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**COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Policy,
November 29 and 30**



The COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Policy will take place

on November 29 and 30. Speakers include: former Census director Ken Prewitt (COSSA's current President), Commissioner of Education Statistics Jack Buckley, National Science Foundation (NSF) Assistant Director for Social Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) Myron Gutmann, White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) Principal Assistant Director for Science Philip Rubin, congressional staff, and American Enterprise Institute Scholar Norman Ornstein, who will assess the results of the 2012 election. Information on registration and a preliminary agenda are available at www.cossa.org. Registration fees increase on November 5.

National Academies Sponsor Symposium on Social and Behavioral Sciences in Action

In what will become an annual event, the National Academies' Division of Behavioral and Social Science and Education (DBASSE) sponsored a symposium, "Social and Behavioral Science in Action," on September 24. This year's event focused on National Security, Medicine, and Engineering and highlighted the contributions of the social and behavioral sciences (SBS) to issues such as water filtration in Bangladeshi villages, patient safety, assassinations, interrogations and school shootings, and distracted driving.

National Academy of Sciences President Ralph Cicerone asserted that the social and behavioral sciences are important to the scientific enterprise and clearly fit within the Academy. He complimented these sciences for their willingness to take on complicated issues and for using the scientific method "to study things that aren't dead." He declared that "modern society demands the social and behavioral sciences" be strong, since explaining human behavior is imperative to issues such as cultural differences, public health, business management, sustainability, interdependence of nations, and a whole host of others.

At the same time, echoing a comment by Columbia Professor and former Census Director Kenneth Prewitt, who chairs the DBASSE Advisory Committee and is COSSA's President, Cicerone expressed concern that society often overlooks the contributions of the SBS and takes them for granted. He assured the audience that the NAS would continue to use its convening power to highlight these sciences and their role in scientific endeavors.

Cicerone's comments were supported by Charles "Chuck" Vest, President of the National Academy of Engineering and Harvey Feinberg, President of the Institute of Medicine, the other entities in the National Academies. Vest noted that "social science is hard," reflecting the late Herbert Simon's retort every time he heard the natural and physical sciences referred to as the "hard" sciences and the social and behavioral sciences derided as "soft" sciences. Vest also emphasized the importance of examining the technology-human interface that must include social and behavioral scientists in teams with engineers and other researchers. He cited "human scale engineering" as another area where the combination of social and behavioral scientists and engineers working together was important. Both Vest and Cicerone commented on the value of the survey research conducted by social and behavioral scientists, particularly those studies that are comparative and longitudinal.

Feinberg declared that studying health without the social and behavioral sciences was like "trying to clap with one hand." He made the case for "systems thinking" with regard to public health that needed to include social and behavioral factors, especially with regard to preventing obesity and reducing smoking. He cited the support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for Health and Society Scholars who bridge the social, behavioral, and biomedical sciences to help improve public health.

Reducing Cholera in Bangladesh with the Help of Social Science

Former National Science Foundation director Rita Colwell gave the keynote address explaining her research on reducing cholera in Bangladeshi Villages. Now President and Chairman of CosmosID, Inc and affiliated with the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and the University of Maryland's Center for Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, Colwell illustrated how, by working with

sociologists and other social and behavioral scientists, she was able to convince women of Bangladesh to employ a simple filtration system, the use of folded sari cloth material, which led to significant decreases in cholera infections and deaths over a period of years. Conducting this social science experiment with 150,000 women in 50 villages, Colwell declared, could not have been done without the input of social scientists. The simple filtration method became so successful, Colwell noted, that the women in the original experiment became "extension agents" diffusing this knowledge to many other villages. Eventually, she said, this method became a new "social norm" that had important implications for village economies and social structures.

Lucian Leape of the Harvard School of Public Health focused his remarks on "Patient Safety as an Exercise in Behavioral Change." Aside from the policy issues in health care such as cost and access, Leape discussed what he described as a significant problem of quality failures that include medical errors that can lead to deaths in hospitals and other medical care facilities. He noted that medical folks are "very much in bed with social scientists" in trying to address this problem.

The key, Leape suggested, is changing the medical care paradigm in order to build a safer health system. The social science contribution is helping to get away from a system where individual performance is cherished and developing one where teamwork, collaboration, adaptability, and respectful behavior are valued. This, Leape argued, would require cultural change, which social scientists know something about.

Robert Fein of the Metis Group and Professor of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School examined how behavioral science research has been used in three areas of national security. He discussed trying to help develop profiles of potential assassins, which can be quite difficult since the notion of these people having mental illness or making explicit threats is not always the case. He also noted his work with the Safe School Initiative instituted by Clinton Education Secretary Richard Riley, an attempt to examine school shooters and try to identify characteristics that could lead to profiles. This was also a very difficult assignment since school shooters do not share many characteristics. He did note that sometimes others know about their intentions, but do not alert authorities.

Fein suggested that the research has made significant contributions to preventing terrorist acts. Work on detecting deception (topic of a COSSA Congressional Briefing in 2004), educating information, interrogation techniques, and other behavioral research has provided important information for his interaction with the President's Intelligence Science Board, Fein said.

John Lee of the University of Wisconsin discussed distracted driving as an area where behavioral scientists and engineers have worked together. Their research has helped try to overcome what Lee described as an "epidemic" of non-safe driving as evidenced by a spate of crashes and injuries caused by people texting, talking on cell phones, choosing music, and performing other distracting behaviors. Using human factors engineering to help design better dashboards and devices and trying to implement behavioral change techniques in public safety campaigns are part of the answers, Lee asserted.

Although the support from the Academies' presidents was significant and the examples presented impressive indications of the role of the social and behavioral science research, Prewitt wondered whether society was paying attention. He argued that these sciences have clearly penetrated the policy-making world and that the use of these sciences by the natural and physical sciences and engineering is "in itself a social phenomenon." However, in a year when parts of Congress wanted to eliminate political science at the National Science Foundation, economics research at the National Institutes of Health, the American Community Survey, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, making the case and building support for the social and behavioral sciences remains a continuing challenge.

To view a webcast of the event go to: <http://www.tvworldwide.com/events/nas/120924/>.

NSF's SBE Issues Dear Colleague on Interdisciplinary Research

Following up on the Rebuilding the Mosaic report (see [Update, November 7, 2011A](#)), Myron Gutmann, Assistant Director for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) directorate, on September 27 issued a Dear Colleague letter outlining a range of different opportunities that exist for SBE scientists to engage in interdisciplinary research.

According to the letter these include:

1. [A new solicitation for an annual Interdisciplinary Behavioral and Social Sciences \(IBSS\) competition](#) which seeks to support large interdisciplinary research projects and exploratory research projects
2. [A new solicitation for an annual SBE Postdoctoral Research Fellowships competition](#), which now includes a track for interdisciplinary education and training
3. Consideration of proposals submitted in response to the [Research Coordination Networks \(RCNs\) solicitation](#). RCNs support networking activities, not research per se, so that groups of investigators can communicate and coordinate their research, training and educational activities across disciplinary, organizational, geographic and international boundaries.
4. Consideration of proposals for interdisciplinary research submitted in response to the standing program announcements and program solicitations. Proposals may be submitted by individual investigators or teams but are expected to incorporate an integrated, interdisciplinary approach and generate results that will contribute to multiple disciplines. The lead PI should be from a discipline appropriate for the host SBE program, but collaborators may be from any area of science or engineering. Such projects may require a large team and may also exceed the current average award size in SBE.

The complete letter is available at: http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2012/nsf12123/nsf12123.jsp?WT.mc_id=USNSF_25&WT.mc_ev=click.

A panel including Myron Gutmann will discuss Interdisciplinary Research and the Role of the Disciplines at the COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences on November 29. For more information and to register for the meeting go to www.cossa.org.

NSF Makes Awards for Sustainability Research Networks

The idea of research networks (RNs), in which teams of scientists coordinate their efforts across many institutions to work on specific scientific problems, has been a significant activity supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF). On October 2, the Foundation announced that it had awarded \$12 million apiece to two RNs as part of its initiative on Science, Engineering and Education for Sustainability (SEES).

Penn State University will lead one of these networks, which will focus on "Sustainable Climate Risk Management Strategies." According to principal investigator Klaus Keller, a Penn State geoscientist, the research will examine proposed approaches to the management of climate-related risks through adaptation, mitigation and geoengineering. Each of these "differ in their costs and benefits, and their vulnerability to uncertainties," noted Keller. The expectation is to foster sustainability research through an integrated and quantitative approach that links the social, economic and environmental components of climate risk management.

Marge Cavanaugh, Acting Assistant Director of NSF's Geosciences directorate noted the increasing importance of including multi-disciplines in climate change research. "Unraveling complex processes involving Earth systems, especially the coupling of human activities and climate, depends increasingly on partnerships among natural science, philosophy and ethics, economics, social science, mathematics and engineering," she remarked.

According to NSF, the economic component will contribute to research on sound foundations of

sustainability, and on the potential consequences of different representations of sustainability in integrated assessment models. The environmental component will provide assessments of these different strategies, as well as of potential definitions of sustainability. The social component will analyze issues such as the ethical dimensions of inter- and intra-generational equity and diversity of ethical frameworks. In addition, earth system modeling will be used to analyze possible future scenarios and interactions among the components of our planet's systems. The project will also assess how to quantify uncertainty--a central theme across the models and methods of evaluating climate risk management.

Aside from Keller, the key researchers on the project include: Robert Lempert, RAND Corp.; Chris Forest, Department of Meteorology, and Karen Fisher-Vanden, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, both at Penn State; and James Edmonds, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

The second Sustainability RN will focus on exploring ways of maximizing the benefits of natural gas development while minimizing potential negative effects on human communities and ecosystems. The University of Colorado-Boulder will house the project. Led by Joseph Ryan of Colorado's civil, environmental and architectural engineering department, researchers will study social, ecological and economic aspects of the development of natural gas resources--and the protection of air and water resources--in the Rocky Mountain region.

John Adgate of the Colorado School of Public Health in Denver will spearhead a group assessing the potential risks of natural gas development to public health and economist Catherine Keske of the University of Colorado will lead an effort to evaluate the network's research findings in social-ecological system models. In addition, the project will share its results with the public through an extensive outreach and education effort led by historian Patricia Limerick of the Center of the American West.

Communication Association Sponsors Public Programs on Presidential Debates

Over 80 million Americans watch them, thousands of journalists cover them, and hundreds of pundits tell us what to think about them. Debating is the ultimate exercise of free speech and democratic deliberation in contemporary political life. But, in the end, too much of the commentary will center on "who won?" and "who lost?" as we learned on the morning of October 4.

On October 1, the National Communication Association (NCA) held an interactive discussion between journalists and scholars of political communication that sought to go beyond wins and losses, beyond the snap judgments and easy answers, and offer a citizen's guide for watching and processing the hours of presidential debating to come in 2012.

Entitled "Beyond Wins & Losses: A Citizen's Guide to the 2012 Presidential Debates," the program was co-sponsored with the First Amendment Center at the Newseum and was broadcast live on C-SPAN1. The panelists were a mix of communication scholars and journalists who had participated in presidential debates as moderators and panelists. They were: Annie Groer, journalist and 1988 Presidential Debate panelist; J. Michael Hogan, professor, Penn State University; Charlton McIlwain, associate professor, New York University; Kathryn Olson, professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and Sander Vanocur, journalist, moderator of one of the Kennedy-Nixon 1960 debates. The speakers diagnosed the current state of presidential debating to provide a richer, more sophisticated rubric for citizen analysis and discussion of presidential debate events.

For more information on the event, and to link to the C-SPAN video library to view the event, visit <http://www.natcom.org/DebateEvent/>.

On October 18, two days after President Obama and Governor Romney engage in their own town hall debate, the NCA will co-sponsor, with the Department of Rhetoric and Communication Studies

at the University of Richmond, a discussion among communication scholars, political and media experts, and an audience at the University of Richmond about what made the 1992 Richmond debate between President George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot so influential. This debate was the first to use the town hall format and led the moderator to suggest that it was "unlike any other presidential debate in history."

This event will feature questioners who participated in the 1992 debate as well as communication scholars who study the '92 event, as well as the 1992 debate moderator, Carole Simpson, the first African-American woman to moderate a presidential debate.

For more information about this upcoming event, visit <http://www.natcom.org/EventDetails.aspx?id=2595>.

(This article was written by Trevor Parry Giles of the NCA.)

AERA Hosts Briefing on Affirmative Action Amicus Brief

On September 27, the American Education Research Association (AERA) hosted a briefing on the amicus brief it, in conjunction with seven other organizations, submitted to the Supreme Court in the upcoming affirmative action case, *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. (See [Update, September 10, 2012](#) for background on the case.) The briefing focused on the scientific evidence regarding the importance of diversity in higher education, race-conscious admissions policies, and the University of Texas's policy in particular.

Felice Levine, AERA's Executive Director, opened the proceedings and asserted that "the AERA et al. filed an amicus brief because the science was and is compelling and the Supreme Court would do well to consider the substantial and significant body of knowledge."

Angelo Ancheta, Santa Clara University School of Law and counsel of record for the amicus brief, explained the context and background of the case, noting that there are two main legal questions at issue: whether diversity is a compelling governmental interest, and whether the University's policy is narrowly tailored to its goal of increasing diversity. The Court ruled that racial diversity is a compelling governmental interest in 2003 but could reverse its decision in this ruling.

Stella Flores, Vanderbilt University, spoke about the research regarding Texas's minority population and the University's admissions policy. She pointed out that because Texas's minority population has grown significantly over the past 10 years, increases in the sheer numbers of minority students attending universities do not prove that policies are effective at increasing diversity. On the contrary, Texas's "percent plan" (automatically admitting the top 10 percent of every high school class to state universities) is not effective at increasing diversity.

Gary Orfield, University of California-Los Angeles, discussed the research behind the "narrow tailoring" issue, arguing that no alternative to race-conscious admission policies can create the levels of diversity we have now.

Liliana Garces, University of California-Riverside, spoke about narrow tailoring in a graduate school context. Her research showed that state-wide affirmative action bans led to dramatic declines in diversity across all graduate fields.

William Kidder, University of California-Riverside, summarized the benefits diversity provides to both minority and non-minority students. Diversity is associated with cross-racial understanding and decreases in prejudice, increases in interracial friendships, better critical thinking and cognitive skills, higher levels of civic engagement, and more empathy and respect for others' beliefs.

Catherine Didion, National Academy of Engineering, discussed the implications of diversity for America's future STEM workforce and argued that the U.S. cannot afford to squander the potential

of its diverse population.

For more information about the briefing, including a webcast of the event, visit: <http://www.aera.net/EducationResearch/LinkingResearchtoPublicInterest/AmicusBriefs/FishervUniversityofTexasatAustin/tabid/13333/Default.aspx>.

The amicus brief is available at:

http://www.aera.net/Portals/38/docs/Education_Research_and_Research_Policy/11-345%20bsac%20American%20Educational%20Research%20Association%20et%20al.pdf.

NSF Seeks Proposals to Examine Broadening Participation Issues

The National Science Foundation's Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) "is committed to the national goal of increasing the numbers of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (URMs), including those with disabilities entering and completing graduate education and postdoctoral training to levels representative of the available pool of URMs." The goal is to increase URM participation in advanced science and engineering education and training critical for supporting the development of a diverse professional workforce. This includes creating a diverse faculty in science and engineering who will serve as the intellectual, professional, personal, and organizational role models that shape the expectations of future scientists and engineers.

To achieve this long term commitment, the AGEP program seeks proposals that "will support the development, implementation, study, and dissemination of innovative models and standards of graduate education and postdoctoral training that are designed to improve URM participation, preparation, and success."

According to NSF, AGEP projects must focus on URM U.S. citizens in science and engineering graduate education, and/or postdoctoral training, and their preparation for academic careers at all types of institutions of higher education. The proposed projects may include professional development more broadly defined. AGEP is interested in proposals that include any or all science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields supported by NSF including the social, behavioral and economic sciences, and multi-, cross-, or inter-disciplinary fields.

AGEP encourages community colleges, primarily undergraduate institutions, minority-serving institutions (Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities), women's colleges, and institutions primarily serving persons with disabilities to participate as lead institutions and as alliance partners in all three types of AGEP projects noted below.

AGEP intends to support the following types of projects:

- **AGEP-Transformation** - Strategic alliances of institutions and organizations to develop, implement, and study innovative evidence-based models and standards for science and engineering graduate education, postdoctoral training, and academic career preparation that eliminate or mitigate negative factors and promote positive practices for URMs.
- **AGEP-Knowledge Adoption and Translation (AGEP-KAT)** - Projects to expand the adoption (or adaptation) of research findings and evidence-based strategies and practices related to the participation and success of URMs in science and engineering graduate education, postdoctoral training, and academic careers at all types of institutions of higher education.
- **AGEP-Broadening Participation Research in Science and Engineering Education (AGEP-BPR)** - Investigator initiated empirical research projects that seek to create and study new theory-driven models and innovations related to the participation and success of URMs in graduate education, postdoctoral training, and academic careers at all types of institutions of higher education.

The AGEP program does not make awards to individual students or postdocs to undertake their

education or research activities.

Proposals are due October 30, 2012. NSF expects to spend \$6 million in FY 2013 to make up to 12 awards for this program.

For more information contact: Jessie DeAro, Program Director, (703) 292-5350 or jdearo@nsf.gov or Mark Leddy, (703) 292-4655 or mleddy@nsf.gov.

The full solicitation is available at: http://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?WT.z_pims_id=5474&ods_key=nsf12554.

A panel on Broadening Participation in Science featuring Sally Rockey, NIH's Deputy Director for Extramural Research; Kellina Craig Henderson of NSF; and Joan Reede, Harvard University, will take place at the COSSA Colloquium on Social and Behavioral Sciences and Public Policy on November 29. For more information and to register for the meeting go to www.cossa.org.

COSSA's Newest Member

We are pleased to announce that the University of Idaho has joined the Consortium. We appreciate the new support and look forward to working with the University whose social and behavioral scientists benefit from COSSA's important work.

Consortium of Social Science Associations

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Midwest Sociological Society
National Association of Social Workers
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Social Science History Association
Society for Anthropological Sciences
Society for Behavioral Medicine
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Society for Research on Adolescence
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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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