

Statistics and Linguistics Associations Appoint New Executive Directors

The American Statistical Association (ASA) and the Linguistic Society of America (LSA) recently appointed new executive directors. Ronald L. Wasserstein is to lead the ASA, and Felix Oliver will head the LSA. Both groups, along with the APSA, are governing members of the Consortium of Social Science Associations, an advocacy group promoting attention to and federal funding for the social and behavioral sciences.

Wasserstein comes to the ASA from Washburn University, where he served as vice president of academic affairs since 2001. He holds Master's of Science and Ph.D. degrees in statistics from Kansas State University and a B.A. in mathematics from Washburn University. He succeeds William B. Smith, who retires effective August 15, 2007.

Oliver comes to the LSA from the Metropolitan Washington Regional Health Service Planning Council, where he served as executive director. He has over 20 years of management experience, serving as a senior manager at ES, Inc., a management consulting firm; president and CEO of Granville Academy, a nonprofit national after-school program; and coordinator and director of Health and Safety programs for the American Red Cross. Oliver replaces Margaret Reynolds, who resigned in January.

NSF Reauthorization Bill Withstands Peer-Reviewed Grant Attacks

On May 2, the House passed the National Science Foundation (NSF) Authorization Act of 2007 (HR 1867) by a vote of 399-17, after rejecting two amendments that would have singled out nine peer-reviewed grants for non-funding.

The amendments were offered by Reps. John Campbell (R-NJ), who targeted seven grants, and Scott Garrett (R-NJ), who targeted two. The grants spanned multiple disciplinary programs and included two dissertation awards. Leading the defense of the NSF and the peer-review process were Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA), chairman of the House Science Committee's Basic Research Subcommittee and a Ph.D. psychologist, and Rep. Vern Ehlers (R-MI), ranking member of the Subcommittee and a Ph.D. physicist. Baird decried judging research projects based on "a cursory examination of the title or an abstract," citing Campbell's protest of a grant, "Study of the Accuracy of Cross Cultural Understanding of Other's Emotions" as an example. Baird indicated that this research had been supported by the U.S. Army Research Institute and seen as "critical to the security of our troops serving in Iraq."

On the eve of the debate and floor vote, several advocacy groups mobilized to ensure the amendments' defeat. Those defending peer review at the NSF included the Consortium of Social Science Associations (of which APSA is a governing member), the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Association of American Universities, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, representatives from universities, and scientific societies from the physical and natural sciences. Campbell's amendment was rejected 195-222; Garrett's was defeated by voice vote.

Report Urges New Commitment to Graduate Education

In late April, a blue-ribbon panel assembled by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) released a report that calls for a renewed commitment to American graduate education, recognizing its critical role in enhancing the nation's economic competitiveness and innovation. The Advisory Committee on Graduate Education and American Competitiveness, comprised of university presidents, corporate leaders, and graduate school deans, called for increased collaboration between government, higher education, and the business community. The report encourages "entrepreneurship" in graduate education and calls for expanding opportunities for interdisciplinary study and for supporting "innovative graduate education programs . . . which respond to workforce needs" in fields including the social sciences. The full report is available on the CGS web site: www.cgsnet.org.

Advisory Subcommittee Recommends IRB Training Requirements, Clarification of 'Minimal Risk'

At the spring meeting of the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protection (SACHRP), the Subpart A Subcommittee (SAS) continued its examination of Subpart A of 45 CFR 46, commonly referred to as the Common Rule.

SAS, which has been looking into the issue of training and education since November, recommended that the Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP) explicitly require institutions to ensure that "initial and continual training" is provided for all officers, members, and staff of Institutional Review Boards, as well as for "investigators and other members of the research team with responsibility for conducting human subjects research." SAS also reported that interpreting the definition of "minimal risk" needs further clarification since, as SAS Co-Chair Dan Nelson noted, there is "a fair amount of confusion and uncertainty about what some of the terms mean, and how it can be applied." The committee's recommendations—including its suggested interpretation of "minimal risk"—can be found in the March 29–30 meeting transcript on the SACHRP web site: www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sachrp.

Sources for this column include the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History's NCC Washington Update, the Chronicle of Higher Education, the National Coalition for History's Washington Update Newsletter, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations' Washington Update.