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CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

# COSSA WASHINGTON UPDATE

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October 7, 1983

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## NSF ADDS \$5 MILLION TO SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE BUDGETS

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has announced that NSF social and behavioral science programs will receive an additional \$2 million over the budget levels originally requested for FY 1984. This increase, announced last week by NSF Director Edward A. Knapp, was made despite the fact that Congress reduced the overall research budget of the Foundation by nearly \$8 million from the requested level. Several weeks earlier, Dr. Knapp transferred \$3 million from science education funds to the social and behavioral science programs for research on teaching and learning (see "NSF to Support Research on Teaching and Learning"). In sum, the original FY 1984 budget request of \$40.7 million for the social and behavioral science programs has been augmented by \$5 million, bringing the total of these budgets to \$45.7 million for the current fiscal year.

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## CONTINUING RESOLUTION PASSED

When the 1983 fiscal year ended on September 30, only 4 of the 13 appropriations bills had been signed into law by the President. Congress then passed a continuing resolution to provide funds to allow the federal government to continue operations. The bill, which expires on November 15, gives Congress an additional 6 1/2 weeks to complete work on the remaining appropriations legislation. If any appropriations bills have not been completed at that time, Congress will have to pass another continuing resolution for the agencies that still lack formal appropriations. Such a bill would most likely cover operations for the remainder of the fiscal year.

## NIE APPROPRIATION: IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

For two weeks last month it appeared that the Senate appropriation for the National Institute of Education (NIE) might be \$4 million less than that approved by the House and \$11.6 million less than last year. The budget level for NIE adopted by the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education on September 15 was \$44 million. COSSA joined the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and other groups in obtaining support for an amendment to the bill in full Committee by Sen. James Sasser (D-TN) to restore the NIE budget to the requested \$48.2 million.

The efforts of COSSA members from the states of those Senators who are members of the Appropriations Committee to persuade their Senators to support the Sasser amendment were certainly instrumental in restoring \$4 million to the NIE budget. COSSA members in Tennessee are urged to write and thank Sen. Sasser for his efforts on behalf of NIE.

## NEH BUDGET UPDATE

A House and Senate conference committee has just completed work on the FY 1984 budget for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The bill, which must be accepted by both the Senate and the House, would provide NEH with a budget of \$140 million for FY 1984, an increase of 7.6 percent over last year's level. The House provision for establishing a new program for predoctoral fellows was eliminated by the conference committee.

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DOL RESEARCH BUDGET RESTORED BY THE SENATE

When the Senate passed its appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor (DOL), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Education last week, it included strong language in support of the DOL research program. In sharp contrast to the House, which passed an appropriations bill effectively cutting the DOL research program in half to fund four rural Comprehensive Employment Programs (CEPs), the Senate explicitly stated that the CEPs should be funded through competitive procedures rather than with research funds. Moreover, the Senate report on the Appropriations bill also included the following language advocated by COSSA:

"The Committee directs the Employment and Training Administration to use research, development and evaluation funds contained in the Committee recommendation to develop programs consistent with the purposes specified in title IV, part D, of the Job Training Partnership Act. That act directs the Secretary of Labor to 'establish a comprehensive program of employment and training research utilizing the methods, techniques, and knowledge of the behavioral and social sciences...', specifying a variety of research areas as important, including employment and training programs, studies of the labor market, unemployment, productivity, labor supply and demand, disadvantaged workers, worker shortages, and the transition from school to work, between jobs, and from work to retirement."

A conference on the House and Senate versions of the Labor, HHS, and Education appropriations bills is expected to be held after October 18 when the Congress returns from its Columbus Day recess. Despite Senate support for the DOL research program, however, it is not at all certain how the conference committee will deal with the issue. At present, the Department of Labor is being funded under the continuing resolution that provides for funding the CEPs as specified in the House bill.

Social scientists with an interest in the DOL research budget are urged to write their own Senators and Representatives on the issue. Copies of all letters to Members of the House should also be sent to Representatives William Natcher and Silvio O. Conte, who are likely to be on the conference committee. Copies of letters to Senators should also be sent to Senators Lowell Weicker and William Proxmire. Letters to Representatives should be sent to The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515. Letters to Senators should be sent to The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510. For further information on this issue, call the COSSA office (202/234-5703).

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FCC PROPOSAL THREATENS TELEPHONE SURVEYS

The Senate Commerce Committee has voted to postpone a decision on a recent proposal by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to charge telephone users monthly fees for access to long distance lines, whether long distance calls are made on the telephone or not. These fees, which would begin at \$2.00 per month and rise as high as \$12.00 per month by 1990, could cause many telephone users to decide against paying for home access to long distance lines.

The regulation, if adopted, could make it difficult to conduct telephone surveys of a national sample of the population in the future. For example, if there are many telephone numbers without long distance access, bias could be introduced into new nationwide samples of telephone numbers. Moreover, previously selected samples could include telephone users that subsequently become inaccessible when the respondent can no longer afford or chooses not to maintain long distance access.

The moratorium adopted by the Commerce Committee would expire at the end of September, 1985.

NSF TO SUPPORT RESEARCH ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Dr. Edward A. Knapp, Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), is transferring \$3 million from the Science and Engineering Education account to the Directorate for Biological, Behavioral and Social Sciences (BBS) for research on teaching and learning. These funds will be spent in the social and behavioral science programs for studies of teaching, learning, and cognition. A formal solicitation describing this NSF initiative is expected to be released soon. Further information can be obtained from the following NSF officials:

Joseph L. Young, Division of Behavioral and Neural Sciences  
202/357-9898

Edward C. Weiss, Division of Information Science and  
Technology, 202/357-9572

James H. Blackman, Division of Social and Economic Science  
202/357-9766

Andrew R. Molnar, Office of Scientific and Engineering  
Personnel and Education, 202/357-7539

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RESEARCH MANAGEMENT IN FEDERAL MISSION AGENCIES

Although adequate budget support is critical to the success of federal research programs, the process by which proposals are evaluated and selected for funding is equally important and often overlooked. Agencies that are primarily concerned with research, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA), have well established procedures for peer review of proposals to provide as impartial and scientific an evaluation as possible. Mission agencies that fund research in support of their primary mandate use a greater variety of procedures to select proposals for funding. These procedures are frequently less structured than those employed by the research agencies and, as a result, are more susceptible to being influenced by the political orientation -- real or perceived -- of agency officials or the current administration. COSSA is attempting to monitor research management practices in federal agencies to protect scientifically based review procedures when they are already established and to promote them where research evaluation procedures appear to be unduly influenced by non-scientific criteria.

On September 21, COSSA sent a letter to Margaret Heckler, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), protesting that the "technical" criteria proposed to evaluate grant applications in a recent Request for Proposals (RFP) were based on political rather than technical criteria. The COSSA letter said that this was an unwise policy for a research program and was unhealthy for the research process. The letter made it clear that the study described by HHS was not at issue, only the announced criteria to be used in evaluating proposals. For HHS research to be taken seriously, the letter stated, "research contracts should not be let -- or even appear to be let -- on the basis of political 'understanding.' To do so invites abuse and undermines the research process."

An article describing this issue from the New York Times of September 27, 1983, is included as Attachment 1. An article from the Washington Post dealing with a different set of issues in federal research management is enclosed as Attachment 2.

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NEW COSSA PUBLICATION AVAILABLE

COSSA now has available copies of Health and Human Behavior, the first volume in a series of occasional papers. Written for a lay audience, the COSSA Occasional Papers series is intended for distribution to legislators and other policy-makers. COSSA's goal in initiating the series is to educate federal and state policy-makers about the nature of social and behavioral science research and its relevance to legislative concerns.

The essays in Health and Behavior were first presented at a COSSA seminar last year. The seminar was co-sponsored by the Medical Sociology Section of the American Sociological Association. Essays in the volume include the following:

"Social and Behavioral Factors in Cardiovascular Disease"  
C. David Jenkins, University of Texas Medical Branch

"The Individual's Role in Health Care"  
Marshall H. Becker, University of Michigan

"Social Science and the Response to Alcohol Abuse"  
Ralph H. Hingson, Boston University

"Social Science, Health and Behavior"  
Frederick Robbins, President, Institute of Medicine

COSSA is sending copies of Health and Human Behavior to selected Members of Congress and congressional staff. If you would like to have copies sent to you for distribution to state legislators, contact COSSA (1755 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036; 202/234-5703).

BRITISH TO STUDY LANGUAGE TEACHING, BUDGETS

A national study of the role of language teaching in secondary and postsecondary education and of the effects of university budget cuts on language instruction will be conducted in Great Britain later this year. Because of their small size, university language departments have been particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of budget cuts. The study, which is sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation, will also examine the relationship of language education in secondary and postsecondary education. These are the first funds that have been made available for curriculum development in languages since 1971.

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SOURCES OF RESEARCH SUPPORT: DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

COSSA provides this information as a service and encourages readers to contact the agency rather than COSSA for more information.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)  
Division of Epidemiology and Statistical Analysis

The COSSA Washington Update has already featured NIDA's research program in the Division of Clinical Research. The Division of Epidemiology and Statistical Analysis comprises the other major NIDA program that supports research in the social and behavioral sciences.

FY 1983 Budget: Approximately \$5 million.

Purpose of Program: The Division supports research in the epidemiology of drug abuse, including smoking and the misuse of illicit drugs. Studies examine the consequences of drug use, risk factors, natural history, improvement of methodologies for analyzing information and monitoring drug trends, surveillance, incidence and prevalence.

Funding Mechanisms: Primarily grants.

Disciplines Supported: Social science disciplines including sociology, social psychology, statistics, epidemiology, anthropology and economics (primarily econometrics).

Review Process: Peer panel review.

Restrictions on Awards: Awards are limited to 5 years, although three-year awards are the norm.

Contact: NIDA review groups meet three times a year. Deadlines for applications are November 1, March 1, and July 1.

Dr. Louise Richards  
National Institute on Drug Abuse  
Room 11A55 Parklawn Building  
5600 Fishers Lane  
Rockville, MD 20857  
301/443-6637

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1983

## Scholars Charging Politics On Social Science Research

By ROBERT PEAR

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28 — A large scholarly organization has charged that the Reagan Administration is improperly using political criteria to evaluate proposals for social science research.

The organization, the consortium of Social Science Associations, a coalition of 10 scholarly societies, made the charge last week in a letter to Margaret M. Heckler, the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The researchers were particularly concerned about a project in which the Reagan Administration is asking scholars to compare the merits of public and private programs for providing social services and health care. Federal officials stated in a notice soliciting research proposals that they would evaluate them on the basis of how well researchers understood the Administration's preference for using the private sector and "voluntarism" rather than the Government to provide such services.

Dr. Roberta Balstad Miller, executive director of the consortium, asked Mrs. Heckler to withdraw the solicitation notice. "It is strongly political in tone," she said, "and is written so as to suggest that the political orientation of the proposal will influence the decision as to who receives the contract."

### He Sees No Problem With It

Dr. Robert J. Rubin, an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, said he had reviewed the notice and saw nothing "overtly political" in it. "Obviously," he said, "the subjects we study are initiatives that the Administration is interested in."

The consortium represents 175,000 researchers in the American Economic Association, the American Historical Association, the American Political

Science Association, the American Sociological Association and the American Statistical Association, among other groups.

Henry J. Aaron, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, who worked in the Carter Administration, said the solicitation notice published June 29, contained "language that I would have been embarrassed to use." He continued, "It injects a kind of precondition requiring sympathy with the Administration's position on voluntarism."

President Reagan has repeatedly said that voluntary efforts and private philanthropy could replace funds cut from Federal welfare programs.

### Hypothesis of the Study

The solicitation said that under the contract scholars should examine the hypothesis that "privately funded programs operate more efficiently than do publicly funded programs" in providing social services. Further, it said researchers should study the hypothesis that "privately funded programs are more productive according to commonly accepted measures of service performance."

Under the contract, researchers are supposed to compare public and private agencies in three cities to see how well they provide services such as emergency food and shelter, foster care, assistance to troubled youths, day care, adoption assistance, home health care and family planning.

Asked about the criticism of the Reagan Administration, Prof. Richard P. Nathan, a political scientist at Princeton University, said: "In their review of research proposals, Administration officials have been very conscientiously and quite effectively reaching out to social scientists whose values and orientation are in line with what

the Administration is trying to do. These practices have been going on for a long time. It's widely agreed that social science, at this stage in its development, cannot be value-free."

University professors complained last year that the Administration was choosing people on the basis of political credentials rather than scholarly qualifications to evaluate research proposals submitted to the National Institute of Education. In a letter to Education Secretary T. H. Bell, 25 research organizations said they were "dismayed with the politicization of the peer review process." Partly in response to such criticism, Dr. Miller said, the department has restored apolitical evaluation criteria for those research proposals.

Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, a Democrat, recently introduced a bill that would forbid Federal agencies to consider the political affiliation of people being appointed to scientific and technical advisory committees. The proposal was prompted by reports that the Interior Department had sought clearance from the Republican National Committee for its scientific advisers.

Interior Secretary James G. Watt said he was trying to bring "massive change" to his department and no longer wanted the type of advice that was given to President Carter.

Senator Thomas F. Eagleton, Democrat of Missouri, supported the Bumpers bill and deplored what he said was an attempt to impose "a litmus test of party loyalty as a prerequisite for appointment of scientists" at the Environmental Protection Agency, the Agriculture Department and other agencies.



# Low-Ranked Social Science Projects Moved to Top

By Philip J. Hilts

Washington Post Staff Writer

Officials in a Health and Human Services Department program to give millions of dollars in grants to social science projects have been approving projects rated by experts as the lowest of their class and rejecting others that are highly ranked, agency documents show.

Staff members of the department's Office of Human Development Services and researchers who receive grants from it say the OHDS research grant program has been transformed under the Reagan administration and assistant secretary Dorcas R. Hardy. One researcher called the grant decisions "totally unpredictable," and one staff member said the grant system now is "pure pork barrel."

Defenders of the new system call it innovative, and typical of the way the administration is trying to reshape government-funded science. They said it "throws out the old guard" and brings in more "community-based" programs and more researchers who are not on the "good ol' boy" network.

Hardy, an assistant secretary in California's health department when Reagan was governor who once helped direct a social science program at the University of Southern California, said in a statement last week that the changes at OHDS restored accountability to the grant process and brought about "a marked increase in the diversity of organizations funded."

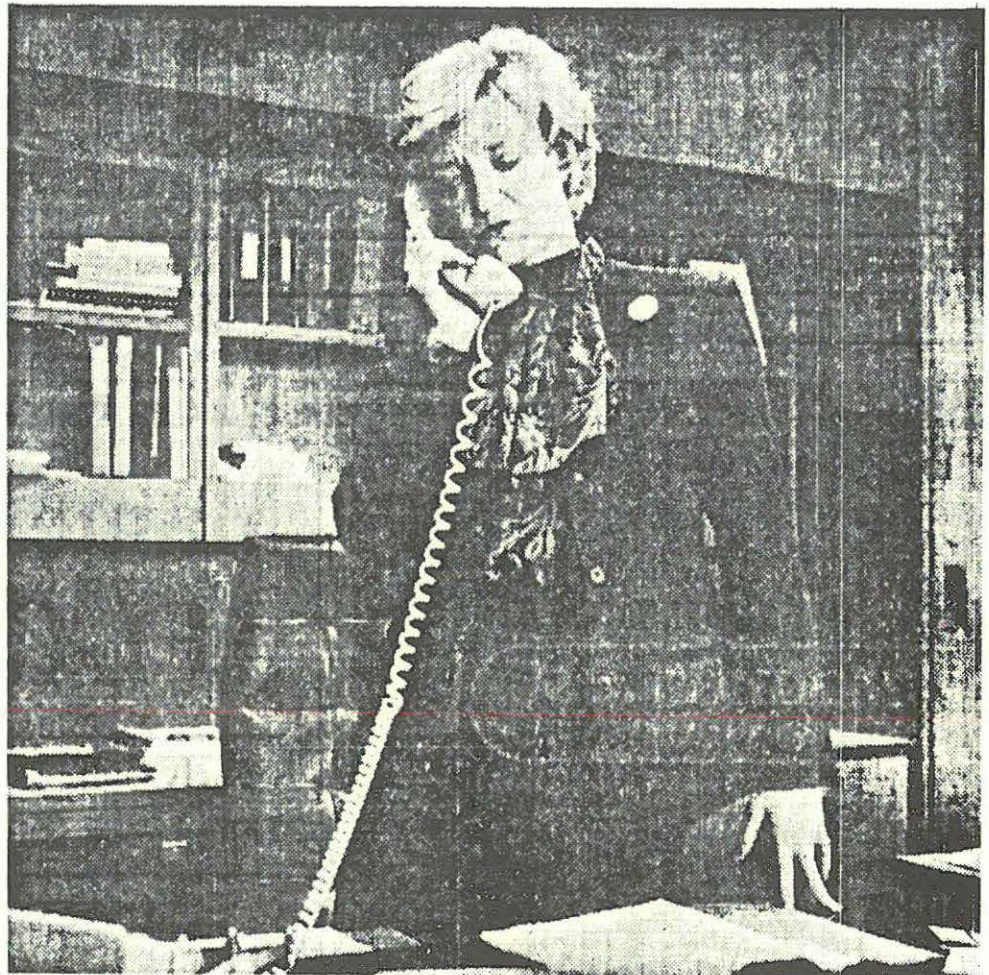
In its main research program, OHDS gave out about 140 grants that totalled \$27 million last year.

In past years, social service agencies' and researchers' proposals were scored numerically and ranked by experts in the field, in psychology, sociology, and social work. Their evaluations, OHDS staffers said, mostly were approved by mid-level agency staff workers. Now, however, that authority has shifted to Hardy and her senior assistants, and "peer review" is given less weight, staff members said. Hardy's critics charge that her system is unpredictable and does not fund the best programs.

Those who say the program is working said that social science grants always have been more "political" than physical or biological science grants. Those complaining, they said, lost decision-making power under Hardy.

Some examples found in computer printouts of senior staff "decision memos":

- Among 88 proposals for child welfare training grants, the proposal ranked by experts as No. 2, with a score of 97 out of a possible 100, was turned down. Eleven more of the top 25 also were rejected. However, a proposal from an Arkansas group that came in last, with a grade of 46, was funded. A note beside the case said, "State previously not funded." Similar comments on state considerations were found in more than 40 of the 88 proposals.



By Joel Richardson—The Washington Post

Dorcas R. Hardy, head of the Office of Human Development Services, defends her social science grant policy.

- Of 267 applicants for funding of family programs, 23 of the top 34 proposals were considered. Seventeen of those approved for consideration were ranked lower than 100 and seven of those were lower than 200.

- The top-rated proposal in a group on training to run programs for the aged received a score of 89 on the first round and was reported to have gotten a 95 in a second review. It was rejected. A proposal scoring 30 points lower, at 60.7, from the University of Southern California, was approved for a grant.

- In a program aimed at aiding homeless children and runaways, five of the top 12 proposals were rejected despite scores of 86.5 to 91. At the same time, proposals ranked 100, 101, and 103 were approved for consideration for grants. They scored between 56 and 58.5.

Officials of the program have said that, of all the proposals rated in the top 25 percent by expert reviewers, only half were allowed by OHDS administrators to compete for funds. Of those ranked in the lowest 25 percent, 8 percent were kept in competition despite low scores. By contrast, officials of other agencies

that fund social science proposals say that in their review systems more than 90 percent of the top-ranked proposals are approved, and that none of the poorest proposals is approved.

One staff member who requested anonymity said that at times, writing a letter of approval becomes a joke. "Someone handed me one of these that scored" below 50 but was approved for funding "and said, 'Just see if you can find me something good to say about that one. Anything at all,'" the staff worker said.

One director of a large social science agency, who asked that his name not be used because he has been getting grants under Hardy's administration and has worked as a reviewer in the system, said, "It's perfectly obvious that an extraordinary amount of discretion is being exercised at the administrative level, above the peer review . . . that makes the process totally unpredictable."

Hardy was unavailable last week for interview. In a statement through a public relations official, she responded to the charge of unpredictability, saying, "The process as administered under the present administration is

somewhat less predictable. Those organizations that used to be able to predict uninterrupted funding year after year can no longer do so.

"All decisions are made by senior staff collegially, thus eliminating the lack of accountability in the previously used system of independent private decisions by each commissioner [within the OHDS] . . . ."

Hardy now requires a 10-page pre-application before full proposals are submitted. She said that this overcomes the advantage that "large professional proposal-writing organizations" have had over "small, innovative but less polished community organizations."

Richard Adelman, director of the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Michigan, for which OHDS has funded programs annually for many years, said that Hardy's administration "lets into play one very important factor: that is the political impact of what they are funding."

He said the Institute of Gerontology, as a result, now is seeking funds from "less political" agencies such as the National Institutes of Health. At the NIH, "generally when you get a grant from them, or a rejection, there is a good reason. I have won many and lost many and I will still say that . . . ."

"At NIH, the predominant concern is about the quality of research. You would be naive to think there was no institutional politics involved at NIH. But at OHDS, they have now got the tables turned. The likely political impact is an important aspect—not the only aspect—but an important aspect of their decision to make a grant," he said.

Hardy, in her statement, responded to the charge of politics entering the process:

"The philosophy of this administration clearly and appropriately permeates the [grant guidelines.] Applicants are scored strictly on basis of published criteria by field reviewers who have been selected for their expertise.

"The selection process does not take into account and indeed could not effectively identify . . . the ideology of applicants being considered . . . ."

She said that despite the gap between rankings and final grants the "selection process . . . puts primary emphasis on the reviewers' scores, tempered by other factors such as geographical distribution, ethnic representation, urban-rural balance, and so on. The selection results bear this out. An application ranked in the highest 25th percentile of the reviewers' scores had a 600 percent higher probability of being selected than one ranking in the lowest 25th percentile."

Of the proposals at OHDS, the lowest-ranked half still had a 20 percent chance of being approved for the final round.

By contrast, in the program that makes similar social science grants at the National Science Foundation, program director Murray Aborn said, without working out specific figures, that "It would be impossible, I think, for a grant to be ranked poor [in the bottom 20 percent] and still be funded . . . . It would also be very difficult for a good project to escape the system, very rare that a proposal rated excellent [in the top 20 percent] does not get funded . . . ."

The NSF has several mechanisms to assure that the reviewers ratings are followed and not overridden by staff, including auditors who search specifically for discrepancies between the final awards and the reviewers' rankings.