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CONGRESSIONAL ACTIVITIES & NEWS

Congresswoman Johnson Defends NSF's Merit Review Process

Last week, Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), Ranking Member of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee, released a [letter](#) penned to Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-TX) expressing concern over the chairman's ongoing "investigation" into the merit review process at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and criticism of individual grants funded by NSF. Her letter comes as Chairman Smith has issued a third request in 18 months for NSF to provide the Committee with confidential, pre-decisional merit review documents for 30 additional grants; Smith has previously asked for documentation on a group of five grants and a second group of 20 grants earlier this year.

In her letter to the Chairman, Johnson states, "The plain truth is that there are no credible allegations of waste, fraud, or abuse associated with these [awards]. The only issue with them appears to be that you, personally, think that the grants sound wasteful based on your understanding of their titles and purpose."

Also last week, Johnson posted online for public consumption all of the [correspondence](#) between Chairman Smith and NSF regarding the grants in question.

FEDERAL AGENCY & ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES & NEWS

White House Hosts Conference on BRAIN Initiative

On September 30, the White House hosted a [conference](#) on President Obama's BRAIN (Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative. The Initiative is a large-scale effort to provide researchers with important insights to treat a variety of disorders, including Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, and traumatic brain injury, among others. Four agencies, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), have together committed more than \$110 million to the Initiative in FY 2014 (see [Update, April 7, 2014](#), pg. 26).

The White House conference served as an opportunity for the Administration to highlight new federal and private sector commitments to the effort, including the FDA and the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA). The FDA's goal for the BRAIN Initiative is to enhance the transparency of the regulatory landscape for neurological medical devices. IARPA, which is located within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and invests in high risk, high-payoff research surrounding the difficult challenges faced by the intelligence community, intends to use multidisciplinary approaches to advance understanding of cognition and computation in the brain. IARPA intends to support several applied research programs in this area. The conference also highlighted the participation of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues in

the Initiative.

[Read on](#) for additional details regarding the conference.

NIH Council of Councils Discusses Stable Support for Investigators

At the September [meeting](#) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) [Council of Councils](#), NIH Deputy Director Lawrence Tabak provided an update of the agency's activities, including an update on the agency's efforts to pilot "longer-term, stable support" for NIH investigators. Echoing National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) director Joh Lorsch about the state of the NIH's budget since the doubling period (1998-2003), Tabak explained that the agency is seeking the best models for sustaining biomedical research (see [related story](#)). Without Congressional intervention, the sequester returns in FY 2016 (see [Update, February 10, 2014](#)).

Consequently, Tabak explained, the NIH has given an "enormous amount of thought" as to what the agency can do to enhance the support for extramural research that is budget neutral given the "unprecedented budgetary constraints" NIH is currently experiencing. To this end, the NIH is considering whether it can build on the "successful experience generated from the Pioneer Awards," and expand these programs to the NIH institutes and centers.

[Continue reading](#) for more information.

NIGMS Advisory Council Approves New Grant Mechanism, Discusses Reproducibility

At the September [meeting](#) of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) Advisory Council, director Jon Lorsch provided an update on the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) data reproducibility efforts and the NIGMS strategic planning process, and provided an overview of the impacts of the previous NIH budget-doubling period "on the biomedical research ecosystem." In addition, the Council approved the Institute's concept clearance to create the new Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA), clearing the way for NIGMS to proceed.

Regarding reproducibility, Lorsch noted that it is not a single issue but an issue of reproducibility of data, generalizability of conclusions, and the correctness and strength of the conclusions. According to the director, NIGMS has been leading the NIH effort around "exportable" training in this area. That effort includes training modules that are available online, widely accessible, and free for use by any program.

[Read on](#) for additional details.

NIH Center for Scientific Review to Host Peer Review Webinars for New Grant Applicants

In early November, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Center for Scientific Review (CSR) plans to host four [Meet the Experts in NIH Peer Review](#) webinars designed to provide new NIH grant applicants and other interested individuals with valuable insights into the submission and review

processes. CSR is NIH's gateway for grant applications and their review for scientific merit. It organizes the peer review groups, or study sections, that evaluate the majority of the research grant applications sent to the agency.

The webinars will address the various types of grant mechanisms supported by NIH: Academic Research Enhancement Awards (R15), Fellowship Awards, Small Business Grants (SBIR/STTR), and Research Project Grants also known as investigator-initiated awards (R01).

All of the webinar presentations will be given by CSR/NIH experts and will cover the following topics: the initial review of grant applications; application receipt and referral; how applications are reviewed; key aspects of the various types of applications; and information on the CSR's Early Career Reviewer Program.

NSF Seeks Nominations for Waterman Award

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is accepting nominations until October 24 for the 2015 [Alan T. Waterman Award](#). The Waterman Award is given annually "in recognition of the talent, creativity, and influence of a singular young researcher;" nominations are accepted for researchers from all fields of science supported by NSF. Among the requirements, candidates must be 35 years of age or younger or be not more than seven years beyond receipt of his/her Ph.D.

Agriculture Census Highlights Organic Farms

The National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) released [findings](#) from the 2012 Census of Agriculture's Special Organics Tabulation illustrating some key differences between organic and conventional farms. Forty-two percent of organic farms sell directly to consumers, compared with only 7 percent of all U.S. farms. Organic farms are also more likely to participate in non-traditional markets, such as marketing directly to retail outlets, producing value-added products, or distributing products through farm-shares or CSAs (community-supported agriculture). Organic farms also invest more in renewable energy production. More on the Census is available on the NASS [website](#).

NOTABLE PUBLICATIONS & COMMUNITY EVENTS

Roundtable on Health Literacy Seeks Nominations for New Members

The Institute of Medicine [Roundtable on Health Literacy](#) is seeking nominations for new members. Specifically, it is seeking health literacy experts from a variety of fields including nursing, pediatrics, pharmacy, primary care, public or population health, research, and transformative technologies.

The Roundtable was established in 2005 to build upon the work of the IOM consensus report, *Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion*. It is composed of leaders from academia, industry, government, foundations and associations, and representatives of patient and consumer interests who have an interest and role in improving health literacy. The Roundtable's mission is to inform, inspire, and activate a wide variety of stakeholders to support, develop, implement, and share evidence-based health literacy practices and policies to improve the health and well-being of all people. Accordingly, the Roundtable convenes workshops and symposia to discuss specific topics related to its mission and vision.

Nominations should be sent to Lyla Hernandez at Lhernandez@nas.edu by October 13, 2014. Nomination information should include the name, expertise, and basic contact information.

Henry and Bryna David Lecturer Proposes "International Climate Club"

Economist William D. Nordhaus delivered the 2014 [Henry and Bryna David Lecture](#) at the National Academy of Sciences on October 2. Nordhaus is the Sterling Professor of Economics at Yale University and will chair the Boston Federal Reserve Bank for 2014-2015. The topic of his lecture was "Climate Clubs: How to prevent free-riding in international environmental agreements."

Nordhaus observed that while a lot of progress has been made in climate science, estimating the costs and benefits of reducing emissions, and developing policy instruments to reduce emissions (like carbon taxes and cap-and-trade systems), there has been essentially no progress in improving international climate agreements to prevent free-riding. He explained that international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol expect countries to act against their economic self-interests by voluntarily imposing higher costs on themselves (reducing carbon emissions), while other countries can reap whatever environmental benefits are gained without reducing emissions themselves (free-riding). This dynamic incentivized countries like the U.S. and Canada to drop out of the agreement, minimizing the Protocol's impact.

Nordhaus proposed an alternative model for an international climate agreement designed to eliminate the free-riding problem, an arrangement he called a "climate club." This type of club would consist of two elements: (1) All member countries would agree to meet a target minimum price for carbon emissions, and (2) The member countries would impose a tariff on non-participant countries as a penalty. Nordhaus shared the results of an analysis he conducted that demonstrated that a low-to-moderate price for carbon emissions (on the scale of \$25-\$50 per ton of CO₂) and a low penalty tariff on non-participants (around 7 percent) would be enough to induce broad participation, allowing countries to act in their economic self-interests while still producing a reasonably efficient global climate policy.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Psychosocial and Behavioral Aspects of Bariatric Surgery

The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) is seeking applications designed to measure psychosocial and behavioral variables in individuals undergoing bariatric surgery to understand how they predict success and risk and examine mechanisms of behavior change. The funding opportunity announcement, *Psychosocial and Behavioral Aspects of Bariatric Surgery* ([RFA-DK-14-026](#)), responds to the dramatic increase in the number of bariatric surgeries performed in the U.S. over the last decade, including those performed on adolescents.

This surgery has been shown to produce large sustained weight loss in many individuals. The emerging evidence also suggests that the surgery may be beneficial for treatment of type 2 diabetes and other obesity-related comorbidities. In addition, the data about the short- and long-term behavioral and psychological predictors, mechanisms are either insufficient or mixed, according to NIDDK.

The Institute is also interested in basic behavioral research to look at mechanisms by which bariatric surgical procedures may impact energy intake and physical activity through changes in such factors as experience of hunger or satiety, macronutrient, taste, ore other dietary preference, reward sensitivity, cognition, executive function, and mood. In addition, NIDDK is interested in understanding predictors of success and risk and examining mechanisms of behavior change. Research is needed that allows detailed measurement of psychosocial and behavioral variables in the targeted population before and after bariatric surgery.

Letters of intent are due March 16, 2015. Applications are due April 16, 2015.

COSSA MEMBER ACTIVITIES

AERA to Host 11th "Brown Lecture in Education Research" -- October 23

The American Educational Research Association (AERA), a COSSA Governing Member, will be hosting the 11th Annual Brown Lecture in Education Research on October 23 in Washington, DC. This year's lecture, "A Long Shadow: The American Pursuit of Political Justice and Education Equality," presented by [James D. Anderson](#) of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, will observe the 60th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. The annual lecture highlights the important role research plays in broadening understanding of education equality. You may register to attend the lecture [here](#).

CASBS and SSRC to Host 2014 Behavioral and Social Science Summit -- November 8

The Center for Advanced Study in the behavioral Sciences at Stanford University (CASBS) with the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), both COSSA members, will host the 2014 Behavioral and Social Science Summit on November 8 at Stanford University. This year's summit, "The City," will feature social and behavioral scientists speaking about "the best means and policies for improving the urban experience." The list of speakers and discussion topics, as well as registration information can be found on the summit [website](#).

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Society for Empirical Legal Studies
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Society for Social Work and Research
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Society of Behavioral Medicine
Southern Political Science Association
Southern Sociological Society
Southwestern Social Science Association

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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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