

In Focus: Reorganization of the National Science Foundation

From the Editor

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Testifying before the Biological, Behavioral and Social Sciences Task Force Looking to the 21st Century, Dr. Robert L. Metzberg speaking on behalf of the Genetics Society observed that the social sciences should not separate from biology and form a new directorate within the National Science Foundation. The presence of the biological sciences has helped to temper the volatility of the social sciences, said Metzberg. Under questioning from panel members, Metzberg also observed that the social sciences were merely subfields of the biological sciences and could be served within the existing organizational structure. Thus began the second set of Task Force hearings held November 29-30, 1990 in Washington, D.C.

The history of the Task Force and the content of the first set of hearings is set out in the following article reprinted from the *COSSA Washington Update*, September 21, 1990.

Responding to Dr. Metzberg, Warren Miller, former APSA President, stated, "Biology is largely irrelevant to the center of gravity of political science." Miller went on to present the testimony reprinted below. He was joined in his support for a separate social science directorate by representatives for the Federation of Behavioral, Psychological and Cognitive Sciences, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, the American Sociological Association, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA).

The compelling nature of their arguments and those of others was not apparent until the following day, when the Task Force unanimously recommended the creation of a sepa-

rate directorate. The astonishing turn of events was addressed by Roberta Balstad Miller of the NSF Division of Social and Economic Science speaking before the COSSA annual meeting. Her presentation is also reproduced in this issue of *PS*.

The Task Force will present its final report in April. A good deal more work must be done to insure that the Task Force's recommendation is carried out. *PS* will keep its readers posted of future events.

BBS Task Force Meets: Separate Directorate Issue on the Table

Reprinted from COSSA Washington Update, September 21, 1990

The new National Science Foundation (NSF) advisory committee on the social and behavioral sciences met for the first time on September 10. From the start of the two-day session, most of the panel's social and behavioral scientists made clear that they were there to discuss a separate NSF directorate for the social and behavioral sciences. (For a list of the panel's members, see *Update*, September 7, 1990.)

In greeting the committee—dubbed the Task Force Looking to the 21st Century—Acting NSF Director Fred Bernthal asked members to examine the need for restructuring NSF's Biological, Behavioral, and Social Sciences (BBS) directorate. Bernthal asked members to keep several thoughts in mind: (1) BBS must have the flexibility to meet new mandates; (2) BBS must meet the infrastructure needs of its disciplines; and (3) the

zero-sum budget situation makes funding reallocations difficult.

Clutter's Thoughts

Mary Clutter, assistant NSF director for BBS, provided the task force with an overview of her directorate's operations. In outlining important issues, Clutter mentioned the recently introduced Walgren-Brown bill but did not discuss the bill's call for a separate behavioral and social science directorate. Clutter seemed to dismiss the legislation, but the question of a separate directorate remains on the task force's agenda.

Clutter concluded her presentation by suggesting "everything is possible, but the task force should focus on the implementable." By 2000, she predicted, NSF will look different, but attempts at radical change will be constrained by current NSF structure.

Division Directors' Reports

Roberta Miller, director of social and economic science (SES) within BBS, noted former NSF director Erich Bloch's view that SES was the "most controversial division at the foundation." In reviewing the history of NSF support for the wide range of the social sciences, Miller stressed the foundation's three-fold importance: (1) NSF is the most important source of funding for the disciplines; (2) the foundation is the only source for large-scale data collections; and (3) NSF is the only source for methodological research. The foundation also facilitates contact with research organizations in other nations, she said.

Miller went on to point out, however, that despite NSF's important role in social science research, the foundation's budgetary support has not been good during the past decade.

Miller also drew attention to the role of "shadow programs"—cross-disciplinary, cross-directorate research initiatives such as that addressing the human dimensions of global environmental change—in enhancing NSF support for the social sciences. Miller also discussed the future of the large data-bases that NSF has supported for quite some time—the National Election Studies, the General Social Survey, and the Panel Study on Income Dynamics. Finally, she cited the data from the Bowen and Sosa report on projected faculty shortages in the social sciences and humanities. The numbers, she said, suggest that the social sciences face substantial human resource needs.

Risa Palm, vice-chancellor for research and dean of the graduate school at the University of Colorado (and a former COSSA president), asked Miller if she favored a separate directorate for the social sciences. Miller replied that "it would be splendid to have a directorate," but noted the need to separate that issue from the consideration of enhanced NSF resources for social and behavioral science.

Nathaniel Pitts, acting director of the behavioral and neural sciences (BNS) division, described his division's history and structure, calling BNS a "bridge division" between the biological and social sciences. BNS, Pitts noted, receives more proposals than any other division within NSF, yet budgets during the past ten years have not reflected this large demand.

Echoing her earlier question to Miller, Palm queried Pitts about a separate directorate. Pitts said he had a "split brain," and suggested that a reorganization "cannot take all of us" into a separate directorate. As a neuroscientist, Pitts remarked, he enjoys the theoretical byplay with biology and would be reluctant to place neuroscience in a different directorate.

Presentations were also made by the directors of the biological sciences divisions and the instrumenta-

tion and resources division. Task force member Nancy Cantor, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, asked if cross-directorate cooperation on interdisciplinary research could occur. (Cantor's question is important since one of the arguments against separation has been the need to continue interdisciplinary research among biological, behavioral, and social scientists.) Bruce Ummiger, director of the cellular biosciences division, responded that considerable interdisciplinary research occurs across directorates, mainly through the cooperation of program officers.

Frank Harris, executive officer of BBS, described his directorate's relationship with the rest of the foundation, particularly noting the \$5-6 million of social and behavioral science funding available outside of BBS. Such funding includes programs in arctic social science and cognitive research in the computer and information science directorate.

Following the division directors' reports, the Task Force was separated into five working groups:

(A) Organization for Cognitive, Behavioral, Economic, and Social Sciences—Risa Palm, chair;

(B) Organization for Biological Sciences—Judy Meyer, Department of Zoology, University of Georgia, chair;

(C) Infrastructure (Education, Equipment, Resources)—Julius Jackson, Department of Microbiology, University of Michigan, chair;

(D) Organization to Facilitate Scientific Change—Marvalee Wake, Department of Integrative Biology, University of California at Berkeley, chair;

(E) Defining a Unique Role for the Directorate—Michael Greenberg, Whitney Marine Laboratory, University of Florida, chair.

Separate Directorate Working Group

With five social and behavioral scientists and three biologists, Palm's group provided a forum for the separate directorate debate. Harold Morowitz (biology and natural philosophy, George Mason University) said the split made no sense to him, since it would leave social and behavioral science politically vulnerable. Richard Berk (sociology, University

of California at Los Angeles) voiced wariness about discussing a separate directorate without any alternatives other than the present structure.

Greenberg asked where the boundaries for the behavioral sciences component would be drawn, a key stumbling block to separation. Cantor made clear that organizational structure does not preclude intellectual alliances, and Charles Plott (humanities and social science, Cal Tech) was joined by the other social scientists in stressing the internal diversity and uniqueness of the disciplines.

Palm convinced the working group to focus on several main issues: (1) alternative organizational structure with respect to future behavioral and social science research; (2) the role of the behavioral sciences in that alternative structure; (3) the internal diversity of the disciplines in that structure; and (4) reconciling support for cross-disciplinary research with support for "core" disciplinary research in any new structure.

In response to a request from Anderson, Clutter agreed to make a presentation on the current procedures for decision-making within the present BBS structure. Clutter also agreed to Berk's suggestion that the presentation include case studies illustrating how special initiatives within the directorate succeed or fail.

The other working groups also focused on information needs. Among the questions raised were: How does NSF measure the vitality of a discipline or program? (This question arose in the context of "sunsetting"—read, eliminating—programs.) Where is science hurting because of a lack of funds? (This query seemed to be a challenge to social and behavioral scientists to come up with justifications for increased funding.) How would interdisciplinary research be affected by structural changes? How do you develop a structure that can change as science changes?

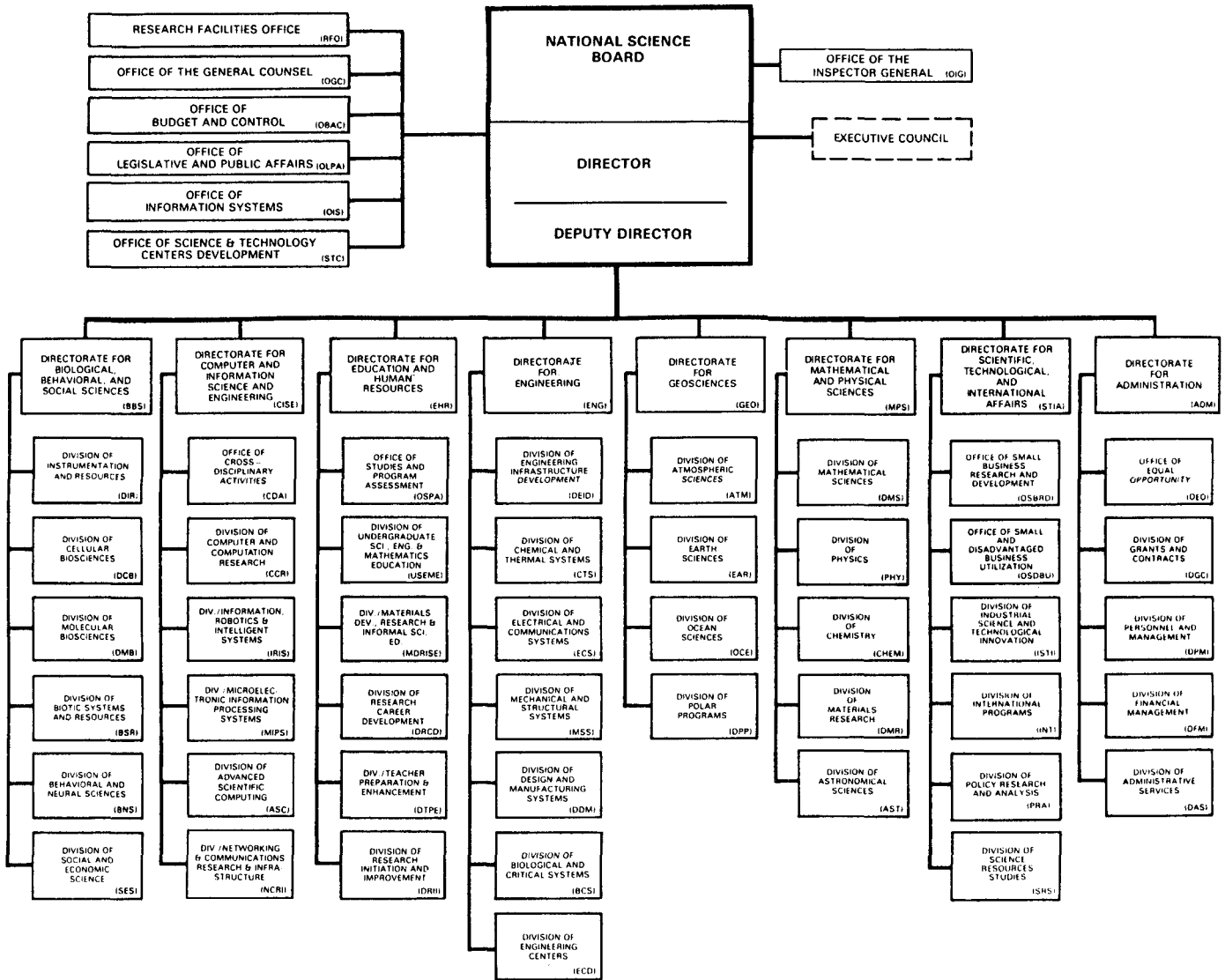
What Next?

The Task Force will reconvene from November 28 to December 1 to hear Clutter's presentation, take testimony from the scientific community, and meet in executive session.

In Focus

The panel is also expected to determine what it wants to include in the interim report. The Task Force will then meet again on January 7 to preview the interim report.

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