutions. He finished by stating that in the near future, "constitutional law could be rewritten every five years by 5-4 decisions," something Graber considers a worrisome prospect.

In a brief Q&A session, the panelists were asked what associations can do to help find and build up centrist voices. Binder responded, stating that stakeholders must reach out to legislators who have demonstrated interest in policy- and evidence-oriented solutions. For instance, some members of Congress are members of the American Political Science Association who could clearly be receptive to such issues. The next questioner wondered if associations could work with the business community to address some of these problems. Mayer thought this is certainly possible, especially with the dysfunction hurting businesses as it has, but Graber was concerned that businesses might not reflect the social science community's interests.

How We Live Now: Societal Changes

The second panel examined "How We Live Now: Societal Changes." The panel was comprised of Linda Jacobsen, Population Reference Bureau and COSSA Board Member; Lee Rainie, Pew Research Center Internet and American Life Project; and Deborah Carr, Rutgers University.

Household Changes in the U.S.

Jacobsen (slides) discussed changes in household trends in the United States since 1940. She began by explaining how households are defined. A household consists of all the persons who occupy a housing unit; the "householder" is the person (or one of the people) in whose name the housing unit is owned or rented. The household type is determined by the relationship of the other people in the household to the householder. A "family household" includes a householder and one or more others who are related to him or her by marriage, birth, or adoption; it can also include non-family members. A "nonfamily households" consists of a householder who lives alone or with non-relatives (like roommates). Jacobsen conceded that these categories can seem arbitrary at times; co-habiting couples may be classified as family or non-family, and dependent children further complicate classification (depending on what partner the child is biologically related to).


Linda Jacobsen

Those caveats aside, Jacobsen went over some of the major changes in household trends between 1940 and 2010. She noted that the number of households in the U.S. more than tripled since 1940 (35 million to 117 million in 2010), outpacing population growth in every decade. Looking at the structure of these households is important, Jacobsen said, because it impacts the well-being of individuals and families and affects demand on government support services. The proportion of non-family households more than tripled, rising from 10 percent of households in 1940 to a third of households in 2010. The proportion of married couples with children declined sharply (43 percent in 1940 to 20 percent in 2010), while persons living alone increased (eight percent in 1940 to 27 percent in 2010). The proportion of married couples declined as well, dropping below 50 percent for the first time in 2010 (whereas married couples comprised three quarters of all households in 1940).

Seniors over 65 are more likely to live alone than any other age group, and African Americans have the highest proportion of single-person households of any ethnic or racial group. Another trend Jacobsen pointed out is that those with lower levels of educational attainment are more likely to choose cohabitation over marriage.

The drivers of these trends, Jacobsen explained, include changes in marriage, divorce, and childbearing patterns. People are getting married later; median age at first marriage dropped during the baby boom, but is higher now than in 1890. In 1945, 86 percent of women had been married by age 25; in 1987, that figure was 35 percent. In addition, marriages are less stable today than they were; half of all marriages are projected to experience a disruption (divorce, separation, or death of a partner). Women are also having fewer children; in the 1930s, a plurality of women had four or more children. Now, the dominant number is two children.

Jacobsen concluded by describing some of the challenges to this kind of demographic work: the complexity and fluidity of living arrangements (including shared custody), lags between societal change and available data to measure phenomena like cohabitation and same sex marriage, and limitations in data collection and analysis.

Networked: The New Social Operating System


Lee Rainie

Rainie (slides) talked about how the internet and social media have affected society. He called the new structure "networked individualism." This is a system in which personal networks are: 1) more important (for learning, social support, and economic, social, and political navigation), 2) composed differently than in the past (they are larger, consisting of more close friends, but are also segmented and fragmented and include a new layer of "consequential strangers"), 3) perform new functions (often a "gatekeeper" function), and 4) lubricated by social media. Other factors driving these changes, Rainie explained, include changes in family life, business and labor structures, transportation and living patterns, and identity shifts in politics and religion (Rainie pointed out that "independents" are now the largest political bloc for the first time and that 44 percent of Americans have a different religious affiliation than the one they were raised with).

He remarked that since its creation in 2000 the Pew Internet and American Life Project has been able to observe three "digital revolutions." The broadband revolution has seen huge increases in high speed internet access in a very short period of time. In 2001, three percent of households had broadband, now 70 percent do. This has led to a greater volume, speed, and variety of information available online, as well as an increase of networked and always-available information, which in turn, has led people to create systems for filtering and recommending content. In addition, broadband has democratized content creation, and challenged the old broadcast model. The media landscape has also been altered; digital media, like blogs and twitter, has become what some have called a "fifth estate"-- content producers who lack the traditional journalistic distance from their subjects.

The second digital revolution is the mobile revolution; there are more mobile subscriptions in the U.S. than there are people. Over 90 percent of adults have mobile phones and more than half have smartphones. Rainie observed that this has affected our attention zones in a number of ways: we multitask more, are paying continuous partial attention to our phones, face penalties for not being connected, can "deep dive" into new subjects, and "snack" on information in idle moments (limiting boredom). In addition, mobile connectedness privileges "real-time, just in-time experiences," and has created a "metaverse," a space where data and the real world merge (like stargazing smartphone apps).

The final digital revolution Rainie discussed is the explosion in social networking; 61 percent of American adults participate in social networking. It has shifted expertise to non-professionals (Rainie cited the Smithsonian's "citizen scientist" program as one example). Social networks evaluate quality of information and serve as our audience. They also elevate do-it-yourself learning and action.

Rainie concluded by suggesting that more digital revolutions may be just around the corner. They might involve things like wearable, drivable, flyable, and scannable technology; new interfaces; expanded video and audio search; 3D printing; clouds and big data; or the gamification of information.

Aging of the Baby Boomers

Carr (slides) shared some of the impacts of the aging of the baby boomer age cohort, which is larger than the cohorts both preceding and following it. She discussed some of the aggregate impacts of this phenomenon, but cautioned that the baby boomers are a very heterogeneous group. Currently 13 percent of Americans are 65 or older; in 2040, that number will be 20 percent. In addition, the number of those over age 85 will triple. An important effect of that increase will be a decline in the number of available caregivers. The ratio of potential caregivers to each person over 80 is projected to be halved by 2040 (to three caregivers per recipient). Carr observed that even this low ratio can be misleading; while some people may have many potential caregivers (children, grandchildren, etc.), others have none.

Deborah Carr

Carr explained that the baby boomers are a diverse group in terms of both social characteristics (race/ethnicity, nativity, education, socioeconomic status, martial/relationship status, sexual orientation, parental status, age, health, and social integration) and attitudes and behaviors (literacy and language, health behaviors, political attitudes, sense of control, personality, quality of relationships, employment/volunteer status, daily time use, residential setting, and household composition). The baby boom cohort is much more ethnically diverse than the current 65+ cohort. This affects factors like family structure and socioeconomic status, and consequently the needs of that population.

The boomers are living longer than their predecessors, but Carr noted, this lone metric does not indicate that they are better off overall. The real picture seems to be more mixed. Baby boomers have longer life expectancy and lower rates of smoking, emphysema, and myocardial infarction than their predecessors. However, they also experience higher suicide rates, lower self-rated health, more frequent use of assistive devices, more reported work or functional limitations, higher obesity rates, lower exercise frequency, and greater rates of hypertension and diabetes. Carr suggested that these decrements may, in part, be the "cost" of living longer.

In terms of social relations, baby boomers have fewer biological children, but are more likely to have step--+children. They have more divorces and remarriages, fewer lifelong marriages, higher levels of non-marital cohabitation, more same-sex partnerships, more "living apart together," less "traditional" allocation of male/female roles, and are more likely to be multigenerational (grandparent caring for a grandchild), compared to their predecessor cohort. The baby boomers have more education than prior cohorts, but lag behind younger adults in health literacy. Carr concluded by pointing out that baby boomers report being most concerned about losing physical independence, major illness, losing memory, and paying for medical costs-- not dying. She observed that this can be good news, since we can design interventions to forestall many of these concerns.

Colloquium: Changes Regarding Race in America

In this panel, moderated by COSSA President James Jackson, panelists John Garcia, University of Michigan; Margaret Andersen, University of Delaware; and Ken Prewitt, Columbia University and former COSSA President, discussed the timely issues of the Voting Rights Act, Affirmative Action, and changing the categories of race/ethnicity in the Census, respectively.

Voting Rights Act

John Garcia

Garcia (slides) began by outlining the argument behind the recent *Shelby County v. Holder* Supreme Court decision that overturned Section 4b of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), which required a prescreening of changes to voting laws in states with a history of racial discrimination. The primary question presented to the Supreme Court was whether 1965 practices of preventing racial discrimination in voting laws were still relevant today. Chief Justice Roberts' majority opinion concluded that the VRA was immensely "successful" in its goals and that much progress has been made since it was passed. Garcia noted, though, that several political scientists submitted an amicus brief to the Court with empirical data that demonstrated "many of the same problems [from the 1960s] are alive and well in today's society."

With Section 4b of the VRA overturned, states are now able to pursue a wide array of voter suppression tactics, many of which are already in effect, overwhelmingly in states that previously fell under the purview of Section 4b. These tactics include the changing of polling locations, voter ID laws, reducing the number of polling locations, packing majority minority districts through gerrymandering, and others. Garcia stressed that voter ID laws in particular will have disproportionate effects on minorities. Data from Indiana shows that 83 percent of white eligible voters have acceptable IDs, compared to 71 percent of black voters. Moreover, these laws have a "significant" partisan impact, disproportionately affecting Democratic voters. Additionally, Garcia continued, when combined with the packing of congressional districts through gerrymandering, minorities' representation in the legislature at the state and federal level does not proportionately reflect population growth.

Garcia concluded by remarking on the difficulties this Supreme Court decision has created for advocacy organizations and other stakeholders. Under the pre-*Shelby* VRA, the Department of Justice was automatically presented with any changes to voting laws in these states, meaning it did not have to seek them out. Post-*Shelby*, the burden of raising complaints to new laws that may violate the VRA now largely falls on outside organizations. "The costs of trying to maintain historical gains" surrounding the prevention of racial discrimination in voting are now increasing, Garcia said.

Affirmative Action

Margaret Andersen

Andersen's discussion revolved around affirmative action in light of the June 2013 Supreme Court decision in *Fisher v. University of Texas*. In this case, Abigail Fisher, an undergraduate student, asked the Court to consider whether race-based application decisions by the University of Texas were inconsistent with previous rulings stipulating that any consideration of race in admissions must be "narrowly tailored." The Court ultimately ruled in favor of the University of Texas and remanded the case to the lower courts. Nonetheless, this case revived the saliency of affirmative action.

Andersen stated that social science research has demonstrated a strong connection between education outcomes and racial diversity in classrooms. The evidence also shows that there still exists a stark educational gap when comparing races, and that the post-secondary education system mimics racial inequality in society. This in turn continues the cycle of racial inequality in the economy due to the gap in college graduates by race. For instance, whites are two times as likely to attend a highly selective institution as blacks or Latinos.

However, she also noted that creating racial diversity in institutions has historically been challenging. To achieve racial diversity at the university level, applicants must be placed into racial categories, which is inherently problematic and, historically speaking, has primarily been used for exclusion rather than inclusion. In using affirmative action, universities must delicately balance these concerns while simultaneously demonstrating that racial diversity cannot be achieved through normal application procedures and that race-neutral solutions are insufficient. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that social science is unable to experiment in order to figure out exactly what solutions are most effective, Andersen said.

Andersen finished with a statement on affirmative action's future. She argued that affirmative action must be "framed" in a different manner for it to work in society. Racial diversity, she said, must be framed as a core value of the American electorate because of the clear benefits it has for society. However, she concluded by saying that affirmative action as we know it is "probably doomed."

Classification in the Census

Ken Prewitt

Prewitt, who is a former Director of the Census Bureau, concluded the panel by discussing a "politically feasible way" of fixing the race question in the Census. He emphasized the importance of this issue, stating that race statistics determined by the Census "drive policy" in the United States, and that accurately measuring race is a top priority for the 2020 Census. It is the basis of his new book, *What Is Your Race?: The Census and Our Flawed Efforts to Classify Americans*.

In one of the most significant changes to measuring race in U.S. Census history, the 2010 Census moved away from the notion that there only exist five racial groups - a concept that originated in the

18th century. According to Prewitt, by introducing the "mark one or more boxes" method of measuring race, individuals are able to separate the often-conflated race-nativity line. For example, in the 2010 Census, individuals were able to identify themselves as White, Asian Indian, or African American - or any combination of the above. Prewitt pointed out, though, that this still creates problems for someone who is, for instance, black of Ethiopian decent who has lived in the U.S. for decades. The way this person classifies themselves on this question is very subjective, and at a large scale represents a significant data point about which policy is formed. Nonetheless, the 2010 Census' novel approach of allowing more choice by the individual in selecting nativity and race created a more accurate data set than in past years. Further complicating matters is the separate question on Hispanic origin.

Prewitt highlighted the importance of finding an accurate measure to race in America by noting that in the early 1900s there were separate categories for Europeans - Polish, Irish, etc. - and "Whites." Over the decades, those who chose the European distinctions began to select White as their classification, changing the race data but not the fundamental makeup of the country. Along the same logic, Prewitt continued, many classifications from today, such as Asian-Indians, will cease to be a distinctly-identified race in 10-15 years, yet the same cultures and people will live in this country. By underlining these inherent problems with asking people to identify their race versus their nationality, Prewitt wanted to emphasize that the idea of fixed, non-changing race groups is "ridiculous." Thus, finding a race question for the Census that keeps both race and nationality as distinct data sets is vital if our public policy will continue to be guided by questions of racial makeup. In the future "we won't be colorblind," he finished, "but color won't predict as much as it does currently."

Colloquium: The Press and Social Science

Nancy Kidd, National Communication Association and COSSA Board Member, moderated a panel on the Press and Social Science, comprised of D'Vera Cohn, Pew Research Center; Scott Jaschik, *Inside Higher Ed*, and Mike McAuliff, *Huffington Post*.

Tour of the New Media Landscape

D'Vera Cohn

Cohn (slides) shared some recent trends in how people get their information. All of the news media sectors have been in decline for the past decade or two (television, radio, and newspaper), except for online news; more people get their news online than by reading a newspaper or listening to the radio. Reading in print, in general, has also been declining, but people who read on tablets do report doing in-depth reading. Cohn observed that this is part of a mobile news paradox: tablet users spend more time on news, read new sources for news, and report adding to the news they consume. However, the newsroom workforce continues to diminish, shedding over 18,000 workers in just over a decade. Simultaneously, nonprofit news sites (like ProPublica and the Center for Investigative Reporting) are on the rise. These are generally young organizations (less than thirty percent were founded before 2008), and are generally funded through rich donors or foundation grants; they face an uncertain financial future.

Cohn offered some implications of these developments for social scientists. First, she observed that the traditional gatekeepers (such as newspaper editors), while still important, have lost their monopoly. However, the old guard was more objective in comparison with new media, where outlets often have a specific voice or point of view. Second, niche players (topic-specific blogs or news sites) are now very important. Third, the speed at which news is gathered and delivered is much faster than it used to be.

Cohn suggested that social scientist who would like to get involved in the public debate take advantage of the more numerous platforms (though many of these don't pay), write in plainer

English, and accept "good enough" over perfect, particularly on time-sensitive topics.

Getting Social Science Research into the News

Scott Jaschik

Jaschik shared some of his thoughts on why social science research has a hard time getting into the news. He observed that while mainstream media outlets often treat the results of research in the physical and biomedical sciences as groundbreaking news, this is generally not the case with social science findings. He suggested that the mindset of writing conference papers and journal articles (put the conclusion at the end) is the opposite approach to take when approaching the media. When talking to the press, social scientists should try to avoid "burying the lead." In addition, Jaschik suggested working to build relationships with reporters, maintaining an updated website, being able to explain a finding and its importance in a sentence, and keeping an eye out for relevant news stories.

Some challenges social scientists may face when dealing with the press include a suspicion of qualitative research, confusion over quantitative elements like regressions, and the perception that everyone in a field thinks the same thing. In addition, Jaschik recommended that those doing research into hot-button topics like sex, race, and drugs be prepared to address controversy and not stay silent if their work is attacked. He also encouraged researchers to be comfortable applying their conclusions to different situations so reporters find them more versatile.

"Be more Huff Post-y"

Mike McAuliff

McAuliff talked about how the flexibility of media outlets like the *Huffington Post* can offer some lessons to social scientists. He shared his impression that social scientists don't reach out to reporters as often as other would-be sources. He suggested that social scientists could benefit from emulating HuffPo's quick, assertive style: advocate for your work, push for the truth of your conclusions, and get to the point quickly. In addition, he echoed Jaschik's recommendation to think about the timeliness factor. He also suggested that social scientists think about search terms and search optimization to make their research easier to find. McAuliff also emphasized the importance of building relationships and establishing trust with reporters.

NSF Announces Policy Regarding Political Science Program

In a Dear Colleague letter dated November 1, Joanne Tornow, Acting Assistant Director for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences directorate, announced updated information about the political science program. She declared that "the Political Science Program at NSF will be holding its regular and dissertation competitions this spring. As usual, the deadline for both competitions is January 15th with results being announced between the middle of May and early June."

Recognizing that the program is still under the restrictions placed on it by the Coburn Amendment, which stipulates that projects funded through the Political Science Program must either "promote national security or the economic interests of the United States," she advises researchers that "the relationship of the proposed research to these goals should be addressed both in the broader impacts section of the project summary and within the project description."

Regarding the review process, Tornow notes that "the Political Science Program...will continue to engage panels to review grant proposals, using the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts)." However, these panels will be asked to provide input on the degree to which the proposed research projects meet the Coburn criteria. Informed by the advice of the review panels, NSF Program Officers will make funding recommendations.

As long as a Continuing Resolution (CR) remains in effect for NSF's FY 2014 funding, eliminating the Coburn amendment will remain difficult, since a positive action would be necessary to remove it. If the Congress manages to consider NSF's FY 2014 budget in a regular or Omnibus Appropriations bill, the elimination of Coburn restrictions could be easier because the two bills the emerged from the House and Senate appropriations committees that include funding for NSF in FY 2014 do not include the Coburn language and another amendment to preserve it would be required.

For questions and further information about the Dear Colleague Letter contact: Brian Humes (bhumes@nsf.gov) and Erik Herron (eherron@nsf.gov).

George F. Koob Named Director of NIAAA

George F. Koob has been selected as Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). He is expected to join the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in January 2014.

As NIAAA director, Koob will oversee the institute's $458 million budget, which primarily funds alcohol-related research in a wide range of scientific areas including genetics, neuroscience, epidemiology, prevention, and treatment. NIAAA also coordinates and collaborates with other research institutes and federal programs on alcohol-related issues and national, state, and local institutions, organizations, agencies, and programs engaged in alcohol-related work.

Koob comes to the NIH from The Scripps Research Institute, California Campus, where he is Chairman, Committee on the Neurobiology of Addictive Disorders, and Director, Alcohol Research Center. He earned his Ph.D. in Behavioral Physiology at Johns Hopkins University.

His early research has contributed to the understanding of the anatomical connections of emotion al systems and the neurochemistry of emotional function. He is also one of the world's authorities on alcohol and drug addiction. He has furthered the understanding of the neurocircuitry associated with the acute reinforcing effects of drugs of abuse and more recently on the neuroadaptations of these reward circuits associated with the transition to dependence.

NIH director Francis Collins recognized and thanked NIAAA Acting Director Kenneth R. Warren, "for his exemplary and dedicated service. Ken ably led the NIAAA for five years, and those years have been full of uncertainty and change."

Senate HELP Committee Holds Hearing on "Attaining a Quality Degree: Innovations to Improve Student Success"

On October 31, the full Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing to discuss the role of innovation in improving access, quality, affordability, and completion in higher education. HELP Chairman Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) laid out the goals of this hearing in their opening remarks, stating "innovation for its own sake is not what we're after." Alexander continued by saying there should be three goals of innovation in higher education: 1) improve student performance; 2) increase graduation and retention rates; and 3) reduce costs to taxpayers and students. He finished his statement by wondering if the federal government is "in the way" and asked the witnesses to talk about the government's role in their testimony.

The witnesses were Richard Kazis, Senior Vice President, Jobs for the Future; William Kirwan, Chancellor and CEO, University System of Maryland; Scott Ralls, President, North Carolina Community College System; and Paul LeBlanc, President, Southern New Hampshire University. In response to the opening statements, Kazis argued that innovation is vital to improving success and access for first generation and low-income students, and that Congress should provide incentives for innovation. Kirwan reiterated these points and mentioned that massive open online courses (MOOCs) are a positive step in this direction. Ralls said that his experience in North Carolina has shown that "focusing on success as much as access" was important in improving outcomes in N.C. community colleges. He continued by saying that reauthorizing the Higher Education Act would be a positive step in the right direction. Finally, LeBlanc affirmed his belief that competence-based education programs (CBEs) "have the potential to drive a paradigm shift in higher education." LeBlanc also suggested that Congress demand more from higher education as an industry in areas such as transparency, data, and overall accountability.

Alexander asked what lawmakers can do more specifically to help this process. The witnesses' answers were in alignment: more incentives and money. Technology in particular has been shown to lower costs and improve learning and outcomes, but new technology comes with high up-front costs that many institutions have difficulty covering.

Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) raised the issue of the rise in non-traditional students, such as those with families and full-time jobs. LeBlanc agreed that innovations must address this group, stating that the challenges presented to these learners are much different than the typical middle- to upper-income student coming out of high school and enrolling in a four-year institution. For instance, many of these non-traditional students have potentially not written a paper in over a decade, but they do have relevant work experience that should exempt them from certain course requirements. Ralls agreed as well, stating that community colleges in particular must ensure articulation agreements-- agreements that set the rules for transferring credits-- are well-established and keep transferees from retaking classes. Additionally, non-traditional students are generally focused on completing as quickly as possible, as opposed to the more traditional university enrollees. They are not interested in summer vacations, for example.

To conclude the hearing, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Harkin asked for more detail about the cost structure of some institutions, with a particular focus on LeBlanc's university's model. The senators' concerns surrounded the cost structure of online courses versus traditional courses. Specifically, LeBlanc and others stated that the low overhead and relative affordability of online courses have resulted in higher profits compared to traditional in-person courses. In response, Warren asked if it made sense for those who participate in online courses-- typically lower-income individuals due to the courses' lower costs-- to subsidize the traditional courses for the typically higher-income students who attend classes on campus. LeBlanc responded by stating that, at his university, 90 percent of students at the traditional campus receive some sort of financial aid and that both students bodies were fundamentally different (40 percent of online attendees are adults, for instance). Warren and Harkin were not wholly satisfied with this answer, stating that discussions on future innovation must consider who, in actuality, is really footing the bill for higher education. However, the hearing concluded before they were able to delve more deeply into this issue.

The Nation's Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading, Grades 4 and 8

In the National Assessment of Educational Progress' (NAEP) webinar *The Nation's Report Card: 2013 Mathematics and Reading, Grades 4 and 8*, the NAEP delivered information on student performance data in mathematics and reading. The data in their entirety are available on the NAEP website.

Notable points:

- The white-Hispanic score gap has not decreased, but scores in both categories individually have continually increased.
- The white-black score gaps did not change significantly in 2013.

- Fourth- and eighth-grade female students scored higher in mathematics in 2013 than in 2011, but the scores for fourth- and eighth-grade male students did not change significantly over the same period.
- Math scores were higher in 2013 than in all previous assessment years.
- The number of students performing at or above "proficient" has increased in every year of the study.
- Only two states (Hawaii and Tennessee) and the District of Columbia saw higher mathematics scores in 2013, and only Iowa, Tennessee, Washington, the District of Columbia saw higher reading scores. The District of Columbia schools, however, ranked among the lowest in the nation in past years.
- In reading, minority progress stagnated in the fourth grade, but in eighth, Asian students gained five points, Hispanic students gained three points, and black students gained two points. Boys' scores went up two points, and girls' rose three points.
- This NAEP assessment includes more data from special education students than in past years due to changes in methodology.

Jack Buckley, the commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics which oversees NAEP, said that he was "heartened" by the positive results, particularly in eighth-grade reading, but noted that overall, there was not much improvement. The continued gap in racial and ethnic progress is of notable concern to Buckley. Additionally, Cornelia Orr, the executive director of the National Assessment Governing Board, said during the call that assisting "beginning readers to be stronger readers would be an area that needs more attention" based on the fourth grade reading scores.

Texas State Senator Leticia Van de Putte discussed some important policy changes and the impact of these data on policymaking and education reform. "NAEP is the only yardstick that can measure student achievement nationally," she said. She finished by stating that policymakers must pay attention to the data in the NAEP report card if we are to make productive reforms in education policy, particularly in states with changing demographics.

William Waidelich, Executive Director for the Association for Middle Level Education, also praised the rigor and usefulness of the NAEP studies. He stated that the data show that educators "continue to improve their curriculums" and that they should continue to "challenge their students when developing their curriculums." He also stressed the importance of active involvement by parents. It is important, Waidelich stated, that stakeholders recognize the vital importance of a quality education at these grade levels in particular.

NCHS Releases Interactive *Health, U.S. 2012* Website

The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) has released its interactive website for *Health, United States 2012: In Brief*, developed in collaboration with the National Library of Medicine. The website allows users to take the data from the *Health, U.S.* report and create customized charts and tables; additional years and data elements (such as sex, age, race and Hispanic origin, percent of poverty level, geographic region, and location of residence) are available. The *Health, U.S.* topics cover life expectancy, infant mortality, causes of death, teen births, overweight and obesity, health insurance status, delay of medical care due to cost, and others.

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American Political Science Association
American Psychological Association
American Society of Criminology
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Association of American Law Schools
Law and Society Association
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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is an advocacy organization promoting attention to and federal support for the social and behavioral sciences.

UPDATE is published 22 times per year. ISSN 0749-4394.