
CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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THE SENATE AND PEER REVIEW: OR WHO CUTS UP THE MELON?

Late on the night of June 5, the U. S. Senate spent two hours debating the nature of peer review and merit selection of recipients of federal money. The occasion was an amendment offered by Sen. John Danforth (R-MO) to the FY 1986 Supplemental Appropriations bill seeking to eliminate language directing the allocation of Department of Defense research funds to certain educational institutions. The amendment passed by voice vote after a motion to table (and kill) the amendment failed by a 58-40 vote.

Danforth's amendment had the support of many in the education and scientific community, led by the Association of American Universities (AAU), who had complained of the successful end-running around the peer review process in awarding funds to universities during the past few years. It also pitted the members of the Appropriations Committee, who claimed earmarking of funds for specific purposes was a legislative prerogative, against their colleagues who argued research and development funds should be awarded on the basis of expertise -- not politics. Another facet of the debate was a struggle between members of the Appropriations Committee and the Armed Services

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The Consortium represents more than 185,000 American scientists across the full range of the social and behavioral sciences, functioning as a bridge between the research world and the Washington community.

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Committee, the latter claiming that earmarking is illegitimate since there was no authorization for the spending of such funds in this manner.

Speaking in strong support of competitive peer review selection of research and development awards were, along with Danforth, Senators William Proxmire (D-WI), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), and James Sasser (D-TN). Another key to the passage of the amendment was the strong support of Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. Goldwater's position undermined the stance of Sen. Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ) who argued that Arizona State University, one of the recipients of the earmarked money, deserved the funds.

The vote revealed support for the idea of peer review, although the conference committee with the House may restore some of the earmarked projects. The debate suggested, however, that supporters of merit-based R&D awards still have much educating to do. DeConcini argued that the peer review system leads to "over 50 percent of the research money going to 16 states every year." He further charged that peer review favors the "elite" schools in the Northeast and California, a charge that has been echoed by many. Sen. Russell Long (D-LA), demonstrating the tradition of Southern oratory for the Senate's new television audience, asked "how do you get to be one of the peers? The answer is, you do not. You just stay where you are." He also noted: "I would rather depend on my colleagues on the appropriations committee than on one of those peers...When did we agree that the peers would cut the melon or decide who gets the money?"

The increase in earmarking of appropriations for specific university projects has occurred concurrently with the demise of federal programs funding the building and upgrading of scientific facilities on campuses. There are a number of bills advocating new programs to provide funds for this purpose, but most are stalled in the Congress.

FELLOWSHIPS FOR SOCIAL SCIENTISTS RENEWED BY CONGRESS

The National Graduate Fellows Program, which awards need-based fellowships to graduate students in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, has been renewed by both the House and Senate in their reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The program, originally authorized in 1980, did not receive funding until FY 1985. Delays in appointing the Board to oversee the program led to extensions of the FY 1985 appropriation and the first group of 82 fellows were not named until April, 1986. The \$2.5 million FY 1985 appropriation will support this group for 30 months. The FY 1986 appropriation also provides \$2.5 million but stipulates that it must all be spent in the 1986-1987 academic year. Thus, 162 new fellows will receive only one year of guaranteed support.

The administration has sought to eliminate this program, requesting zero-funding for it in the FY 1987 budget. Congress seems determined to maintain it. However, if the program does not receive funding above the \$2.5 million level in FY 1987, a difficult choice will have to be made. The Department can continue supporting the 1986-87 class of fellows or it can cut off their support in order to conduct a competition for a new class of fellows in 1987-88. COSSA has joined with other groups to support increased appropriations for the program in order to avoid this dilemma.

In addition to the administration's desire to eliminate it, the program has been plagued with other problems. There is no separate competition between incoming graduate students and those already in the midst of their careers, resulting in very few first-year graduate students receiving fellowships. The Director of the program at the Education Department (ED) has been replaced. The original chairman of the Board has been nominated to be the Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental Relations at ED. The vice-chairman has also left. At the meeting of the Board last December, some Board members questioned the political views of a number of proposed application reviewers.

In reauthorizing the program the Senate voted to change the make-up of the Board. In the future the Board would be appointed by the Secretary of Education rather than the President. This would presumably reduce delays in getting members on the Board. It also phases in a reduction in the size of the Board from 15 to 9. It is hoped that these changes and a continued commitment by the Congress will sustain the program.

ADAMHA PLANS TO INCREASE NUMBER OF LONG-TERM RESEARCH PROJECTS

The Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration (ADAMHA) has announced a goal to increase the proportion of their research grants which are awarded for 4- and 5-year projects. (ADAMHA encompasses the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Mental Health.) In recent years, about 85% of ADAMHA's regular research grants have been made for project periods of 3 years or less. In FY 1985, only 7% of awards were made for 5-year periods. Under the new policy investigators are being encouraged to apply for longer-term projects. While it is anticipated that the most frequent project period will continue to be 3 years, ADAMHA wants to increase significantly the submission of applications for longer periods of support and intends to give favorable consideration to such applications.

The purpose of this initiative is to reduce the costs for investigators and the agency associated with the preparation and review of frequent applications for grants, and in so doing provide investigators with more time to conduct research and to demonstrate meaningful results. Longer commitments of support are intended for established investigators who have a proven

record of productivity and scientific contribution and for unusually promising newer investigators.

Initial Review Groups (IRGs) are being provided with guidelines for considering 4- and 5-year projects for funding. In addition to an established track record of the principal investigator or unusual promise of newer investigators, reviewers will consider whether institutional resources are sufficient to sustain the research for the entire project period, and whether the proposed research topic is likely to be productive for the full period of support requested.

FEDERAL AGENCIES PLAN COORDINATED EFFORT ON AGING STATISTICS

In recognition of the enormous social and economic implications of a U.S. population of which 20 percent will be over age 65 by 2025, representatives of 31 federal agencies and programs met on May 2 to identify vital policy issues regarding aging-related statistics and to plan a coordinated effort for data collection and research on the aging. The summit meeting was co-sponsored by T. Franklin Williams, Director of the National Institute on Aging (NIA), and John G. Keane, Director of the Census Bureau.

The meeting produced a consensus on several problems that impede research on aging. Many surveys fail to differentiate groups within the over-65 population -- 'young old' versus 'oldest old' (85+), male/female, racial/ethnic subgroups, etc. The quality of data on the oldest old is often poor, due in part to cognitive and hearing impairment among this group and to the high rate of institutionalization. There are also significant 'data gaps' and a lack of longitudinal data. For example, very little is known about the interrelationships between health, wealth, and income on a longitudinal basis among the elderly and there is little data on the interactions between disabilities and housing decisions among the elderly. Also, in some cases, scarce resources are being spent on overlapping data gathering efforts. Data gaps seem to be a far larger problem than duplication, however.

To combat these problems, an interagency forum on aging-related statistics will be formed to: 1) identify data gaps, potential research topics, and inconsistencies among agencies in the collection and presentation of data; 2) create opportunities for joint research and publications among agencies; 3) improve access to data by serving as a coordinating point for data requests from Congress, governmental agencies, and others; 4) hold meetings with data users to gain a better understanding of their data needs; 4) develop joint funding for projects involving aging-related statistics of mutual need among agencies; 5) identify statistical and methodological problems in the collection of data and investigating questions of data quality; and 6) work with other countries to promote consistency in definitions and presentation of data.

Agency staff hope they will be able to stretch their resources by piggy-backing modules on each other's surveys and linking to or sampling from existing administrative records (such as Medicare files, Social Security Administration earnings records, etc.). Increased and more expeditious access to data sets for extramural researchers will also be encouraged.

The forum will be coordinated by the NIA, Census Bureau, and National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), and will be composed of senior-level agency representatives able to make broad policy decisions.

The need for a coordinated federal statistical effort necessitated by the rapidly aging population has also been recognized by the Congress. On June 3, Sen. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-IA) co-chaired a joint hearing of the Subcommittee on Energy, Nuclear Proliferation, and Government Processes and the Subcommittee on Aging entitled "Statistical Policy for an Aging Society."

The hearing was called to explore how aging research and data collection can be coordinated to eliminate duplication, produce needed information in the most cost-efficient way, and encourage sharing of ideas for solutions to the problems of the elderly.

At the hearing, Jacob A. Brody, Dean of the School of Public Health of the University of Illinois at Chicago, sketched the dramatic changes in mortality rates in this century (in 1900, only 25% of people lived beyond age 65, while in 1985 approximately 70% survived age 65 and more than 30% lived to be 80 or more). Brody concluded that knowledge "gained by carefully accumulating accurate data from well-designed statistical investigations will alleviate much of our discomfort [at such enormous and expensive increases in health related expenses] and allow us to plan and manipulate our futures."

Dr. Williams and Dr. Keane spoke at the hearing to report on the May 2nd 'summit meeting'. Keane summed up the impetus for the heightened agency collaboration: "Through cooperation, we can improve our ability to link data collection and research to planning and policy development. We can provide better information for establishing priorities in data collection and research that meet the tests of scientific value, social relevance and affordability." The need for integration of socio-economic data with health data was emphasized by all witnesses.

In response to questions from Sen. Grassley, the directors agreed that no new legislation would be needed to implement the forum plan nor will there be a need for additional appropriations -- thus making the plan especially appealing to the Congress.

Also testifying at the hearing was John M. Cornman, Executive Director of the Gerontological Society of America. Mr. Cornman spoke on the many policy problems arising from cutbacks

in funding for federal statistical activities which have already occurred in this decade. Citing examples such as reductions in sample sizes, increased time between surveys, and staff cuts at the federal statistical agencies, Cornman warned of much greater problems if the FY 1987 Gramm-Rudman-Hollings reductions are implemented. Mr. Cornman's testimony was based on a report entitled "Availability of Federal Data on the Aged: Recent Changes and Future Concerns" by James R. Storey (June 1986). The report is available for \$4.00 from the GSA, 1411 K Street, NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005.

INTERNATIONAL VISITORS MEET WITH COSSA STAFF

Istvan Banfalvi, a research associate at the Institute of Social Sciences in Budapest, Hungary, visited the Consortium's offices on May 30. Traveling under the U.S. Information Agency's International Visitors Program, Banfalvi is meeting with various American officials and groups in connection with a study of the utilization of social science research in high-level political and economic decision-making. During the meeting, COSSA staff described the various ways in which U.S. social scientists participate in the federal legislative and rulemaking process. A former Secretary of the Committee for the Coordination of Social Science Research of the Council of Ministers, Banfalvi explained the organization and funding of research in Hungary. Of particular interest was the process by which Hungarian government agencies request support and use interdisciplinary and policy research.

Luis I. Ramallo, Secretary General of the International Social Science Council (ISSC), Paris, visited Washington on June 10-11. During his visit, Ramallo met with staff of the National Science Foundation, the National Academy of Sciences, and COSSA to discuss plans for the involvement of U.S. social scientists in the projects and meetings of the ISSC.

1987-1988 CONGRESSIONAL FELLOWSHIPS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Applications for 1987-1988 Congressional science fellowships in child development are invited by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCDD). Open to scientists and professionals at the post-doctoral level with interests in child development and public policy, the fellowships provide an opportunity to spend one year as a member of a Congressional staff. Mid-career applicants are especially encouraged. The fellowship year begins September 1, 1987.

The deadline for applications is November 10. For further information, contact Jeanette Goodstein, Director, SRCDD Washington Liaison Office, 100 North Carolina Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20003; 202/543-9582.

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 further information.

Centers for Disease Control

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is currently accepting applications for grants to support injury control research and demonstration projects and injury prevention research centers (IPRCs). The request for applications is based on the report, Injury in America, produced by the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, which urges a broad approach to injury control utilizing many disciplines that previously have not been an integral part of public health efforts. (Copies of the report are included in the application package available from CDC.)

R&D projects are encouraged that will yield results directly applicable to identifying interventions to prevent injury occurrence or minimize disability; 2) apply and evaluate the effect of known interventions on injury morbidity, mortality, disability, and economic losses; or 3) elucidate the etiology and mechanisms of injury. The three major categories of injury covered under this RFA are intentional, unintentional, and occupational injury. At least half of the available funds will be awarded in the area of traffic and motor vehicle-related injury control. Funding for this program is provided in part by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Applications for establishing Injury Prevention Research Centers must come from academic institutions with core faculty and expertise initially in at least one area of injury control and demonstrated involvement of other faculty in at least medicine, engineering, and public health, with a specific time-framed plan to expand to include the behavioral and social sciences, biostatistics, and health administration.

Budget: \$5.8 million to support up to 25 R&D projects; \$2.0 million for 5 IPRCs

Review Process: Peer review panels

Deadline: August 11, 1986

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