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# COSSA Washington Update

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## WELCOME TO 2009

COSSA is pleased to welcome you to 2009. A Happy and Healthy New Year to all our readers! As Volume 28 suggests, this is our 28<sup>th</sup> year of reporting on events and activities in Washington that impact social and behavioral science researchers and the results of social and behavioral research that affect policymaking and policymakers. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at [newsletter@cozza.org](mailto:newsletter@cozza.org).

## A NEW CONGRESS CONVENES

The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress convened on January 6. With new overwhelming majorities, 256-178 in the House (with one vacancy) and a probable 59-41 advantage in the Senate (with two Independents organizing with the Democrats and the Minnesota and Illinois seats still vacant), the Democrats are well positioned to work with the incoming President on major issues facing the nation.

The top Democratic leaders in the House remain the same - Speaker Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Majority Whip Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC). Following the 21 seat loss in the 2008 elections, the Republican leadership changed. Not at the top, however, as John Boehner (R-OH) remains as Minority Leader, but the

second and third positions have new faces. Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA) is the new Minority Whip and Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN), once Chair of the Republican Study Group that created difficulties for social/behavioral science grants at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), is now the head of the Republican Conference.

Although committee assignments are not complete, the Appropriations Committee has announced its line-up of Chairs and Ranking Minority Members. The key Subcommittees that COSSA monitors did not have any changes in their Chairs - Rep. Alan Mollohan (D-WV) will continue to lead the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee (CJS); Rep. David Obey (D-WI), who chairs the full committee, will also head the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education panel; Rep. Rosa De Lauro (D-CT) will remain as chair of the Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittee; and Rep. David Price (D-NC) will continue to chair the Homeland Security (HS) Subcommittee.

The Republicans have shifted a number of Ranking Members. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA) returns as the head Republican on the CJS panel; Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) takes over as ranking on the Labor, HHS, and ED panel; Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA) will continue to lead the GOP on the Agriculture and Rural Development Subcommittee; while Harold Rogers (R-KY) will remain as ranking on the HS Subcommittee.

There are no changes at the top of the House Science and Technology Committee, where Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN) and Rep. Ralph Hall (R-TX) remain as Chair and Ranking Member. There may be a shuffle of Subcommittee heads as two Chairmen have moved on. In addition, COSSA will miss working with two long-time committee staff members- Jim Turner and Jim Wilson - who have retired.

As a result of the continued delay with regard to the Illinois and Minnesota Senate seats and the pending new Senator from New York, the Senate will take a little longer to get organized. Two other Senate seats left vacant because of jobs in the new Administration have already had their replacements made. Ted Kauffman, long time aide to new Vice President Joe Biden, is the new Senator from Delaware. Denver Schools Administrator Michael Bennet is the new Senator from Colorado, replacing Ken Salazar, the Secretary of Interior-designee.

The Senate leadership remains the same. Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) and Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) will lead the Democrats. Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Jon Kyl (R-AZ) will lead the Republicans.

We do know about the following changes. Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HA) is the new Chairman of the Appropriations Committee replacing Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WV), who still serves but stepped down as chair for age and health reasons. Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) will replace Inouye as the head of the Science, Commerce, and Transportation Committee, which has jurisdiction over the NSF. Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) will replace Biden as head of the Foreign Relations Committee.

Given the current economic difficulties facing the country, Congress has spent its first week trying to work with the incoming Administration in putting together a stimulus package of spending and tax cuts. Speaker Pelosi has vowed to get the package enacted by the scheduled President's day recess or else "no recess." The Senate has also begun hearings for Cabinet appointees that started with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary-designee Tom Daschle, with some contentiousness expected at the January 15 hearing before the Judiciary Committee of Attorney General-designee Eric Holder.

## A NEW ADMINISTRATION STAFFS UP



The New Science Adviser

President-elect Barack Obama has been in Washington for over a week now, leading to closed streets and more-than-the-usual horrible traffic. Although he continues to defer to President Bush on foreign affairs, Obama has taken center-stage on the economic woes facing the nation. He spent December putting together his team and now that team is beginning to confront the challenges that face the new Administration.

As called for by the scientific community, including COSSA, the President-elect has chosen his new Science Adviser and director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy before the inauguration. John P. Holdren, Teresa and John Heinz Professor of Environmental Policy and Director of the Science, Technology and Public Policy Program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University is Obama's choice. Holdren, who also directs the Woods Hole Research Center, has served on the President's Committee of Advisors on Science and Technology during the Clinton Administration and was president of AAAS in 2006.

In both those capacities he demonstrated an understanding of the importance of the social and behavioral sciences to the nation's science policy agenda. Holdren has a Ph.D. in Physics from Stanford University.

Holdren will also co-chair the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST). His co-chairs will be: Harold Varmus, former NIH Director and now President of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York; and Eric Lander, founding director of the Broad Institute and one of the principal leaders of the Human Genome Project. Lander is also professor of biology at MIT and professor of systems biology at Harvard Medical School.

As has been noted many times, it is not only the results of research in the social and behavioral sciences that impact policy, but the people in policy positions trained in those sciences that are important as well. The Administration new has selected a number of key aides with social science connections. **Christina Romer** is the new head of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA). Romer is the Class of 1957-Garff B. Wilson Professor of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley, where she has taught since 1988. She is also the co-director of the Program in Monetary Economics at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and a member of the NBER Business Cycle Dating Committee. She has served as vice president and a member of the executive committee of the American Economic Association. Her research interests include: the effects of fiscal policy; identification of monetary shocks; the determinants of American macroeconomic policy; changes in short-run fluctuations over the 20th century; and the causes of the Great Depression. She received her Ph.D. from MIT in 1985.

**Peter Orszag** has been chosen to lead the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Orszag led the Congressional Budget Office for almost two years, where made speeches and blogged about the impending crisis in the costs of Medicare, Medicaid, and other health-related activities. He was scheduled to speak at the COSSA Annual Meeting this past November, but had to cancel given his pending appointment in the new Administration. Orszag also worked with President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers. He was a senior economics fellow at the Brookings Institution where he served as head of the Hamilton Project, which focused on new solutions to major social and fiscal problems. Orszag has a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics.

Joining Orszag on the economic team of the new Administration is **Austin Goolsbee**, who will be the Staff Director and Chief Economist of the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board, led by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, and a Member of the Council of Economic Advisors. Goolsbee is the Robert P. Gwinn Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and a research associate with the National Bureau of Economic Research. He has been an economic adviser to Obama since his Senate campaign. He has a Ph.D. from MIT.

Obama has also selected former Harvard President and Treasury Secretary **Lawrence Summers** as the Director of the National Economic Council. Aside from all his other achievements, Summers is the only economist to win the National Science Board's Alan Waterman Award for young scientists.

The President-elect has selected **Susan Rice** as his nominee for United Nations Ambassador. Rice was a member of the National Security Council under President Clinton and then Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. She was a foreign policy adviser to both the Kerry and Obama campaigns. Like Orszag, she too had a stint at the Brookings Institution. Rice has a D. Phil. in International Relations from Oxford University, where she was a Rhodes Scholar. She is not related to the outgoing Secretary of State.

Obama has also tapped the Dean of Harvard's Law School **Elena Kagan**, as his nominee for Solicitor General, and Indiana Law School Professor **Dawn Johnsen** as the head of the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel.

## NIH SUMMIT EXPLORES SCIENCE OF HEALTH DISPARITIES

On December 16 -18, 2008, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) held a summit examining the science of health disparities, the first of its kind. Sponsored by the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) and with the involvement of the 27 NIH Institutes and Centers, the summit assembled more than 3,000 national and international clinicians, researchers, policy leaders, academicians, and community leaders to highlight recent progress made in addressing health disparities. Despite the advances in science, medicine, and technology, with the potential to improve health, a large portion of the population "defined by race, ethnicity, geography, gender, or socio-economic status" are not receiving equal benefits from the progress that is being made. The Summit was also seen as an effort to redefine the agenda for health disparities research. Specifically, the goals of the meeting were to:

- Showcase the collective contribution of NIH in the development of new knowledge in the Science of Eliminating Health Disparities;

- Highlight the progress of NIH minority health and health disparities research activities to improve prevention, diagnostic, and treatment methods;
- Increase awareness and understanding of disparities in health;
- Showcase best-practice models in research, capacity-building, outreach, and integrated strategies to find solutions to health disparities; and
- Identify gaps in health disparities research.

According to NCMHD director John Ruffin, the theme of the Summit was “the intersection of science, practice, and policy.” “The elimination of health disparities will require a wide spectrum of approaches,” he added. “There are biological and non-biological factors that we must tackle involving multiple populations. To affect real solutions and be truly impactful will take vision, leadership, commitment, creativity, passion and partnership.”

Summit participants included Raynard S. Kington (Acting NIH Director), Representative Elijah Cummings (D-MD), David Satcher (16<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General and former Assistant Secretary for Health), Bernadine Healey and Harold Varmus (former NIH directors), the Honorable Louis Sullivan (former Secretary of Health and Human Services), Howard Dean, (an M.D., former Governor of Vermont, and former Chairman of the Democratic National Committee), and poet Maya Angelou (associated with the Wake Forest University Medical Center). Experts, including Robert Valdez (University of Mexico), Brian Smedley (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies) and David Williams (Harvard University) discussed strategies, challenges, and progress in diagnosing, treating, and preventing some of the most debilitating and devastating diseases and conditions such as cancer, HIV/AIDS, obesity, heart disease, and diabetes that disproportionately burden African Americans, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Hispanics/Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and individuals of all races and ethnicities living in poor and medically underserved communities such as rural areas.

“Health disparities research is key in our quest to improve the health of all Americans,” said Kington. “This summit represents the multidisciplinary scientific progress that the NIH has made to understand health disparities, and underscores the significance of partnerships to eliminate this complex issue.”

Kington announced the approval of an intramural research program at NCMHD “to compliment its extensive extramural research activities.” He explained that NIH intramural research is that research which takes place on the NIH campus by NIH scientists. The research takes advantage of “the NIH’s unique research environment, including sustainable funding, unparalleled human intellectual capital, and premier facilities that encourages innovation in science.” Kington described the NIH’s intramural program as a venue for high-risk, high-impact research and one that supports the agency’s ability to provide a rapid response to public health emergencies as well as conduct long-term research on complicated problems such as health disparities. “The NCMHD Intramural program will also create training and mentoring opportunities to grow intramural researchers focused on health disparities,” he stressed, adding that the program will contribute a pool of early stage and seasoned investigators that will enhance the diversity of scientists and research disciplines comprising the intramural program at NIH.

Angelou keyed the event, commending Summit participants and thanking them on behalf of “all of the people...you’ll never see and whose names you’ll never hear for [their] commitment to the idea of medical care for everyone.” She urged participants to “move beyond disparity” given that she looks “at the world, at everything, as if it is a half-filled glass.” The word “disparity,” Angelou argued, “puts the weight on the already encumbered.” Her image is that of increased “emphasis on opportunity, on seeking, with more resolve, more hope.”

### **Health Disparities and the Intersection of Science and Policy**

Moderating a session on health disparities and the intersection of science and policy, Satcher related that there was a time when he thought that all you needed was the best available science to make things happen in this country to improve the health of people. But he has since learned that while it is critical to have the best available science, you still have to deal with the “great intersection” of science and policy.

Emphasizing the importance of multidisciplinary research in his keynote address, Valdez also stressed the importance of interdisciplinary science that is bringing medical scientists and social scientists together to address the complex issue of health disparities. Interdisciplinary research allows scholars to reach beyond the boundaries of their disciplines and adapt or develop new methods of analysis, said Valdez. He cited as an example how might we think about the leverage points for interventions to reduce or eliminate disparities in our society?

Individuals are born into our society or move into our society, a society that neither treats people nor distributes opportunity equally, which he pointed out raises legitimate research questions for interdisciplinary teams of health and social scientists at every juncture. “Discrimination, poverty, and other forms of oppression play out at the community

level, affecting the overall community environment in which people work for pay, play, and pray. Especially in resource-poor communities, the stresses of daily life bear down on our minds and bodies inviting illness and disease through environmental exposures and other types of stress such as limited access to the basic necessities of life including healthcare services," argued Valdez. These environmental factors, he explained, "in turn shape our behaviors such as eating and activity patterns. What's available becomes part of our decision making. What's not available cannot even be considered."

Valdez also discussed a number of the conceptual challenges that scientists must overcome if "we're in fact going to eliminate health disparities." "To create a truly healthy republic requires us to address health disparities on many fronts, recognizing its root causes in social inequities that are amenable to change through intersectional policy changes," he argued.

Smedley spoke briefly about some of the challenges and opportunities before the country today. He predicted that the current economic downturn is going to widen health inequality. Without effective communication on how we are going to address these problems, the opportunity to take advantage of the political will be lost. He pointed to the need for research that "shows the complexity of inequality generally in this country" in order to address the "myth" that health inequality is the result of "bad genes or bad behavior." The strong belief in "individual determinism creates a problem of political will" for those who try to do this work. According to Smedley, we have known that health inequality is deep and persistent in America since the 1985 Heckler Report. Since then, the Institute of Medicine has produced a number of reports that have further documented health inequality and solutions to address these problems. A better job of addressing the political will is needed, he declared.

Smedley also underscored the need for strong interdisciplinary teams and interdisciplinary models to address health disparities. He applauded the NIH but called upon the agency to "use its levers to help stimulate the market place" to encourage research on health inequality. He noted that the agency's "disease system and organization system" has, in some respects, hindered research in this area. "Where would you study the fundamental determinants of health, such as residential segregation, neighborhood context, inequality in itself, racism?" Smedley asked. Unfortunately, he concluded, "this disease system and organ orientation has left us without a strong emphasis on prevention."

### Health Disparities and the Intersection of Science, Policy and Practice

Addressing the topic of *Health Disparities and the Intersection of Science, Policy and Practice*, Williams highlighted "some of the contours of disparities." He noted that for Black Caribbean, Latino, and Asian immigrants there is "worsening health with increase in generational status in the U.S. with a pattern being most marked for that of Black Caribbean immigrants." One of the major challenges in this area, according to Williams, is to identify the relevant factors that are shaping this pronounced pattern we see of worsening health with increasing length of stay in the U.S.

Williams also highlighted the fact that "there is growing body of evidence of the highest quality that points to important solutions we need to take in terms of addressing disparities." Interventions narrowly focused on health behaviors are likely to be ineffective, he explained. What we need are broad interventions to address the fundamental determinants that drive individuals' health, said Williams. He cited smoking and its success where "it has taken the contribution of many organizations working through multiple intervention channels to inform the public through multiple mechanisms, to provide economic inducements to reduce tobacco smoke, and also laws and regulations."

The point, Williams stressed is that "to reduce inequities in health and to make more progress than we've made before, we must address the fundamental, non-medical determinants of health that drive the health we see. We need to move upstream." Why? Because where we live, learn, work and play, and worship has more to do with our health than access to medical care. He acknowledged to the applause of the audience that "medical care is important but medical care is the repair shop. It takes care of us when we get sick." He emphasized that "we know enough to act." Encouraging health officials to work collaboratively with other sectors of society to initiate and support policies that promote health and reduce inequalities, Williams stressed that "All policy that affects health is health policy." While acknowledging the need for research, Williams concluded his remarks declaring that "our greatest need is systematically and comprehensively to use the knowledge that we have."

Program information, including links to the audio and video archives of the plenary sessions from the Summit, is available via <http://www.ncmhd.nih.gov/>.

## HOUSE RESCINDS BUSH EXECUTIVE ORDER ON PRESIDENTIAL RECORDS

As its first legislative action of the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, the House of Representative passed legislation (H.R. 35) by a vote of 359-58 that would overturn a President Bush Executive Order and make it easier for researchers to gain access to presidential records.

The Presidential Records Act, enacted in 1978, established, according to Rep. Eldolphus Towns (D-NY), chief sponsor of the new legislation, "that the records of the President belong to the American people, not to the President. It also ensured that these records would be released to historians and to the public in a timely manner."

However, in Executive Order 13233 promulgated in November 2001, Bush gave Presidents and former Presidents the ability to delay the public release of records long after their own deaths. It did this by allowing descendants of Presidents the authority to assert Executive Privilege over the information. In addition, former Vice Presidents could now assert Executive Privilege over their records.

The House-passed bill gives former Presidents the authority to assert privilege, but it requires a sitting President or a court to agree with the assertion in order to withhold the information. The bill also sets strict deadlines for the President and former Presidents to review the records before they release them to the public. Public access to these records through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) will come five years after the end of an Administration, with a provision that allows the President to invoke as many as six specific restrictions to public access for up to 12 years. The legislation also requires that Vice Presidential records receive the same treatment as Presidential ones.

COSSA joined many groups including the American Historical Association, the American Political Science Association, the National Humanities Alliance, the Society of American Archivists, the White House Correspondents Association and others to work for this repeal. A number of meetings were held with White House Legal Counsels Alberto Gonzales and Harriet Miers with no significant results. Once the Democrats recaptured Congress in 2006 a legislative solution was considered possible.

Similar legislation passed the House in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, but the Senate did not act. The expectation is that the Senate will follow the House's lead in the new Congress.

## DOD ANNOUNCES MINERVA INITIATIVE AWARDS

On December 22, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced the recipients of awards under the Minerva Research initiative (see Update, [June 16, 2008](#)). There were 211 preliminary white papers submitted in response to the Broad Agency Announcement. DOD selected, based on a merit-review process by panels of subject matter experts, seven projects to share \$50 million over the next five years. The principal investigators and their topics are:

Susan Shirk, Political Science, the University of California, San Diego - *The Evolving Relationship Between Technology and National Security in China: Innovation, Defense Transformation, and China's Place in the Global Technology Order.*

Mark Woodward, Religious Studies, Arizona State University - *Finding Allies for the War of Words: Mapping the Diffusion and Influence of Counter-Radical Muslim Discourse.*

Patricia Lewis, Nuclear Physics and Deputy Director of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies - *Iraq's Wars with the U.S. from the Iraqi Perspective: State Security, Weapons of Mass Destruction, Civil-Military Relations, Ethnic Conflict and Political Communication in Baathist Iraq.*

Jacob Shapiro, Politics and Public Affairs, Princeton University - *Terrorism Governance and Development.*

David Matsumoto, Psychology, San Francisco State University - *Emotion and Intergroup Relations.*

James Lindsay, International Affairs, University of Texas at Austin - *Climate Change, State Stability, and Political Risk in Africa.*

Nazli Choucri, Political Science, MIT - *ECIR - Explorations in Cyber International Relations.*

Thomas Mahnken, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy Planning, who shepherded the initiative, declared that DOD was "extremely impressed with the breadth and quality of the Minerva proposals." He added that "these

grants lay the groundwork for exciting new research and relationships that will bring the best work of academics to bear on our country's most pressing national security challenges." Another aim of the initiative, according to DOD, was to help build an enduring capacity to conduct DOD-related basic research in the social sciences.

The National Science Foundation has a Minerva-related competition as well (see Update, [August 11, 2008](#)).

## NSF SEEKS PROPOSALS IN THREE AREAS ASSOCIATED WITH HSD

The National Science Foundation's (NSF) Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences directorate (SBE) has requested researchers to submit proposals to the regular programs in three areas covered by the recently completed Human and Social Dynamics priority (see Update, [December 8, 2008](#)). There are no special competitions for these areas and relevant proposals should be sent to the existing SBE programs according to the regular target or deadline dates (see <http://www.nsf.gov/dir/index.jsp?org=sbe> for a list of these dates).

The three areas are complexity science, large-scale interdisciplinary research, and infrastructure.

Complexity Science. SBE encourages work on: complex systems incorporating analyses of the interaction of simpler systems to explain observed complexity; and the dynamics of complex systems, for example "tipping points," where many things change dramatically at one time, and "emergent phenomena," such as phase transitions in which complex phenomena emerge despite being underdetermined by ambient conditioning factors.

Large-scale Interdisciplinary Research. SBE invites proposals to the regular programs of large-scale interdisciplinary projects that advance the understanding of the dynamics of human systems. The directorate expects to make a small number of awards of up to \$1.2 million.

HSD funded interdisciplinary research teams using methods from different fields to understand the dynamics of human action and development, as well as knowledge about organizational, cultural, and societal adaptation and change. The new proposals addressing such matters should have an integrated approach drawing on more than one discipline. The Principal Investigator must be from a discipline appropriate for the host program, but collaborators may be from any area of science, not just the SBE sciences.

Investigators should contact the most appropriate SBE Program Officer to determine if their ideas respond to this activity's goals. If it is deemed responsive, the program officer will ask for a two-page description of the proposed project in advance of submission of a full proposal to facilitate the processes of joint review and/or funding. The review process will follow standard NSF practices agreed upon by the programs participating in a proposal's review, with awards determined in a directorate-wide process.

Infrastructure. SBE also seeks proposals for infrastructure development. This includes, but is not limited to, cyberinfrastructure, instrumentation, shared data bases, repositories, consortia, etc. SBE will consider both free-standing proposals for infrastructure and requests for research resources not typically available within the context of SBE research proposals. Again, researchers should consult with the relevant program officer.

In addition, one of the key topics of HSD-funded work in each of these three areas concerns the relation between human activities and environmental change. SBE will continue to accept and encourage proposals on this topic both through the Directorate's programs and through cross-cutting competitions that go beyond the Directorate.

## OBSSR REVAMPS WEBSITE



The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has redesigned and enhanced its Web site for scientists, advocacy groups, the media and the general public, providing key information on behavioral and social science research and activities at NIH. The new site is now online at <http://obssr.od.nih.gov>. It now contains more readily accessible and searchable information on funding opportunity announcements, key scientific areas, a calendar of news and events and video casts of the BSSR Lecture Series.

Acting OBSSR Director Christine A. Bachrach declared, "The new Web site allows the office to communicate with researchers, advocacy groups, media, and the general public about critical research and training opportunities, lectures and news." In addition, the new site "enhances our

ability to communicate activities that support our mission of stimulating and coordinating behavioral and social science research across NIH," said Bachrach.

In addition to a new look and feel, including a newly designed OBSSR logo, the site allows for faster navigation to the Office's scientific areas of concentration: Biopsychosocial Interactions; Genes, Behavior and Environment; Health and Behavior; Methodology; Social and Cultural Factors in Health; Translation. The website now contains a "From the Director column," which highlights critical issues and developments in the behavioral and social science fields. Also, upcoming talks in the BSSR Lecture Series and news about the Office, such as the recent, first trans-NIH retreat for behavioral and social scientists are now posted on the website.

The Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) opened officially on July 1, 1995. The U.S. Congress established the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) in the Office of the NIH Director in recognition of the key role that behavioral and social factors often play in illness and health. The OBSSR mission is to stimulate behavioral and social sciences research throughout NIH and to integrate these areas of research more fully into others of the NIH health research enterprise, thereby improving our understanding, treatment, and prevention of disease. For more information, please visit <<http://obssr.od.nih.gov>>.

## EDUCATION REPORT FOCUSES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

On January 7, Education Week released its report, *Quality Counts 2009: Portrait of a Population*, which focused for the first time on English language learners (ELLs).

According to the new report there are now 4.5 million ELLs enrolled in our nation's public schools. In the U.S. between 2000 and 2005, ELL student enrollment increased by 18 percent. Today ELLs make up 9 percent of the total student population.

Several states have seen a marked increase in the last decade in this population. Between 1995 and 2005 in thirteen states the ELL enrollment went up by more than 200 percent. The majority of those states are located in the South, with Arkansas, North Carolina and South Carolina seeing a quadrupling of their numbers.

Despite the perception that most ELLs are immigrants; the report found that nearly two-thirds are second or third generation U.S. citizens. And while not surprisingly Hispanics make up the majority of ELLs with 68 percent, the population also includes whites, 14 percent, and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 13 percent.

The report also highlights in addition to the language barrier, ELLs face an academic achievement gap. Only 9.6 percent of fourth and eighth grade ELL students scored at least proficient in math on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) compared with the average of 34.8 percent. As one might expect, this gap was also present on the NAEP 2007 reading test with only 5.6 percent of ELLs scoring in proficiency, compared with the national average of 30.4 percent.

Education Week hopes this report will help highlight the challenges states face educating this diverse student population, and will help policymakers find ways to create better ELL programs.

For more information on Education Week's Quality Counts 2009 report please go to <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/01/08/index.html>

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT COMPARISONS IN MATH AND SCIENCE REVEAL IMPROVEMENT FOR U.S. STUDENTS

On December 9, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released the U.S. results on the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

This is the fourth time since 1995 that this international comparison of student achievement has been conducted. In 2007, fourth graders from 36 countries or educational jurisdictions participated, while 48 participated at the eighth grade level.

In 2007, the average U.S. mathematics score was 529 for fourth graders, and 508 for eighth graders, both were higher than the TIMSS average scores of 500 for both grades. Compared to 1995, the first year the TIMSS tests were given, the



average mathematics scores for U.S. fourth and eighth grade students rose in 2007. At the fourth grade level, the U.S. average score in 2007 was up 11 points over the 1995 average of 518. The U.S. eighth grade average score in 2007 was 16 points higher than the 1995 average of 492.

The TIMSS results, however, also showed that the U.S. achievement gap, both racial and socio-economic, continues to affect students. The average mathematics score for fourth grade students was 482 for black students, 504 for Hispanics, and 550 for whites, compared with the TIMSS average score of 500. This score gap was also consistent for eighth graders as blacks scored 457, Hispanics 475, and whites 533, compared with 500 for the TIMSS average.

The achievement gap was also noticeable in poorer socio-economic schools, with the average mathematics scores of fourth graders in public school with 75 or more percent of their students eligible for free or reduced price lunch scoring 479, compared with those who have less than 10 percent of those students scoring 583. For eighth graders that score was 465 for schools with 75 percent or more, and 557 for those with less than 10 percent.

The average science score for U.S. fourth graders was 539, and for eighth graders 520; again both were higher than the average for both grades of 500. However, in 2007 the average science scores for fourth and eighth grade students were not measurably different from those in 1995. The U.S. fourth grade average science score actually decreased by three points from 1995, but for eighth graders the average score went up seven points over 1995.

There was also an achievement gap present in the TIMSS science scores. The average science scores of U.S. fourth grade students was 488 for blacks, 502 for Hispanic, and 567 for whites compared with the TIMSS average of 500. The trend was similar for eighth graders as Blacks scored 455, Hispanics 480, and white 551 while the TIMSS average was 500.

For schools with 75 percent or more of their students eligible for school lunch fourth graders scored 477 and eighth graders scored 466. This is compared with schools with less than 10 percent of such students, 590 for fourth graders and 572 for eighth graders.

For more information and a copy of the full TIMSS report go to the NCES website at <http://nces.ed.gov/timss>.

## PREPARING FOR TERRORISM DISASTERS SUBJECT OF BRIEFING

On December 15, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), whose director Gary LaFree of the University of Maryland is a member of the COSSA Executive Committee, held a briefing on the newly released survey conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles, "Public Response to Terrorism: Findings from the National Survey of Disaster Experiences and Preparedness." The survey was funded by the Department of Homeland Security and the National Science Foundation.

The survey sought to answer four questions: what have Americans done to prepare for disasters or terrorism; what steps have they taken to avoid or reduce exposure to terrorism; what motivates them to prepare for terrorism, disasters and to avoid terrorism risk; and lastly, how can policies and programs increase public readiness?

The survey also examined two actions: preparedness, whether Americans have developed emergency plans, become more vigilant, etc; and avoidance, whether they have reduced travel, and use of public transportation, avoided certain cities, buildings or national landmarks.

Some people are getting ready, but most are not. According to the survey only 31 percent of the population has created emergency plans. And there was no real difference on how respondents answered questions based on their area of the country, race or ethnicity. The survey also found that terrorism was not the major factor for those who had prepared themselves for an emergency.

The survey authors found that information is the key factor that motivates the public to get ready, and recommended ten steps that could be taken to better ready the public for disasters.

To find out more about these ten steps and for additional information on the survey results go to START's website at <http://www.start.umd.edu/announcements/announcement.asp?id=123>.

## HISTORIANS DISCUSS "HISTORIC" NATURE OF 2008 ELECTION

At the recent meeting of the American Historical Association in New York City a panel of historians addressed the question "Election 2008: How 'Historic' Was It?" The group acknowledged the "dramatic, symbolic nature of the election," as Alan Brinkley, Provost of Columbia University, declared. However, there were warnings that it was "too soon to tell," as most of the speakers focused on the daunting challenges facing the new President.

Eric Foner of Columbia, who moderated the session, suggested that "critical elections," those that bring about seismic shifts in American politics, are best viewed in hindsight. As to the comparisons of Barack Obama to Lincoln and the two Roosevelts, Foner asked how do we know that the new President "might more resemble Franklin Pierce?"

For David Levering Lewis of New York University and author of a prize-winning biography of W.E.B. DuBois, Obama's election was "a civil rights dream." He also noted the world-wide excitement over Obama's victory. John Darwin of Oxford University, suggesting he represented the European view on the panel, agreed that the "interest and enthusiasm" in Europe that greeted the 2008 presidential election outcome came from assessing the result as a chance for "a great renewal of the United States' place in the world." He compared it to John Kennedy's election in 1960.

Carrying this theme further, Caroline Elkins of Harvard called Obama "a global president" and "a symbol of global expectations," particularly in Africa. She noted the great excitement in Obama's ancestral home of Kenya and throughout the continent. This offers the new President a chance to take important actions to improve the lives of Africa's citizens by ending the violence and suffering in places like the Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Kenya, Elkins argued.

Jacqueline Jones of the University of Texas at Austin was fine with the symbolic nature of the Obama victory, but questioned whether as some have commented, it represented a "transformation in American race relations." The structures that produce racial inequality in America still remain, she asserted.

Julian Zeliser of Princeton saw the election as a chance for real political change and the "opportunity for a new era" that might transcend the old liberal/conservative context that has defined American politics recently. He also suggested, as did Jones, that the election was really about President Bush and his discredited policies and leadership.

However, the final judgment on Obama and whether 2008 was historic will derive from how well he succeeds in dealing with an economic crisis Brinkley described as "more difficult than the New Deal." Brinkley believes that Obama is like FDR in his ability to "inspire confidence and hope." However, he warned that Obama has to exhibit more boldness than FDR, particularly in the new Administration's need to reject FDR's "fiscal reticence" on Federal spending. Both Brinkley and Darwin also noted that the new economic crisis depended much more on international collaboration than the 1930s, when countries could focus on their own situations. Darwin worried that some nations might again be "inward looking" through protectionist measures that could result in disaster. Obama, he suggested, would have a delicate balancing act of extracting the U.S. out of its current mess while at the same time preserving the global free trade economy.

At the same time, Zeliser noted Obama will face a diminished opposition, not only in reduced Republican numbers in the Congress, but in a conservative movement that "is in a state of political crisis" with significant internal divisions. This provides Obama with an opportunity to focus on "middle-class security" and redefine the liberal agenda. However, Zeliser concluded that conservative won't go away completely. He also expressed concern that Afghanistan could become Obama's Vietnam.

## STUDY FINDS ELECTRONIC PRESCRIBING SYSTEM PRODUCES COST SAVINGS

According to a new study funded by Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), electronic prescribing or e-prescribing systems can save up to \$845,000 per 100,000 patients per year. The study, entitled "Effect of Electronic Prescribing with Formulary Decision Support on Medication Use and Cost," test the cost-savings potential of an e-prescribing system that includes data on insurers' formularies.

Insurers are now using formularies, lists of approved prescription drugs, to encourage use of lower cost or generic drugs. It works by charging patients the lowest co-payment for generic medications, a higher sum for preferred brand-name drugs, and the highest amount for non-preferred, brand-name drugs. Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston compared the change in prescriptions written in three formulary tiers before and after an e-prescribing system was launched.

The study examined data collected over 18 months from two major Massachusetts health insurers covering 1.5 million patients. Doctors using e-prescribing with formulary decision support, which accounted for more than 200,000 filled prescriptions in the study, increased their use of generic prescriptions by 3.3 percent, study authors found. These changes were above and beyond increasing use of generics that was occurring among all doctors and the already high rate of generic drug use in Massachusetts.

"These findings show that decision support can improve value for patients," said AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. "These systems have the added and important benefit of improved patient safety by flagging medication errors before they occur."

The full study can be found in the December 8 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

## THE AHRQ RELEASES FUNDING OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

On January 2, 2009, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) issued two Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs), both of which update previous program announcements by including new AHRQ portfolio objectives. Applications should focus on identified priority areas in one of the six AHRQ portfolios: value, prevention/care management, health information technology, comparative effectiveness, patient safety, and innovations and emerging issues. These FOAs also reinstitute a budget of up to \$500,000 in total annual project costs.

The two FOAs are:

- **AHRQ Health Services Research Projects (R01):** This FOA, PA-09-070, supports large research extramural grants. The first application receipt date is **March 9, 2009**. For the FOA go to <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-09-070.html> .
- **AHRQ Health Services Research Demonstration and Dissemination Grants (R18):** This FOA, PA-09-071, solicits large research demonstration and dissemination projects. The first application receipt date is **March 9, 2009**. For the FOA go to <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-09-071.html> .

## APPLICATIONS WANTED FOR NIH-SUPPORTED CENTERS FOR POPULATION HEALTH AND HEALTH DISPARITIES (CPHHD)

The National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI), and Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) of the National Institutes of Health are seeking grant applications for a Centers for Population Health and Health Disparities (CPHHD) Program.

According to the FOA, remarkable advances in understanding human biology and its interaction with behavior and social factors have been made in recent decades. The mapping of the human genome provides a platform for further discovery and progress in disease prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and promises for increasing active life expectancy. For example, identification of specific genes and mutations involved in a disease may lead to new preventive, diagnostic, and/or therapeutic approaches pertinent to that disease. However, the impact of these discoveries may be limited without an effective long-term strategy for linking the knowledge of the disease biology and genomics with the knowledge of factors that affect prevention, diagnosis, and/or treatment of a disease at the population level. Therefore, it is essential to integrate research in the natural, behavioral, and social sciences to create a more comprehensive understanding of disease pathways from a molecular to a societal level. Such integration is expected to lead to more effective measures to prevent disease occurrence and progression, and enhance well-being in all population subgroups, especially those at higher risk and those experiencing the greatest burden of disease.

The difficulty of reducing and eliminating health disparities has been largely attributed to the complex interactions among various determinants, including biological, genetic, behavioral, socioeconomic, and environmental factors. Yet, these complex interactions and the pathways through which they may affect health outcomes are understudied and remain poorly understood. More comprehensive understanding can be effectively achieved but it requires transdisciplinary and multilevel research that could address the roles of multiple diverse factors simultaneously.

The CPHHD Program is designed to promote transdisciplinary research in the area of health inequities with the purpose of contributing directly to improved health outcomes and quality of life for populations with a higher disease burden. This funding opportunity announcement (FOA) is an open competition for all eligible applicants. The focus of the announcement is on both understanding the pathways that result in disparate health outcomes and developing

comprehensive models of how various social, economic, cultural, environmental, biological, behavioral, physiological, and genetic factors affect individual health outcomes and their distribution in populations.

Under this FOA, the NCI will support centers focused on health disparities related to the differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of cancer and related adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States. Centers proposed for funding by the NHLBI must target disparities in cardiovascular diseases and must have the development of interventions to reduce these health disparities as the primary objective of the proposed research. Applicants proposing Centers focused on cancer-related disparities are must include intervention development/testing as one of required projects. Ultimately, for both areas, the results of the proposed research should aid the development of effective strategies for multilevel interventions to that seek to promote health and/or lessen the burden of disease.

Letters of Intent are due: April 29, 2009 and applications are due: May 29, 2009 For more information see: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-CA-09-001.html>

## CONSORTIUM OF SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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