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COSSA Washington Update

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DEFENSE SECRETARY PROPOSES CLOSER DOD/UNIVERSITY CONNECTIONS INCLUDING MORE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH



"Too many mistakes have been made over the years because our government and military did not understand - or even seek to understand - the countries or cultures we were dealing with." With those words in a speech to the Association of American Universities (AAU), Robert Gates, Secretary of the Department of Defense (DOD), issued a call to academia to help the U.S. return, in Arthur Schlesinger's words, "to the acceptance of eggheads and ideas" to meet present and future national security challenges.

Gates, a former President of Texas A&M University, indicated that it was time to enhance the Defense Department's support for university research, much of it in the social and behavioral sciences. A proposed "Minerva Initiative" is under consideration at the Pentagon that would consist of a "consortia of universities that would promote research in specific areas" and serve as repositories of open-source documentary archives.

The Secretary suggested a few areas of current interest for this type of activity, but also indicated that others could appear on the agenda as well:

1) Chinese Military and Technology Studies. DOD wants to create a real or virtual archive of information about Chinese military and technological developments. The archive, Gates indicated would "allow scholars and schools to pool resources," as well as sponsor conferences and research to "understand the intentions of an important world power."

2) Iraqi and Terrorist Perspective Projects. Primary sources that have been captured in recent years need further analysis and could yield, according to the Secretary, “unprecedented insight into the workings of dictatorial third-world regimes.” A current project at the National Defense University has begun to develop a Conflict Records Research Center, but DOD would like to house the Center at a consortium of universities.

3) Religious and Ideological Studies. Understanding how the ideological climate in the world of Islam will evolve over time and what factors will affect it will be the key, Gates declared, to eventual success in the conflict against jihadist extremism. Having religious issues addressed in a “strategic context” could, Gates proclaimed, “make an important contribution to the intellectual foundation on which we base a national strategy.”

4) New Disciplines Project. Using game theory and Kremlin studies as key examples from the Cold War period, Gates said it was time to engage disciplines such as history, anthropology, sociology, and evolutionary psychology to create a much broader conception and application of national power than just military prowess. He cited Joseph Nye’s concept of “soft power,” as in need of more resources and attention.

The Secretary admitted that the relationship between DOD and the social sciences and humanities “for decades has covered the spectrum from cooperative to hostile.” He made clear that the key principle of all components of the Minerva consortia “will be complete openness and rigid adherence to academic freedom and integrity.” There will be no room for “sensitive but unclassified” or other such restrictions, he pledged.

He also acknowledged that part of the difficult relations between the DOD and academe stems from the Department’s “not always doing a great job of explaining what we are doing in ways that are accessible to the uninitiated.” He commented on the current Human Terrain program, which has used anthropologists, economists, historians and sociologists to help understand the culture and societies of Iraq and Afghanistan during our current military efforts there. This program has been controversial and condemned by the American Anthropological Association. Gates defended the program and suggested it has helped initiate programs that are the “key to long-term success,” but not intuitive to a military establishment that “has long put a premium on firepower and technology.”

Gates’ talk comes a week before a joint hearing before the House Armed Services and Senate Science and Technology Committees on the “Role of the Social and Behavioral Sciences in National Security,” scheduled for April 24. It also follows a National Academy of Sciences’ Report, *Human Behavior in Military Contexts* (see Update, [September 24, 2007](#)).

FEDERAL SPENDING: NO NEWS IS NO NEWS

Congress continues to work on the President’s proposed budget for FY 2009 with committee hearings and an attempt to reconcile House-Senate differences on the FY 2009 budget resolution (see Update [March 24, 2008](#)). Although the appropriations’ subcommittees in the House are itching to get started on their mark-ups, there is a growing consensus that the final outcome on FY 2009 spending will not come until after the 2008 election and perhaps, not until well into calendar year 2009.

This assumption increases the attention to the upcoming FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations bill that Congress is currently putting together. Most of the bill will focus on supplying additional funding to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, given the view that this could be the only spending bill to go through the Congress in 2008 and the still-lingering unhappiness with the results of the regular FY 2008 appropriations process, many interest groups are trying to obtain funding for agencies that support the programs for their constituents. Science and technology groups, including COSSA, have pushed for additional funding for the National Science Foundation. Law enforcement groups are advocating for redressing the substantial cuts in state and local law enforcement assistance. Veterans’ groups are lobbying for enhanced funds for veterans’ medical care. And there are many others. In addition, emergency funding for the Census Bureau needs taking care of in the Supplemental bill (see next story).

The Administration, through Office of Management and Budget Director Jim Nussle, keeps issuing pronouncements that the President will not accept anything beyond funding for the wars on the Supplemental. The Democrats in Congress think this is bravado bluffing.

So far, nothing definitive has happened. The Democratic leadership hopes to finish the Supplemental by the Memorial Day recess. The House may take up the bill next week. Stay tuned!

CENSUS 2010 IN CRISIS REDUX; GUTIERREZ TO SENATE AGAIN; SUPPLEMENTAL EMERGENCY FUNDS SOUGHT

On April 15, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, chaired by Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), held part two of its hearing entitled the "Census in Peril: Getting the 2010 Decennial Back on Track."

Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez appeared before the panel to provide an update on the progress made toward addressing some of the challenges currently facing the 2010 Census and to seek the Committee's support in ensuring a successful count. Gutierrez reiterated plans previously outlined to the House Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee on April 3 (See Update [April 7, 2008](#)). The Secretary testified that abandoning plans to use handheld computers developed by Harris Corporation will result in an increased life-cycle cost for the 2010 Census by as much as \$3 billion.

At this time, the Census Bureau needs an additional \$160 to \$238 million in FY 2008 to begin preparing immediately for the redesign. Appropriations' staff suggest this will come as an "emergency spending" part of the FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations bill that Congress will consider later this month and next. Gutierrez proposed that the remaining amount come from reprogramming current programs in the Commerce Department. This strategy was rejected by House appropriators in the April 3rd hearing.

According to Gutierrez, the increased costs are driven in large part by the extra number of people necessary to carry out the 2010 Census, which includes enumerators and personnel to service the help desks, data centers, and the control system for the paper-based non-response follow-up (NRFU). Additional costs, he said, would result from the recent increases in gas prices, postage, and printing.

"While we continue to assess the cost impact for FY 2009 and beyond, our current rough estimates place the need for additional funding in FY 2009 at approximately \$600 to \$700 million," says Gutierrez. Most of the lifecycle cost increase will occur in FY 2010. "Both at the Census Bureau and at the Department of Commerce we have made substantial management changes to address the challenges facing the 2010 Census," says Gutierrez. "We are working to ensure that there is clear accountability and that we have set specific leadership expectations."

CDC DISCUSSES DIFFICULTIES WITH INFLUENZA VACCINE EFFECTIVENESS

Preventing disease through the use of vaccines is one of the miracles of modern medicine. However, as the quest for an AIDS vaccine has demonstrated, sometimes this is extremely difficult. Other times, making vaccines for specific strains of a disease is also hard. Every year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has to determine what strains of influenza to prepare for and what type of vaccine will be most effective. Some years they do better than others.

On Thursday April 17, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) held a media advisory to provide an analysis of influenza vaccine effectiveness for the 2007/2008 influenza season. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and could also lead to death. Every year in the United States, on average five to twenty percent of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and about 36,000 people die from flu. Some people, such as older people, young children, and people with certain health conditions, are at high risk for serious flu complications.

At the briefing Dan Jernigan, Deputy Director of CDC's Influenza Division of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), noted that because of the difficulty in predicting flu strains and the effectiveness of vaccines other behavioral activities are necessary. These include taking everyday precautions like covering your mouth when you cough and washing your hands to prevent the spread of germs.

Jernigan also provided an update on this season's influenza activities, including viruses seen in circulation this year. The measurement of influenza activity monitored each year by the NCIRD indicates that this season has been on the high-end compared to the past three seasons.

According to Jernigan, Influenza A H3N2, one of the two types of Influenza A, has been the most predominant virus this year. In addition, two other types have been seen. Jernigan admitted that: "Most of the circulating influenza viruses this season have been less than optimally matched to the viruses in the vaccine." Despite this, Jernigan suggested that interim data indicates that the vaccine provided substantial protection against the predominant influenza viruses. The data come from patients living in a 14 zip code area surrounding Marshfield, Wisconsin during this past influenza season.

This study found a rate of 44 percent in overall vaccine effectiveness against all types of influenza both A and B circulating in a community in Wisconsin. Against the predominant strain, the effectiveness level increased to 58 percent.

Vaccine supply was not a problem. Based on data reported to CDC by influenza vaccine manufacturers and distributors throughout the last flu season, approximately 113 million doses of the vaccine were distributed, more than in any single season before, and about 10 million more doses than were available in the last season. In addition, the CDC's advisory committee on immunization practices voted to expand the annual influenza recommendations to include healthy children and adolescents 5 to 18 years of age. The committee wants this recommendation implemented during the upcoming 2008/2009 season, if feasible, and no later than the 2009/2010 season.

Data from CDC's most recent flu weekly influenza surveillance report is available on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov.

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH DISCUSSED AT GEOGRAPHERS' MEETING

The recent meeting of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) held in Boston included a presidential plenary session examining interdisciplinary research. AAG President Tom Baerwald of the National Science Foundation (NSF) invited a geographer, a sociologist, and an information technology specialist to focus on how geography works with the behavioral sciences, social sciences, and information sciences. A fourth speaker who would focus on the natural sciences was unable to attend. This presidential plenary echoed a similar session organized by then-American Political Science Association (APSA) president Robert Axelrod at its meeting last September.

Baerwald began the session by indicating the many interdisciplinary programs at the NSF that he has participated in. These include the Human Dimensions of Global Change, Biocomplexity and the Environment, Science and Technology Centers, the current Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems, and the Long Term Ecological Research sites.

Roger Downs, a geographer at Penn State University, spoke about his activities interacting with behavioral scientists as he conducted and published his research on geographic education. He noted that former NSF Deputy Director Anne Petersen, now Associate Director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, said that the most important discoveries occurred at the boundaries of fields. He contrasted that with former AAG president Saul Cohen admonition that interdisciplinary research was a force for fragmentation and that the intellectual cores of disciplines must be protected.

Discussing the behavioral sciences, Downs indicated that they were: empirically grounded, theory driven, used cumulative models, not the same as the social sciences, experimental, and interested in applying their findings to societal behavior. Like all discussions of interdisciplinary research, Downs stressed the importance of learning the culture and language of the disciplines with whose scientists you are collaborating. The culture involves the nature of the journals, the styles of analysis, the styles of writing and publishing, and what he called "genealogies and pedigrees" - who studied with whom. Downs concluded by asserting the importance of space and place in research on human behavior. He cited the example of asthma in children and how where they live impacts on the proclivity for the disease.

For Ron Rindfuss, a University of North Carolina demographer, who also has an appointment at the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii, disciplines collaborate and borrow from each other all the time. Yet, interdisciplinary research can be difficult (again because of different languages and cultures), and cannot, he said, be forced on scientists - "better to use carrots than sticks." He also raised the old bugaboo of university structures - disciplinary based departments and reward systems for promotion and tenure that often don't value interdisciplinary research. In addition to Downs' genealogies and pedigrees, Rindfuss mentioned "secret handshakes" as another impediment to collaboration.

He then focused on the connections that geography and social behavior have developed. He noted how sociologists can influence geographers' notion that land is a stationary assumption. He suggested that "social land" moves. For example, land use and land cover are affected by human influences, social networks and interactions. These, he indicated, are constantly changing and thus the relationship of "people and pixels" (in maps) are significant.

Paul Longley, a professor of Geographic Information Science (GIS) and Deputy Director of the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at University College in London, demonstrated the intersection of GIS and demographics by illustrating social indicators in London neighborhoods. He also indicated that "technological empowerment" has led to data mining techniques to move this connection further. He acknowledged that this raises questions of ethics and privacy. The use of "virtual" visualization techniques, Longley suggested, also allows for agent-based modeling, a technique that tries to simulate the actions and interactions of autonomous individuals in a network, with a view to assessing their effects on the system as a whole and to predicting the actions of complex phenomena.

Geographer Julie Winkler of Michigan State University, filling in as a substitute speaker on the panel, described her interdisciplinary research funded through both the NSF priority on Human and Social Dynamics and the Dynamics of Coupled Natural and Human Systems. Winkler has worked with horticulturalists, agricultural economists, and computer scientists to examine the impacts of projected climate changes on specialized agriculture in the Great Lakes Region, particularly in the tart cherry industry in upper Michigan. She has also internationalized the research by extending it to look at cherry growing in Poland.

The meeting also offered a panel on Geography and Federal Education Policy. John Wertman, AAG's Director of Public Policy, discussed the association's efforts during current reauthorization discussions regarding No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Daniel Edelson of the National Geographic Society focused on strategies for infusing geography as a key subject for elementary education in NCLB. COSSA Executive Director Howard Silver participated on the panel and broadened the discussion to discuss education reform policies and the social and behavioral sciences, both as a research resource and the inclusion of these disciplines as subjects for those policies. Carmel Martin, who serves on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee staff considering NCLB was unable to appear because of new restrictions on Hill staff travel opportunities.

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH INSTITUTES ORGANIZE A NEW CONSORTIUM

Led by John Aldrich, a political scientist, and Wendy Wood, a psychologist, who co-direct the Duke Social Science Research Institute, centers and institutes at American universities dedicated to fostering interdisciplinary social science scholarship and education have established a new consortium. The National Consortium of Social Science Research Institutes and Centers will serve as a network for the circulation of information and encourage its members to identify and pursue opportunities for collaboration.

At a recent meeting held at George Mason University's Public Policy Institute, COSSA's Executive Director Howard J. Silver met with the group to discuss COSSA's history and activities and how the new group and COSSA could work together.

The meeting at GMU followed an inaugural organizing meeting at Duke in 2007. The group currently has 30 university-based centers and institutes as members. Aldrich will continue as chair in 2008, with Karen Cook, a Stanford sociologist, as vice-chair. The 2009 meeting will take place at Stanford and include substantive discussions around an area(s) of social science research.

For further information about the new consortium go to: <http://www.ssri.duke.edu/consortium/members.html>

AHRQ GRANT OPPORTUNITY TO INVESTIGATE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) announces the Agency's interest in supporting grants to rigorously study the implementation of quality improvement strategies and provide generalizable scientific findings about the implementation of the quality improvement strategy, related organizational changes, and their impact. According to AHRQ, there is increasing evidence that success in achieving quality improvement goals is at least partially attributable to implementation processes and contexts and not just to the nature of the quality improvement strategy.

The research funded through this announcement may be conducted by the team designing/implementing the quality improvement strategy or it may be conducted by a separate team. The quality improvement strategy must be one that is expected to result in major improvements in health care delivery that will enhance patient outcomes. Research design and execution will yield results providing AHRQ, providers, patients, payers, policymakers, and the public with contextual details and a high level of confidence about what works and what doesn't in improving health care in the United States. Contexts include important organizational features such as, availability of resources; organizational culture; leadership commitment; support provided to quality improvement implementation (staff support, technical support); and other factors that non-causal research has suggested are associated with variations in implementation of quality improvement strategies, performance, and outcomes.

To learn more about this announcement visit <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-08-136.html> .

BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE GROUP JOINS COSSA

COSSA is pleased to announce that the Society for Behavioral Medicine (SBM) has joined the Consortium in the Membership Organization category. The Society is a multidisciplinary organization of clinicians, educators, and scientists who study the interactions of behavior with biology and the environment, and the application of that knowledge to improve the health and well being of individuals, families, communities and populations. COSSA welcomes SBM and looks forward to working with its members on matters of mutual interest. If your organization or university would like to join the Consortium, please send a note to cossa@cossa.org.

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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.

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