



COSSA

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COSSA Seeks New Executive Director

The position profile for COSSA's search to replace Howard Silver, who is retiring as COSSA's Executive Director, is now available. According to the description, COSSA seeks a dynamic leader in the field of social science advocacy to serve as its next Executive Director. COSSA fills a unique role in the public policy arena, representing the broad spectrum of social science, as opposed to any one discipline. Since its creation in 1981, COSSA has been an effective champion for social science with an impressive record of achievement. The current political climate solidifies the need for COSSA's advocacy and lobbying work and underscores the importance of aggressively pursuing new ideas and strategies to increase the organization's impact. ([Position Description](#))

France Cordova Nominated as Next NSF Director

On July 31, President Obama nominated France Cordova, President Emerita of Purdue University, as the next director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Cordova would replace Subra Suresh, now President of Carnegie Mellon University, who departed NSF in late March. Cora Marrett, NSF's Deputy Director and a sociologist, has served her second stint as Acting Director since then. Cordova would be the second woman and first Hispanic to lead the NSF.



France Cordova

The nominee currently serves on the National Science Board (NSB), the policymaking body for the Foundation. Aside from her leadership of Purdue, Cordova has had a distinguished academic career serving as Chancellor of the University of California at Riverside, where she was also a Distinguished Professor of Physics and Astronomy. Previously, she was the Vice Chancellor for Research and Professor of Physics at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In addition, she was on the faculty of the Pennsylvania State University, where she served as Head of the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics.

Cordova interrupted her academic service to become NASA's Chief Scientist from 1993 to 1996. She was also the Deputy Group Leader in the Earth and Space Sciences Division at Los Alamos National Laboratory for two years as well as a Staff Scientist there for ten years.

She is the winner of NASA's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Medal and was recognized as a 2000 Kilby Laureate, for "contributions to society through science, technology, innovation, invention, and education." She is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and the Association for Women in Science (AWIS). Cordova was nominated to the Stanford University Multicultural Alumni Hall of Fame by El Centro Chicano, Stanford's Chicano and Latino organization. She was also named one of 80 Elite Hispanic Women by *Hispanic Business Magazine* in 2002.

In addition to the NSB, Cordova serves as chairs the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, a position she will have to relinquish to lead NSF. Cordova received a B.A. from Stanford University and a Ph.D. in Physics from the California Institute of Technology.

The Senate needs to confirm Cordova's appointment.

Jo Handelsman Nominated as OSTP's Associate Director for Science

On the same day as Cordova's NSF nomination, President Obama nominated Jo Handelsman, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Professor and Frederick Phineas Rose Professor in the Department of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at Yale University, to become the Associate Director for Science at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). She replaces Carl Wieman, who left OSTP a year ago.



Jo Handelsman

Previously, Handelsman served on the University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty as a Professor in Plant Pathology for 24 years and Professor and Chair of the Department of Bacteriology for two years.

She is currently President of the American Society for Microbiology. In 2011, Handelsman received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Mentoring. For eight years she directed the Wisconsin Program for Scientific Teaching. In 2004, Handelsman co-founded the National Academies Summer Institute on Undergraduate Education in Biology. She is one of the authors of a recent study on gender bias in STEM fields (see other story).

She received a B.S. from Cornell University and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Handelsman also needs Senate confirmation.

NSF Political Science Program Cancels Proposal Target Dates for Rest of 2013

As a further response to complying with the Coburn Amendment to the FY 2013 final appropriations legislation, the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Political Science program has announced the cancellation of its August 2013 research grant proposal deadline and its September 2013 dissertation grant deadline. In addition, the political science review panel will not meet again in 2013. (For the story of the Coburn Amendment see [Update, March 25, 2013.](#))

On June 7, NSF issued a statement describing its plans to implement the Coburn amendment stating: "the Political Science Program in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE) will continue to engage panels to review grant proposals, using the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts)." To comply with the act, "the Panels will also be asked to provide input on whether proposals meet one or both of the additional criteria required -- promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States." (See [Update, June 10, 2013.](#))

The new notice explains: "Because of uncertainty about the NSF budget for fiscal year 2014, the Political Science program will not have target dates in August 2013 (for research grants) and September 2013 (for Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants)." It goes on to assure political scientists that the program will adhere to its January 2014 proposal target date. The program also notes that it will still accept proposals at any time. The panel will meet again in the spring of 2014 to review proposals received by the January 2014 target date.

The hope is that by that time, the Coburn amendment would be history. With the likelihood of a Continuing Resolution funding the government into FY 2014, it will take some strong efforts to remove Coburn's restrictions on the program.

According to the Political Science program website, most of the awards made in FY 2013 have gone to Dissertation Research Grants, training workshops, and collaborative grants on automating political indicators.

NIH 101: Former NIH OER Director Wendy Baldwin Provides Briefing to Congressional Staff

On July 31, the Ad Hoc Group for Medical Research held the latest in a series of Congressional briefings on how the nation's investment in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is fostering scientific discoveries to enhance the health and well-being of the American people. The briefing, *NIH 101: An Introduction to the Nation's Medical Research Agency*, was co-sponsored by the

Congressional Biomedical Research Caucus. Former director of the NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER) Wendy Baldwin, now president and CEO of the Population Reference Bureau and a member of the COSSA Board of Directors, provided an overview of the NIH peer review process, the types of grants funded by the agency, and a brief discussion of how NIH sets research priorities and the process the agency uses to solicit input from the scientific community.

Providing a brief synopsis of the NIH, Dave Moore, Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and chair of the Ad Hoc Group, noted that thanks in part to NIH-funded medical research, Americans are living longer and healthier lives. He cited as an example that life expectancy in the United States grew from 47 years in 1900 to 78 years as reported in 2009. He also pointed out that the disability rate in people over the age of 65 has decreased dramatically in the last 30 years. Additionally, in recent years the rates of new diagnoses and death from all cancers combined have fallen significantly.

He informed attendees that NIH is the largest source of funding for medical research in the world and that more than 84 percent of the agency's budget supports high-quality jobs for over 300,000 research personnel at 2,500 universities and research institutions in every state. The NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland is also home to the NIH Clinical Center, the largest hospital in the world completely dedicated to clinical research. Each of NIH's 27 Institutes and Centers supports a specific research agenda. Moore stressed that the NIH leadership plays an active role in shaping the agency's research planning, activities, and outlook. Quoting NIH Center for Scientific Review director Richard Nakamura, Moore related, "the number and quality of research proposals going unfunded have never been higher in the 67-year history of NIH grants." Unfortunately, since 2000 the success rates for grant applications have fallen by nearly 50 percent. The NIH defines success rate as "as the percentage of reviewed grant applications that receive funding." Success rates are computed on a fiscal year basis and include applications that are peer reviewed. The rates are determined by dividing the number of competing applications funded by the sum of the total number of competing applications reviewed and the number of funded carryovers.

NIH's Office of Extramural Research Explained

Baldwin provided an overview of NIH's structure, noting that OER is within the NIH Office of the Director (OD). She explained that OER's responsibilities include oversight of the NIH's research and program policy; grants administration; intellectual property; research integrity; data management and reporting; peer review policy development, implementation and training; electronic research administration; grants administrative support, animal care and use; human subjects protection; communications and outreach; extramural loan repayment/Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service [Award](#) payback; Small Business Innovation Research ([SBIR](#)); Academic Research Enhancement Award (AREA) Program which supports small-scale research projects in the biomedical and behavioral sciences conducted by faculty and students at educational institutions that have not been major recipients of NIH research grant funds; training and fellowship programs; and much more. What the OER does not do, Baldwin stated, is manage peer review groups, which is the purview of the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) and make grant awards, the purview of the 27 institutes and centers (ICs).

She also explained that the OER establishes policies in consultation with the ICs and the other offices within the OD, and the recipient community. The ICs, Baldwin pointed out, are the first line of implementation of extramural policies. OER, however, has an oversight role. Accordingly, Baldwin emphasized that this has implications regarding where to get answers to questions. If the questions are about why NIH functions as it does in the extramural program, then that is a question that OER can answer. On the other hand, if the questions have to do with why NIH funded or did not fund a project, that is a question for the individual IC, she explained.

The former OER director described CSR's role in the grant process. CSR receives the approximately 50,000 grant applications that come to the NIH each year and has the responsibility of referring the applications to the appropriate ICs and the review groups. It has the charge to constitute and manage standing and ad hoc scientific review groups also known as study sections. Baldwin informed the

attendees that review of scientific research (and training) applications are done by external scientists and is a process that is separate from the programs in the ICs. Approximately 70 percent of the initial review is done by CSR.

NIH's Criteria for Scoring Grant Applications

She also shared the criteria used in scoring grant applications. These include: significance, investigator, innovation, approach, and environment.

- **Significance** -- Does the project address an important problem or a critical barrier to progress in the field? If the aims of the project are achieved, how will scientific knowledge, technical capability, and/or clinical practice be improved? How will successful completion of the aims change the concepts, methods, technologies, treatments, services, or preventative interventions that drive this field?
- **Investigator(s)** -- Are the PD/PIs, collaborators, and other researchers well-suited to the project? If Early Stage Investigators or New Investigators, or in the early stages of independent careers, do they have appropriate experience and training? If established, have they demonstrated an ongoing record of accomplishments that have advanced their field(s)? If the project is collaborative or multi-PD/PI, do the investigators have complementary and integrated expertise; are their leadership approach, governance and organizational structure appropriate for the project?
- **Innovation** -- Does the application challenge and seeks to shift current research or clinical practice paradigms by utilizing novel theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions? Are the concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions novel to one field of research or novel in a broad sense? Is a refinement, improvement, or new application of theoretical concepts, approaches or methodologies, instrumentation, or interventions proposed?
- **Approach** -- Are the overall strategy, methodology, and analyses well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the specific aims of the project? Are potential problems, alternative strategies, and benchmarks for success presented? If the project is in the early stages of development, will the strategy establish feasibility and will particularly risky aspects be managed? If the project involves human subjects and/or NIH-defined clinical research, are the plans to address 1) the protection of human subjects from research risks, and 2) the inclusion (or exclusion) of individuals on the basis of sex/gender, race, and ethnicity, as well as the inclusion (exclusion) of children, justified in terms of the scientific goals and research strategy proposed?
- **Environment** -- Will the scientific environment in which the work will be done contribute to the probability of success? Are the institutional support, equipment and other physical resources available to the investigators adequate for the project proposed? Will the project benefit from unique features of the scientific environment, subject populations, or collaborative arrangements?

Human subjects, inclusion of women and minorities, vertebrate animals, and biohazards are additional elements that are also considered.

Two Levels of Peer Review

She pointed out that the peer review process includes two levels of review. There is a **second level of review**, she explained, which is done by the ICs' advisory councils. The Councils' membership consists of individuals nominated by NIH and approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. Members of advisory councils review funding plans presented by the ICs, including providing special consideration to investigators who receive one million or more in direct costs by these Councils. They also look at human subject issues along with providing consideration of the ICs goals and needs. The Councils advise the IC director.

Explaining the priority setting process, Baldwin emphasized that a number of factors determine an IC's priorities, including funding allocations among the ICs, the wisdom of the scientific community via the submission of unsolicited research programs and the rigor of peer review; ICs' strategic plans which have received the input of the scientific community and are posted on the individual ICs' websites; and the direct solicitation of proposals via the NIH's request for applications (RFAs) and the like.

The NIH staff works with the larger scientific community, she pointed out, stressing that the "boundaries are very porous because it is all science." Baldwin explained that the staff persons are called "Health *Scientist* Administrators," which means that they read the appropriate journals and have their portfolio of grantees and reviewers who are accomplished in their fields. She further explained that the NIH staff also interacts with researchers at scientific meetings, workshops, Council discussions, planning meetings, and the like. She described the concept clearance process for initiatives supported by the ICs which could include groups convened to discuss specific areas of science, consensus development meetings, including the sponsorship of Institute of Medicine (IOM)/National Academies (NAS) committees to examine particular areas of research.

The Importance of Unsolicited Proposals

Unsolicited applications are the "bedrock" of the NIH extramural programs, she stressed. This policy of accepting uninvited research proposals allows the best ideas to percolate up from the scientific community, Baldwin specified. These ideas are assessed by the scientific community via peer review along with the second level review by the IC advisory council. At the same time, she reasoned, solicited applications are important too. They allow a focus on a priority area by bringing applications together for review and in the process encourage the scientific community to address a particular topic. These applications are also assessed by the community via peer view and likewise undergo a second level of review by the advisory council.

Baldwin concluded her presentation with a brief discussion of clinical research. She noted that in FY 2012, NIH supported nearly \$11 billion in clinical research which is in all of the Institutes. She explained that clinical trials are a subset of clinical research and that the agency spends approximately \$3 billion for clinical trials. She pointed out that translational centers that make up the Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) [program](#) are one way of supporting clinical research (see [Update, July 22, 2013](#)). Currently, there are 61 CTSA's across the U.S. The FY 2013 budget request for the program was \$639 million. The process is "very transparent" Baldwin concluded and encouraged that briefing participants go to the NIH's website (www.nih.gov) for more information.

COSSA is a member of the Ad Hoc Group's steering committee and assisted in planning the briefing.

Congress Leaves for August Recess: Appropriations System in "Total Chaos"

Reacting to the Senate's vote not to consider the FY 2014 Transportation/HUD spending bill, Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), Ranking Member of the Subcommittee that produced the bill and the only Republican Senator to vote for bringing it to the floor, lashed out, declaring, "The whole system is in total chaos. It's too early to tell how it is all going to unspool now."

At the same time, the House leadership pulled its version of the Transportation/HUD spending bill from the floor because moderate Republicans balked at the severe cuts to highway programs, creating a situation where there were probably not enough votes to pass the measure.

Although both the House and Senate have made progress on the FY 2014 spending bills at the committee level, getting the bills passed on the floors has been much more difficult. The House has passed four of the twelve, while the Senate has passed only one. The House Appropriations

Committee has completed ten of the twelve, with the Interior-Environment bill making it through the Subcommittee. The Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill had its Subcommittee markup scheduled for two weeks ago indefinitely postponed because of the drastic reductions to many programs in the draft released publicly.

The Senate Appropriations panel has completed work on eleven of the bills. It is missing the Interior/Environment bill as well. Yet, an attempt to bring Transportation/HUD to the floor was blocked by an inability to get support from a sufficient number of Republican Senators to reach the magic 60 votes needed to conduct business in the Senate.

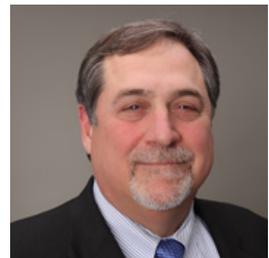
Congress has left town for a five-week recess, not to return until September 9. What will happen when they come back is anybody's guess. The amount of legislative time to conduct business before the new fiscal year begins on October 1 is minimal. Leadership and staff are already in the process of putting together a Continuing Resolution (CR) that will keep the government running into the new fiscal year. However, some GOP Senators are making noises that they will try to block the CR if it includes funding for the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare. This would lead to a government shutdown.

As has occurred during the past few years, there is once again talk of some bargain between the Administration and Congress that would reduce entitlement spending, begin the process of reforming the tax code, and end the dreaded sequester. So far, lots of talk, including meetings of a bipartisan group of Senators with White House Chief of Staff Dennis McDonough, but not much action.

One question also left hanging is whether the Coburn Amendment to the final FY 2013 spending bill restricting the National Science Foundation's political science program (see story above) can get removed from any FY 2014 funding legislation, whether it is a CR or Omnibus bill, which once again might occur later in the calendar year. Stay tuned!

Senate Confirms Thompson as New Census Director

On August 1, the Senate confirmed numerous nominees to Executive Branch positions. Among them was John Thompson, who became the new leader of the U.S. Census Bureau. The former President of NORC will serve out the first five-year term for Census Directors under recently enacted legislation. The term will end on December 31, 2016. He would be re-eligible for reappointment.



Thompson returns to the Bureau where he served for 27 years, including leading operations for the 2000 decennial count. He faces numerous challenges as the Bureau continues its research and testing for the 2020 Census, under enormous pressures to reduce costs. It also faces budgetary and political questions regarding the many other surveys the Bureau conducts. These include the American Community Survey, which the House voted to abolish in 2012, and which many in Congress would like to make voluntary, leading to increased costs and greater inaccuracies.

(For more on Thompson's background and Senate Committee hearing, see [Update, July 22, 2013](#) and [May 28, 2013](#). For information on the Bureau's FY 2014 budget, see Update, [July 22, 2013](#) and [May 13, 2013](#).)

With Thompson's confirmation to lead the Bureau, Thomas Mesenbourg, who has served as Acting Director since Bob Groves' departure in August 2012, announced his retirement. Mesenbourg has spent his entire 40-year career at the Census Bureau. He was the Census Bureau's Deputy Director from May 2008 until August 2012. He also served as Acting Director from January to July 2009. He was the Associate Director for Economic Programs from 2005 to 2008.

Mesenbourg is the 2011 recipient of the Julius Shiskin Memorial Award for Economic Statistics. He has also received the Roger W. Jones Award from American University for exceptional leadership among

people who devoted themselves to federal public service. In 2004, he was awarded the Presidential Rank Award for Distinguished Senior Executives, the government's highest award for career executives. He joined the Census Bureau in 1972.

He was a terrific public servant who will be missed.

Furman Confirmed to Head CEA

Also on August 1, the Senate confirmed Jason Furman to replace Alan Krueger as Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA). Krueger has returned to Princeton University.

The Council of Economic Advisers, an agency within the Executive Office of the President, is charged with offering the President objective economic advice on the formulation of both domestic and international economic policy. The Council bases its recommendations and analysis on economic research and empirical evidence, using the best data available to support the President in setting the nation's economic policy.

Until moving over to the CEA, Furman was the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy and the Principal Deputy Director of the National Economic Council. He has been a Senior Fellow in Economic Studies and Director of the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution. Previously, he served as a Staff Economist at the CEA, a Special Assistant to the President for Economic Policy at the National Economic Council under President Clinton and Senior Adviser to the Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank. Furman has also served as Visiting Scholar at NYU's Wagner Graduate School of Public Service, a visiting lecturer at Yale and Columbia Universities, and a Senior Fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. He has conducted research in a wide range of areas, including fiscal policy, tax policy, health economics, Social Security, and monetary policy. In addition to numerous articles in scholarly journals and periodicals, Furman is the editor of several books on economic policy, including *Path to Prosperity* and *Who Has the Cure*.

Furman has a Ph.D. in economics and a M.A. in government from Harvard University and a M.Sc. in economics from the London School of Economics.

OMB Suggests Agencies Learn How to "Harness" Research Findings from the Social and Behavioral Sciences

In a July 26 memo to the heads of departments and agencies, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) suggests one way to improve the "evidence and innovation agenda" is to use research findings from the social and behavioral sciences "to implement low-cost approaches to improving program results." OMB expects to conduct a workshop on this topic later this year.

All this is part of the current Administration's attempt to help agencies use evidence and evaluations in budget submissions, priority setting, and program implementation. Especially in this era of budgetary constraints, OMB wants agencies to cooperate to improve government performance.

In providing guidance to the agencies as they prepare their FY 2015 budgets, OMB encourages them to "allocate resources to programs and practices backed by strong evidence of effectiveness, while trimming activities that evidence shows are not effective." OMB also expects the agencies to propose new ideas for developing evidence to improve existing programs.

OMB recommends cross-cutting strategies such as: 1) harnessing data; 2) conducting high-quality, low-cost evaluations and rapid, iterative experiments; 3) using innovative outcome-focused grant designs; and 4) strengthening agency capacity to use evidence through clearinghouses that help translate strong research into practice.

For the first strategy, OMB supports linking data across programs and levels of government, while still protecting privacy. It notes that a number of Federal agencies are currently "developing or using

protocols and processes to share personally identifiable data to permit such linkages" while adhering to laws, regulations, and policies regarding privacy.

As part of the second strategy, OMB highlights that "major advances have been made in research regarding the influences that drive people's decisions and choices." These new insights into human behavior "can significantly improve policy outcomes at a lower cost." In addition, OMB cites the Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) program as an example that used administrative data collected for other purposes to keep evaluation costs low.

For the third strategy, OMB discusses pay for success, tiered-evidence grant designs, such as the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund, performance partnerships and waiver demonstrations, and multi-phase grant competitions.

The full memo can be found at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2013/m-13-17.pdf>.

Senate Commerce Committee Wants Study of Video Games and Programming

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, chaired by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), has marked up and sent to the Senate floor the *Violent Content Research Act of 2013*.

The bill calls for the Federal Trade Commission, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Department of Health and Human Services, to jointly arrange with the National Academy of Sciences to undertake a study of the impact of violent video games and violent video programming on the behavior of children.

In introducing the bill on January 24, 2013, Rockefeller like many others was reacting to the killings in Newtown, CT. He indicated that one part of a "comprehensive approach" to coping with this tragedy "concerns violent content, including video games and video programming." He continued, "I have long had concerns about how the violent content that kids see and interact with every day affects their wellbeing. This is a very important issue, and one that deserves further research."

The committee chairman also criticized court decisions that have protected the video game industry, although he did not specifically refer to the 2011 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*, which overturned, using the first amendment, California's attempt to ban minors from purchasing violent video games. Rockefeller asserted: "Recent court decisions demonstrate that some people still do not get it. They believe that violent video games are no more dangerous to young minds than classic literature or Saturday morning cartoons. Parents, pediatricians, and psychologists know better." He added: "These court decisions show we need to conduct additional groundwork on this issue. This [proposed] report would be a critical resource in this process. It could inform research by other organizations, including the Centers for Disease Control, and provide guidance to lawmakers."

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), Chairman of the Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee, also reacting to Newtown, asked the National Science Foundation (NSF) for a report on youth violence. A Subcommittee of the NSF's Social, Behavioral, and Economics Sciences directorate quickly produced the report *Youth Violence: What We Need to Know*. Part of the report dealt with violent video games and programming and a hearing on the report was held by Wolf's Subcommittee on March 19, 2013 (see [Update, March 25, 2013](#)).

There does not appear to be a companion to Rockefeller's bill in the House of Representatives.

Members of Congress Tell NIH Director to Continue Funding of Social, Behavioral and Economics Research

A Dear Colleague letter organized by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) to NIH Director Francis Collins has garnered the signatures of over 80 members of the House of Representatives. The letter affirms the signatories' "belief that the NIH should sustain its crucial support for behavioral, and social science research, including economics."

In writing to director Collins, the Members remind him that: "Support for these areas of research is consistent with the NIH mission to 'enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce the burdens of illness and disability.'"

It further goes on to say: "The social sciences are instrumental to this progress, and researchers from economics, psychology, sociology, demography, history, geography, communications and political science, have all made contributions that build our collective knowledge on the determinants of health and provide the foundation for future policy action."

Specifically addressing the results of NIH-funded economics research, which a House Appropriations Subcommittee in 2012 threatened to eliminate (see [Update, July 23, 2012](#)), the letter notes how a number of findings address "some of the most pressing issues in health research including, how to promote healthy behaviors, stem the onset of chronic conditions, improve the productivity of medical care, and understand how socio-economic factors interact with communities to perpetuate health disparities among population groups."

The letter concludes by urging Collins "to remain steadfast in your support of social science research. Social sciences, economics in particular, have always been an important pillar of knowledge in our effort to improve national and global health."

The letter and the list of signatories can be found on www.cossa.org as soon as it becomes available.

Representatives Request GAO Study of Gender Bias in STEM Fields

Citing a 2012 study by Yale researchers Jo Handelsman, John Dovidio, Corinne Moss-Racusin, Victoria Brescoll, and Mark Graham, "Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students," three senior Congresswomen have asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to update their 2004 report *Gender Issues: Women's Participation in the Sciences Has Increased, but Agencies Need to do More to Ensure Compliance with Title IX*.

Reps. Louise Slaughter (D-NY), Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Rosa de Lauro (D-CT) note that the Yale study found that the limitations on females in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) jobs result from implicit biases people hold that lead them to believe that scientific fields are "meant" for men, while women should focus on the humanities. Furthermore, the members argue, these biases translate into real action on behalf of those doing the hiring. They reference another recent study by the National Science Foundation, which found that women continue to lag behind men in obtaining these kinds of jobs, despite recent increases in the number of women earning STEM graduate degrees.

In the letter to GAO head Gene Dodaro, the Congresswomen seek a report that focuses on specific issues. They would like to know:

- What actions have agencies taken since 2004 to address the recommendations of the GAO Report?
- Have compliance reviews of grantees continued to be periodically conducted at the Department of Energy, NSF and NASA? If so, what are the results?
- Why was the Department of Health and Human Services, and particularly the NIH and their various research centers, excluded from the 2004 Report? Have compliance reviews been conducted by those agencies? If so, what are the results?
- Are there any commonly used templates or other common practices utilized across

agencies in carrying out Title IX compliance reviews?

- What, if any, actions have agencies taken to follow up on the information obtained from compliance reviews?

They would also like to know what, if any, information is gathered in the following areas, what the results of compliance reviews are, and what actions agencies and universities have taken to follow-up on any areas in which disparities have been identified:

- Pay equity at universities: What mechanisms currently exist to evaluate pay equity? Are there any model pay equity programs and how do they work? How are agencies currently monitoring pay equity?
- Gender equity in the tenure promotion system, particularly issues of length of time spent at the associate professor rank.
- Recruitment and retention activities being undertaken by universities for faculty, undergraduate students, and graduate students.
- Inclusion of women in leadership roles: How many women are included on committees, panels, advisory boards and other working groups, and how many in leadership roles within those structures? How many women are included in conferences, workshops and meetings funded by an agency?

In addition, the report should explain what universities themselves are doing under Title IX to address gender disparities, and we ask that the GAO answer the following questions:

- Do all universities receiving federal funding have Title IX Coordinators in place?
- How are Title IX Coordinator responsibilities defined?
- How are Title IX Coordinators informed of/trained on these responsibilities?
- How are university employees informed of Title IX activities, including the existence of and role of a Title IX Coordinator?
- Are Title IX Coordinators actively considering issues of gender equity in faculty and student retention/recruitment, tenure promotion, and funding opportunities?
- What activities addressing gender disparity are select universities doing that could be a model for other universities?
- Are there common standards for enforcement of Title IX?
- How are universities responding to any gender disparities identified during federal agency reviews?

Finally, they seek to understand what agencies are doing and what data they are collecting beyond compliance reviews to address gender disparities in STEM, and would ask GAO to address the following questions:

- What are the policies of agencies on matters relating to the employment of women in STEM fields within their workforce, including Federally Funded Research and Development Centers? To what extent is compliance with these policies monitored?
- Federal grant funding differences in STEM fields between male and female investigators: What is the difference in the number of proposals submitted by women investigators vs. the number of women in the field; the number of grants awarded by gender compared to number of proposals received; size of grants awarded between male and female investigators; and the numbers of grants awarded across a career (i.e., how many men vs. women are getting second grants/additional funding)?
- Which agencies allow competitively funded researchers to apply for no-cost extensions to research grants or have similar policies to account for family and medical leave needs?
- Which agencies are providing training about gender bias?
- Which agencies are providing implicit bias training?
- Who are agencies training? When? How often? How is the impact measured?
- What data about disparities is collected and how is such data monitored?

CDC Reports on Firearm Homicides and Suicides in Metropolitan Areas

A recent *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* discussed [trends in firearms deaths from homicide and suicide in metropolitan areas](#) for 2009-2010 compared to 2006-2007. The report finds that while homicide rates in metropolitan areas remain higher than the national average, 75 percent of cities saw a decline in firearm homicide rates since 2006-2007. The opposite is true for suicide: metropolitan areas have lower firearm suicide rates than the national average, but saw an increase in firearm suicides since 2006-2007. The report draws on data from the National Vital Statistics System (NVSS) and the Census Bureau.

IOM Presents Webinar on UN Post-2015 Development Report

On July 25, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) hosted a discussion on the recent meeting of high-level government officials from around the world to chart the path of global development starting in 2015. With the United Nations' (UN) Millennium Development Goals expiring that year, leaders are working hard to continue the progress made over the past 15 years while also addressing some of the more recent developments and needs as they relate to poverty, health, education, and quality of life. The panel included representatives of government, the private sector, academia, civil society, and youth. IOM's discussion was aimed at analyzing the goals and indicators that were established in the panel.

John Norris, a senior advisor to one of the authors of the upcoming 2015 Millennium Goals report, was first to speak about the progress that had been made. Norris started by explaining that he had seen remarkable advancement since the last time the panel met in 2000. Some of the statistics reflecting this progress were staggering: 500 million fewer people in extreme poverty and about three million children's lives saved each year. Four out of five children now get vaccinated for a range of diseases. Maternal mortality gets the focused attention it deserves. Deaths from malaria have fallen by one-quarter.

Although there was significant progress, Norris noted that major issues remained with uneven implementation even within single nations. There included areas in which groups were marginalized because of race, gender, religion, and caste. Another problem, Norris suggested, was an ongoing sense of competition and tension between the environmental and poverty-focused groups. He added that the panel was determined to find solutions that created environmentally sustainable and responsible economic development.

UN health specialist Kumanan Rasanathan spoke next on the some of the global health implications of the meeting and subsequent report. Rasanathan started by commending the panel members on successfully managing the competing views and priorities that were present. The panel, Rasanathan said, also succeeded in creating a transparent and participatory process for health advocates to work together efficiently. He was worried, however, that there may be too many specific targets and indicators and not enough resources for data collection and analysis. Additionally, he expressed concern about insufficient emphasis on the indirect contributors to health such as environmental and labor conditions.

Andrew Haines, a Professor of Public Health and Primary Care, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, closed out the webinar by voicing his concern over the general lack of emphasis on health within the report. Out of the eleven thematic groups, only one focused specifically on health. The list would be improved, Haines stated, by including universal healthcare and socioeconomic and environmental detriments to health.

Haines used livestock farming as an example of the unintended (and dire) consequences of economic development on global health. Livestock farming not only creates a large amount of greenhouse gasses before, during and after livestock production, but also leads to high animal byproduct intake, he declared. This intake can lead to cardiovascular issues and colorectal cancers. According to

Haines, this is one of many crosscutting issues that worry health officials.

Overall, the speakers seemed very optimistic of the progress that has been made and the goals that have been set. All three panelists, however, also seemed worried about the uneven balance of economic development and health care progress.

Child Marriage Subject of UNFPA Briefing

As part of a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) effort to call attention to child marriage, the Russell Senate Office Building recently hosted a traveling photography exhibit, "Too Young to Wed," featuring photographs of young girls in forced marriages. A briefing on "Ending Child Marriage," co-sponsored by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), was held on July 25. Margaret Hempel, Ford Foundation, moderated the panel.

Stephanie Sinclair, a Pulitzer-winning photojournalist whose photographs make up the Too Young to Wed exhibit (the pictures and more information are available [here](#)) led off the briefing. Sinclair explained that she first encountered child marriage during her work as a conflict photographer in Afghanistan. While visiting a hospital in 2003, she discovered that a number of young girls had attempted to commit suicide by setting themselves on fire, many of whom were married. Sinclair noted that some of the girls she photographed for the exhibition were married at ages as young as eight. One sign for optimism was that all of her pictures were taken with the permission of the families and communities, a sign that some are ready for change. Sinclair shared the story of a mother, married as a child, who wanted to stop the wedding of her eight-year-old daughter, but lacked the resources and knowledge to convince her husband. Sinclair and her colleagues elicited the cooperation of a nearby hospital, which sent an ambulance to the rural village as part of a reproductive health campaign. The information about the health risks of child bearing to young girls gave the mother the tools she needed to make the case for stopping the marriage to her husband.

Rachel Vogelstein, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Fellow and author of [Ending Child Marriage: How Elevating the Status of Girls Advances U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives](#), shared some pragmatic reasons to pursue this issue. Child marriage is more prevalent than people think, she explained. One in three women ages 20-24 (67 million people) were married before they were 18. Five million girls under 15 are married each year. India accounts for 40 percent of all child marriages worldwide, but the practice is seen throughout South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Vogelstein explained how ending child marriage is in the U.S.'s self interest. First, it would contribute to increased economic growth and stability in developing countries. Because girls are commonly taken out of school when they become engaged, they receive less education, which undercuts their earning potential (and thus the country's per capita income growth). Girls in these countries are also more likely to become single mothers through marital abandonment than by becoming pregnant out of wedlock, so child marriage perpetuates a cycle of poverty. Second, ending child marriage would have significant global health implications; early childbirth has very serious health consequences for both the mother and child. These ongoing risks undercut U.S. investments in global health. Finally, ending child marriage could contribute to greater security abroad, as the most unstable countries tend to have a higher prevalence of child marriage. Vogelstein concluded by pointing out that the Violence Against Women Act, reauthorized in March 2013, requires the Secretary of State to develop and implement a strategy to prevent child marriage; ending child marriage globally is not only in the U.S.'s interests, it is now law.

Call for an Evidence-Based Approach to the Problem

Jennifer Redner, Girls Not Brides, discussed strategies to eliminate child marriage worldwide. She called for a multi-sectoral, evidence-based approach consisting of five elements: 1) preventing these marriages from taking place, 2) empowering girls at risk of being married, 3) addressing community needs, 4) targeting areas that are "hot spots" for child marriage, and 5) diplomatic initiatives. Redner suggested that areas of focus be identified by data-driven selection that takes into account where girls are being married young, where girls are dying in childbirth, literacy rates, contraception

needs, legal environments, and existing complementary initiatives. She also recommended that new programs start small, but incorporate scalability and evaluation into their initial design. She shared five ways to approach the problem: 1) working directly with married and at-risk girls, 2) educating and mobilizing parents, 3) putting more resources into schooling, 4) providing economic support, 5) promoting international efforts and negotiations (for example, child marriage is not an issue that is incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals).

Priya Nanda, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), discussed efforts to end child marriage in India, where nearly half of all women aged 20-24 were married before they were 18. Nanda observed that one of the more insidious effects of child marriage was the way it shapes girls' destinies and identities; child marriage affects how families view and invest in their daughters even before they are engaged-- their value is seen in their ability to make a good match. India is in the process of implementing a national strategy to end child marriage (although it has been illegal since 1929). States and districts have been developing action plans to implement the strategy. Since there is no single policy lever to pull that will stop child marriage, solutions must be comprehensive and address many contributing factors. One strategy that seems to have some positive impact is conditional cash transfers, which consist of payments to families whose daughters do not marry before they turn 18. However, Nanda explained, such programs have not yet been rigorously evaluated. ICRW is currently undertaking a study to measure these programs' effectiveness. ICRW's report, [Solutions to End Child Marriage: What the Evidence Shows](#), is available for download.

Tradition cannot be "extracted at the cost of fundamental human dignity."

Kate Gilmore, Deputy Assistant Director and Assistant Secretary General of UNFPA, pointed out that if the number of women married as children were a country, it would be three times the size of France. Given its scope, Gilmore argued, child marriage should be viewed as a mainstream--not marginal--problem. She took issue with child marriage apologists who view it in the context of cultural relativism, arguing that the girls being married off are also holders of culture. She asserted that tradition cannot be "extracted at the cost of fundamental human dignity." Gilmore concluded by asking the audience, "how can it be that we haven't declared this a humanitarian crisis?" UNFPA's report, [Marrying Too Young](#), is available online.

The panel responded to a question about data gaps and pointed to a number of opportunities for researchers. They mentioned the scarcity of data about rural areas (where these practices are concentrated) and identified the Middle East/North Africa and Central and South America as regions where data is particularly limited. They also called for age-disaggregated data and more focus on vital statistics. Some topics that should receive more attention are the impact of child marriage on boys and men and how norms are shifted.

Clinical Trial of a Multifactorial Fall Injury Prevention Strategy in Older Persons

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the Improving Health Care Systems (IHS) program within the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) are seeking applications (*RFA-AG-14-009, Clinical Trial of a Multifactorial Fall Injury Prevention Strategy in Older Persons*) to conduct a randomized clinical trial of a multifactorial strategy for preventing serious fall-related injuries among non-institutionalized older persons. Injuries that result from falls pose a substantial public health burden, especially among other persons with risk factors for falling. Serious injuries may be important facts that contribute to older persons' loss of independence.

Clinical trials focusing on reducing the incidence of falls have found that some interventions have substantial effects and others have little or none. A major determinant of the effectiveness of a fall prevention strategy is the degree to which the intervention team has control over the implementation of the intervention; strategies in which one team recommend preventive interventions for a patient and a different team implement them have been generally ineffective. Other obstacles to the success of strategies for preventing falls and injuries include: providers' lack

of relevant knowledge, expertise and/or adherence to guidelines; geographic barriers to patients visiting health care providers and to providers' ability to assess and improve patients' home safety; patients' incomplete adoption of recommended self-management of risk-modifying behaviors; and lack of financial and organizational support required for planning, communication, and coordination among providers of the risk-reducing healthcare.

Data on the effects of falls prevention strategies on fall-related injuries is even more limited than that regarding the degree to which evidence-based practice guidelines are being implemented in the different practice settings and different populations. Additionally, there is sparse evidence about the effects of falls prevention strategies on other outcomes that are important to patients.

Letters of intent are due October 13, 2013. Applications are due November 13, 2013. For more information see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-AG-14-009.html>.

Short Courses on Innovative Methodologies in the Behavioral and Social Sciences

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) and participating Institutes and Centers (Cancer; Eye; Heart, Lung, and Blood; Aging; Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering; Child Health and Human Development; Deafness and Craniofacial Research; Drug Abuse; General Medical Sciences; Mental Health; Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine; and the Office of Disease Prevention invite Research Education Grant (R25) applications to develop, implement, evaluate and disseminate short courses in innovative methods for behavioral and social sciences research (BSSR).

The R25 grant mechanism is designed to support the development of creative and innovative research education programs for the development of biomedical, behavioral, and clinical researchers, or for public education and outreach on health-related research to a variety of audiences. Methodological domains of interest for the funding opportunity announcement, *Short Courses on Innovative Methodologies in the Behavioral and Social Sciences (RFA-OD-13-009)*, include but are not limited to: study design, data collection, measurement, data analysis and visualization, modeling and simulation (systems science methodologies). While research education grants are not typically research instruments, they do involve experiments in education and/or dissemination of research knowledge that require an evaluation plan in order to determine their effectiveness. Accordingly, each application is required to include a plan to evaluate the activities proposed, as well as a plan for disseminating user-friendly course materials to the broader scientific community. Specific examples of appropriate topics include but are not limited to:

- Systems science methodologies (e.g., agent-based modeling, system dynamics modeling, social network analysis, microsimulation, discrete event simulation).
- Mixed methods research (combining quantitative and qualitative methods).
- Mobile and wireless health (mHealth) methodologies for the conduct of BSSR.
- Innovations in dissemination and implementation research methodologies.
- Quasi-experimental designs and other designs that complement randomized controlled trial designs.
- "Big data" mining, pattern recognition, integration, visualization and analysis which encourage hypothesis testing or analysis of BSSR research questions. The phrase "big data" in this FOA refers to large, diverse, complex, longitudinal, and/or distributed data sets generated from instruments, sensors, Internet transactions, email, video, click streams, and/or all other digital sources available today and in the future.
- Mediation analyses, moderation analyses or their combination (e.g., moderated mediation) Mediation analyses are those that explore the underlying mechanism or process giving rise to the observed relationship between variables. Moderation analyses are those that explore mechanisms or processes that govern the strength of the observed relationship between variables.
- Merging multiple iterations of experimental or survey data that contain common data. Merging

multiple iterations of survey data to test for trends over time or obtain larger sample sizes for hard-to-reach populations.

- Statistical matching methods to identify the same cases in different datasets.
- Innovations in community-engaged or community-based, participatory research.
- Methods for analyzing and integrating spatial data with other behavioral and social sciences research (BSSR) data.
- Methods to improve the bidirectional translation of knowledge of behavioral and social processes in humans and animal models (e.g., comparable behavioral testing paradigms in humans and model organisms).
- Innovative methods for integrating biological and BSSR data (e.g., analytical methods for the integrative study of gene and behavioral/social environment interactions).
- Innovative methodologies to improve policy relevant research.
- Cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness analyses of behavioral, social, policy or public health initiatives.
- Innovative study designs, creative uses of existing data, and novel analytical approaches for cross-national comparisons of data relevant to health.
- Study designs, methods and analyses of early phase translation of basic behavioral and social sciences findings into behavioral interventions.
- Innovative methods for the analysis of longitudinal multidimensional data (e.g., growth curves) including issues related to missing data.
- Innovations in short, brief interventions and referrals to treatment (SBIRT) in medical and non-medical settings.
- Methods to develop common data element approaches for integrative behavioral interventions.
- Methods to develop translational tools for integrative behavioral interventions.
- Algorithms for measuring the construction of short, brief interventions and referrals to treatment (SBIRT) measurement and/or methods to evaluate the effectiveness of research delivery models in medical and non-medical settings.

Letters of intent are due October 14, 2013. Applications are due November 14, 2014.

Editor's Note



With Congress in recess until September 9th, Update will also take a summer hiatus. We will also return on September 9th to cover what promises to be a very interesting fall. Enjoy the rest of the summer!

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