COSSA
Washington Update

Consortium of Social Science Associations

May 17, 2004
Volume 23, Issue 9

GAO REPORTS ON INDEPENDENCE AND BALANCE OF ADVISORY BOARDS

Rebuffed by House Science Committee Chairman Rep. Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) in their attempt to get a hearing on complaints about the Bush administration's "manipulation of science," Democrats on the panel held their own briefing on the subject on May 19. The centerpiece of the briefing was a report from the General Accounting Office *Federal Advisory Committees: Additional Guidance Could Help Agencies Better Ensure Independence and Balance (GAO-04-328).* **http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04328.pdf**.

Reps. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Brian Baird (D-WA) requested the GAO report and co-chaired the briefing. Johnson is the ranking Democrat on the Basic Research Subcommittee and Baird is one of four psychologists in the Congress. Johnson's opening statement referred to reports issued by Rep. Henry Waxman's (D-CA) and the Union of Concerned Scientists (see UPDATE May 3, 2004 and November 3, 2003) that attempt to document "the Administration's scientific shenanigans."

Both of these earlier reports included allegations that the Administration had appointed "ideologues or those with clear conflicts of interest" to Scientific Advisory panels. Robin Nazarro, who led the team that prepared the GAO report, appeared as a witness at the briefing. Although there are approximately 950 federal advisory committees with 62,000 members, she explained that the report examined the policies and procedures at six federal departments and agencies that make extensive use of scientific and technical advisory committees – the Departments of Agriculture, Energy,

(Continued on Next Page)

Inside UPDATE…

REPORT EXAMINES BASIC BRAIN AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AT NIMH

On May 14, the National Advisory Mental Health Council (NAMHC) to the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) accepted the report of a workgroup to the Council: *Setting Priorities for Basic Brain and Behavioral Science Research at NIMH.* The report responds to NIMH Director Tom Insel's request for advice to set "clear priorities" and to "ensure maximal impact of the Institute's investments."

Established in December 2003, the workgroup was chaired by Alan Lesher, AAAS Chief Executive Officer. (See *Update*, February 9 ,2004) It was charged with reviewing the

(Continued on Page 3)

NSF DIRECTOR, (Continued from Page 1)

experimentation; enhanced modeling of institutions; new tools to study cognition, affect, and emotion; new data sets to study international relations; demographic studies becoming more analytical; social networks theory; research on the sociology of disasters, and better understanding of fragile families. Bement added a few of his own such as Geographic Information Systems, and the development of improved statistical methods. He noted that the SBE sciences have become a high priority for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. The problem, as Richard Lempert, SBE's Division Director for Social and Economic Sciences, pointed out, is that the analysis of complex systems by grand-level data using new methodologies is increasingly expensive.

The Acting Director is also well aware, since Congress has reminded him often, about the importance of supporting NSF's core research programs. Although delighted that NSF has managed to increase its average grant to $140,000 and to increase graduate student stipends to $30,000, he is well aware that with relatively stagnant budgets and increased demand, success rates in these programs have been decreasing significantly.

Responding to concerns from advisory committee members about how to maintain key databases that are an integral part of the SBE sciences' infrastructure, Bement suggested that it was not possible to open up NSF's Major Research Equipment and Facilities Construction Account to these projects. In fact, it is going to be very difficult to fund all the large projects already in that account's pipeline. NSF, Bement noted, needs to figure out a strategy for funding mid-range infrastructure, which is where the SBE projects would fit. So far, that has yet to happen.

Bement also suggested that NSF would continue to focus on supporting research that crossed directorates. He noted the recognition of the importance of examining the social and ethical implications of nanotechnology, which gives SBE a significant role to play in developing research agendas in that newly promising science and technology.

NIH SEEKS HELP TO STUDY GENETIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES OF DISEASES

The National Institutes of Health seeks input from the scientific community and the public on approaches to developing a large-scale prospective cohort study in the U.S. The completion of the Human Genome Project provides an unprecedented opportunity to define the genetic and environmental contributions to health and disease. Replication of associations and estimation of their magnitude, consistency, and temporality can only be obtained through prospective population-based cohort studies. Such a study is the next step in the "systematic elucidation of gene-environment-disease relationships."

Respondents are asked to comment on one or more of 14 issues listed but should not feel compelled to address all issues. Reponses will be compiled and shared with advisory committees involved in the development and approval of this study concept. Information requested includes:

1. If appropriate funding were available to support a large cohort study (N~500,000) of genetic and environmental determinants of major complex diseases, please comment on what you would see as advantages of recruiting and examining a new cohort vs. building upon existing cohorts.

2. Describe the characteristics of a large U.S. cohort study that you view as most important to include in any such effort that might be undertaken.

3. Suggest the family structures, and proportion of related individuals, that you would recommend for inclusion.

4. Identify the most relevant issues concerning the power to detect genetic effects (such as environmental risk factors, heterogeneity, prevalence) for diseases or traits that you would be interested in studying in a large U.S. cohort study.

5. Other information not specifically addressed by the comments above, but considered important and relevant to the development and implementation of a large-scale study of genetic and environmental influences on common diseases, would also be of considerable interest and value.

The request also seeks advice from investigators responsible for a prospective population-based study with stored DNA and asks them to comment on several issues if existing cohorts were to be combined.

To respond to the request link to the online form at http://grants.nih.gov/cfdocs/rfi_not-od-04-041/rfi_form.htm or contact Terri Manolio at 301/435-0708 or via fax at 301/ 480-1667 or email at nhlbi_cohortstudy@mail.nih.gov

existing NIMH portfolio in five areas: molecular, cellular, and behavioral neuroscience, basic behavioral and basic cognitive science.

According to Leshner, who presented it to the Council, the report is a "most interesting and well-done group effort." He acknowledged that it was a "tough topic" and had "far more controversy than it deserved." He lamented that years of exceptional budget growth had "sadly" come to an end. Accordingly, this would limit the opportunity for new initiatives, he explained.

Noting NIMH's "extremely broad and diverse domains," Leshner observed that no Institute can afford to be doing another Institute's work, especially in this sort of budget climate.

Emphasizing the core conclusions of the report, Leshner noted that basic behavioral science and neurosciences are critical to achieving NIMH's mission. Accordingly, the Institute's mission should drive its portfolio, but there is also a need not to "over-plan," Leshner cautioned. Heeding this caution, the workgroup recommended the need to maintain a balance between allowing flexibility in achieving the mission and letting the mission drive the research portfolio.

Leshner concluded his remarks by noting that "NIMH's basic behavioral and neuroscience research portfolio is already in superb shape and serves the mission well. [But] all things can be improved." In the context of budgetary realities, the Institute's portfolio can benefit from shits in emphasis and priorities.

Setting Priorities

NIMH's basic science portfolio spans multiple levels of analysis – from molecular, to cellular, to systems, to individual and social behavior. This research is currently housed within the Division of Neuroscience and Basic Behavioral Science which consists of three branches:

1) Molecular, Cellular, and Genomic Neuroscience Research – supports fundamental research on the elucidation of the genetic, molecular, and cellular mechanisms underlying brain functions;

2) Behavioral and Integrative Neuroscience – supports research targeted at understanding the normal operation of brain structures and functions and how these may be regulated in psychiatric disease; and

3) Basic Behavioral Sciences – supports research that delineates the principles of healthy behavior in order to better understand the behavioral differences that characterize mental disorders.

This structure will change given that NIMH Institute Director Tom Insel is in the process of reorganizing the Institute.

'Overarching Principles'

The workgroup, in the course of conducting its review, determined several "overarching principles" that guided its work.

1. Basic science questions that are most central to understanding the potential causes, treatment, and prevention of mental illness and behavioral disorder should be the highest priority.

2. Basic research that integrates or translates across levels of analysis – from genetic, to molecular, to cellular, to systems, to complex overt behaviors – should be given high priority.

3. Research and training that is interdisciplinary in nature should be more heavily emphasized in the basic science portfolio.

4. Numerous studies in the past have uncovered the profound effects of the physical, social, cultural, and economic environments on individual behavior; more recent advances now indicate that it may be possible to examine the effects of environments on behavior at both the molecular and integrative systems levels. More investment is needed in developing the tools that will allow intensive study in this area, given that most mental disorders appear to involve or result from such dynamic processes over time.

'Cross-Cutting Themes'

The workgroup identified several cross-cutting themes. These include: sex/gender differences in psychiatric disorders, individual differences in basic behavioral and neural processes, adolescence and earlier phases of development, and the development of more appropriate animal models for specific aspects of mental disorders.

'Areas for Increased Emphasis'

Areas of research "particularly ripe for increased investment at this time" are also noted by the workgroup.

These include areas of both special need and special opportunity:

- Emotion – the workgroup identified two key areas that should be emphasized; the neurobiology of emotion, mood, and motivation; and the interaction of emotion and cognition.

- Development – The workgroup recommended that NIMH supported research should focus on defining the environment's long-term effects on brain and behavior, through a number of recommended activities.

- Social Interactions – Valuable research on social behaviors and processes relevant to mental illness is now being supported and should continue to be supported. Observing that it is now possible to include work on the molecular, cellular and systems levels to better understand the neurobiology of social interactions, the workgroup recommended that NIMH invest in this new area of research that integrates social processes and behaviors with brain functioning, in both human and non-human species.

- Sex/gender differences and mechanisms – Systematic comparison of males and females developmentally and in adulthood, using both human and non-human subjects, will provide novel insights into normal and aberrant neural functioning as it relates to mental disorders and could lead to the development of more effective therapies, the workgroup observed.

The workgroup acknowledged several areas where it thought "careful investment in the development and adaptation of research tools and techniques would serve as catalysts for advancing the basic science of mental disorders." These included: appropriate animal models, ligand development, computational models, standardization of behavioral tools, and neuroimaging.

'Areas Ready for Refocus'

Several areas of research that have been very productive would "now benefit from an evolutionary shift in focus to have greater impact in accomplishing the mission of the Institute," according to the report. These areas include: aspects of learning and memory, sleep, circadian biology, stress, neurotransmitter-signaling systems, and prejudice and stereotyping.

The workgroup recommends that NIMH build upon its success in its very extensive portfolio in aspects of learning and memory and begin to emphasize the integration of learning and memory in terms of brain and behavior, as well as within and across various domains of cognitive function and emotion.

Similarly, in the area of prejudice and stereotyping, the workgroup suggested that NIMH begin to shape this portion of its portfolio to encourage more transparent relevance to mental health issues. Given the Institute's large portfolio in this area, NIMH is urged to convene a separate workgroup to determine how best to maximize the impact of future research in this area.

'Areas Better Served by Other Institutes'

Finally, the workgroup addressed the issue of areas of research that it thought would be "better served by other Institutes." It cautions that "it should be made clear that these conclusions do not reflect a negative view of the quality of these research programs, which is in fact quite high." These included:

- Visual and other primary sensory perception and motor processes,

- Metabolic/thermoregulation, and

- Characterization of the processes of normal development or aging without a compelling argument for the relevance to mental illness or behavioral disorders.

Comprehensive Research Agenda Encouraged

Responding to the workgroup's report, Steve Breckler, Executive Director for Science, at the American Psychological Association (APA), commended the workgroup and encouraged Insel and the NAMHC to "seriously consider" the recommendations during the coming reorganization of the Institute.

Breckler highlighted the workgroup's recognition of "the importance of NIMH continuing a comprehensive research agenda [that] includes a strong commitment to basic behavioral research. This research would include integrative research as well as basic research that [is] focused exclusively on dimensions of behavior (individual and group) that can help inform us about which individuals are resilient to mental and health disorders, which populations are more vulnerable to mental and behavioral disorders, and how social and environmental factors impact the development,

diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of mental illness."

Expressing the concern of APA and other social and behavioral science organizations regarding the emphasis by the workgroup as well as part of the upcoming reorganization on integrating the sciences to focus more on translational research, Breckler underscored the continuing "need for basic science that is not focused on translation." Highlighting comments by Insel regarding the need to integrate the basic behavioral sciences into neuroscience, he emphasized that those comments come across as conceived to be a one-direction effort. He pointed out that it is impossible to do translation without material to translate. "There is much that basic behavioral scientists could offer scientists studying biological, cellular, and genetic aspects of neuroscience," he reminded them.

Finally, Breckler noted that some of the efforts being proposed seem to be a response to short-term budgetary problems. He "recommended thinking more long-term about the consequences of reorganization as significant as this one." He concluded his remarks by inquiring of the director "What is the long-term effect on future generations of basic research? What kind of new training programs should NIMH create if they want to foster and nurture an interdisciplinary community?"

CENSUS SEEKS ADVICE ON ACS DATA PRODUCTS

The Census Bureau is proposing to revise and expand the data products it produces from the American Community Survey (ACS). It requests comments from current and potential future users of ACS data products to help guide their redesign. The ACS is a very large nationwide survey that will collect and publish data about the demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics of the population. Full-scale data collection will begin with the mail-out to 250,000 addresses at the end of June 2004.

The Census Bureau plans to release the redesigned data products from the 2005 ACS, the first full year of data collection, in the summer of 2006. While some of the data products will resemble those from the development phase of the ACS, others will be new or redesigned.

The goal is to publish preliminary versions of the new data products by mid-year 2005 and to give data users another opportunity to comment further before the redesigned products are in final form. The ACS has been under development since 1996 and several ACS data products have been released every year since 1997. A special link on the ACS Web site *http://www.census.gov/acs/www/product_review/* will enable you to view examples of current and proposed data products.

Written comments must be submitted on or before **July 14, 2004** to the Director, U.S. Census Bureau, Room 2049, Federal Building 3, Washington, DC 20233–0101.

For further information contact: Kenneth R. Bryson, Program Analyst, Outreach and Analysis Staff, Office of the Associate Director for Decennial Census, on (301) 763–1911, or by e-mail at *kenneth.r.bryson@census.gov*

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STUDY SUPPORTED AT BRIEFING

As Congress continue to determine budget priorities, the American Chemical Society sponsored a briefing on April 28 to inform Members and their staffs of the urgent and important questions about children's health and development that the National Children's Study (NCS) intends to answer and to update them on the FY 2005 funding that the study requires to move into its second phase

The NCS is a long-term, nationwide study that will investigate the effects of a broad range of biological, chemical, and environmental influences on children's health and development. The study, currently still in its final design stage, would follow roughly 100,000 children and their families for 21 years or more and collect information about participants' health at different stages of growth and certain developmental milestones. Although the study will span for over 20 years, researchers will continuously analyze the information collected and release their findings to the public as the study progresses. (See *Update*, October 7, 2002)

Former Illinois Congressman John Porter, who chaired the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, HHS and Education, served as the moderator for the event. Three distinguished scientists, Kimberly Thompson, George P. Daston, and Philip J. Landrigan, highlighted the importance of the study, the broad range of issues it intends to answer, and the exigency for Congress to appropriate the additional funds needed for the study to even continue into its next phase.

Thompson, the Associate Professor of Risk Analysis

and Decision Science (Pediatrics), at Harvard Medical School and Director of Kids Risk Project, provided a brief overview of the kinds of health risks children encounter. Using examples of risks to children identified in her project and a compilation of mortality figures for children in the U.S., Thompson carved out the large questions that provide the force behind the study, such as:

- What are the biggest children's health risks and what can we do about them?
- What can risk analysis research do to improve decisions about children's risks?
- Do we have our national priorities straight?
- What interventions really matter and which offer the biggest bang for the buck?
- What long-term impacts result form childhood experience?

In addition, Thompson emphasized how important it is for researchers and committee members involved in designing the study to incorporate the broadest possible scope of influences and exposures - such as allergens, nutrition, education, community livability, family stability, pesticide exposure - which the resources will allow. Specifically, Thompson said, "We can only answer the questions that we ask…and we cannot allow [NCS] to become to narrow or we won't be able to go after questions that answer the causes of the biggest risks to kids."

George Dashton, Research Fellow with Proctor & Gamble, focused his presentation, on how the NCS will fill gaps in the knowledge base that would facilitate both public and private organizations linking up to improve the health and well-being of children in the U.S. Dashton, a member of the business community, emphasized how companies like his need the kind of information that the NCS will produce to make sure the products they put out in the marketplace are beneficial for children.

"Kids aren't small adults, we can't extrapolate what we know of adults and apply them to children," explained Dashton. Knowing that children experience the environment in a way different from adults, Dashton emphasized how little we really know about the variety of factors and chemicals in the environment that impact children's health. "We have found single sources, but now we need to look at the interactions."

Picking up where both Thompson and Dashton left off about the wide variety of environmental and chemical risks that are encountered by children today, Philip Landrigan, Chair of Community and Preventative Medicine and Professor of Pediatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, illustrated the increased rates of chronic conditions in American children and the changes in the physical environment, along with demonstrating the urgent need for NCS to move into its second phase.

According to Landrigan, recent data from the CDC shows that the rate of asthma in U.S. children has more than doubled in the 20 years, birth defects have doubled in the past three decades, the incidence of childhood cancer has been steadily increasing even though mortality is down, and the prevalence of obesity has nearly quadrupled in American children.

In addition to the increased rates of chronic disease, the chemical and built environments that we raise our children in have changed. Landrigan was quick to point out that children are especially vulnerable to environmental toxins and there is no denying "that environmental factors can exert impact on children's health." Landrigan concluded his remarks by cautioning that, "Our generation is the last best hope to do something about disease prevention in children. Environmental disease is preventable, but prevention requires good science."

Following Landrigan's presentation, Porter moderated an impassioned question and answer session that underscored how the budgetary crunch facing Congress is jeopardizing the future of the NCS.

After two years of planning and research, NCS has entered into Phase II, the pilot phase. Before the study can begin enrolling participants in late 2005, key projects such as identifying study sites, developing protocols, and creating a repository for study samples must be completed. In order to fund these key projects and start enrolling participants in 2005, study organizers requested $27 million for FY 2005; they expect only a $10 million appropriation.

Furthermore, the resource needs for the study will only continue to increase significantly during the relatively expensive stage in which large numbers of participants are enrolled. Study organizers acknowledge the funding needs of the study have only been partially met and that the funding requirements will not decrease until 2010. "A significant funding increase is needed. Without the increase, it will be difficult for the study to move forward as planned," Porter told audience members.

Laying out the bottom line regarding the future of NCS without the additional funding, Porter articulated that if the study does not get the funding this year that it requires, then the start of the study will be delayed; and if NCS does not get the necessary funding ever, then we "may not get the study."

To conclude, Porter called on the audience to save the NCS by appealing to members of Congress to take up the cause and appropriate the additional funds needed saying, "The potential costs/savings that would come out of the study would pay for it a thousand times over."

COMMUNICATION GROUP APPOINTS NEW HEAD

The National Communication Association (NCA) has appointed Roger Smitter as its new Executive Director. He will commence his new position on July 1. Smitter is currently at North Central College, where he is chairman of the Speech Communication Department, Director of the Leadership, Ethics and Values Program, and Coordinator of the Master of Leadership Program. North Central College is an independent liberal arts school in Naperville, IL. House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) spent his first year of college there and will deliver the commencement address this June.

Smitter has served the speech and communication community in a number of ways, including as co-founder and co-director, with Joe McDaniels, of the Essential Undergraduate Curriculum Conference in Communication. This conference has led to a core curriculum for undergraduate communications programs, significant curriculum revisions at 22 different institutions, and a collective network of scholars and peers who have continued research initiatives.

The new NCA head has published work in communications, Interdisciplinary Studies, and Leadership and Ethics themes in the *Journal of Leadership Studies, Organizational Behavior,* and the *Journal of Communication Studies.* Smitter earned his B.A. in Speech and Theatre from Taylor University in Indiana, an M.A. from Ball State University, and a Ph.D. in Communications Studies from Ohio State.

NATIONAL SCIENCE BOARD RELEASES SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING INDICATORS

The National Science Board, the policy oversight committee of the National Science Foundation, has released the 2004 version of the biennial *Science and Engineering Indicators*. This series provides a broad base of quantitative information about U.S. science, engineering, and technology for use by public and private policymakers. The document is produced by NSF's Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate's Sciences, Resources and Statistics Division led by Lynda Carlson.

This year's version contains analyses of key trends that illuminate the scope, quality, and vitality of research and education both in the United States and in an international context. It also includes a new chapter on state-level indicators.

The complete report, including tables is available at http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/seind04/start.htm

CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

Executive Director: Howard J. Silver
Deputy Dir. Health Policy: Angela L. Sharpe
Gov't Relations Asst.: Julie A. Egermayer
President: Orlando Taylor

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), an advocacy organization for Federal support for the social and behavioral sciences, was founded in 1981 and stands alone in Washington in representing the full range of social and behavioral sciences.

Update is published 22 times per year. Individual subscriptions are available from COSSA for $80; institutional subscriptions - $160; overseas mail - $160. ISSN 0749-4394. Address all inquiries to **COSSA**:

1522 K Street, NW, Suite 836
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: (202) 842-3525
Fax: (202) 842-2788

www.cossa.org