

TO: Lisa L. Jones, SBE/OAD COV Monitor

**FROM: Frank P. Scioli, Deputy Division Director
Social and Economic Sciences**

IN RE: Annual Call for Updates/Progress Made Since Last COV

October 1, 2010

A Committee of Visitors (COV) convened March 8-10, 2007 to review the disciplinary programs in the Division of Social and Economic Sciences (SES): Decision, Risk and Management Sciences Program; Economics Program; Innovation and Organizational Change Program; Law and Social Sciences Program; Methodology, Measurement and Statistics Program; Political Science Program; Science and Society Program; and Sociology Program.

This is an update and progress report on a list of recommendations made by the COV and our response to them. It also reflects actions already taken by the SES Division with respect to the response to the recommendations and, finally, as appropriate, actions remaining to be taken. The response is to Division-level recommendations. It should be noted that Program-specific recommendations are being pursued by Division management and will not be discussed in this report.

The “Overall Assessment” made by COV members concerned assessment of the integrity and efficiency of the SES Division with respect to baseline responsibilities of soliciting and appropriately reviewing proposals, making research awards that are likely to produce useful results, and meeting specific NSF goals. The COV stated that their second goal was to assess the SES Division with respect to its performance in achieving the overall goal of producing knowledge beneficial to science and the national welfare.

1) In the areas of integrity and efficiency of the SES Division the COV teams found the SES Division to be doing an excellent job. However, the COV noted that administrative resources are insufficient to deal with the workload that SES programs currently face. As a consequence of this observation and partially to assist in dealing with the workload, Division management renewed the terms of appointment of three science assistants working in the Division and added a support staff person to the Economics and Decision, Research and Management Sciences Cluster. This alleviates some of the pain of having Program Directors manage core Programs while also assisting with special initiatives that emerge and call for their expertise in handling proposals and in recommending awards and declinations. The Division remains committed to providing sufficient support staff for Program Directors.). Nonetheless, the ARRA process exacted a considerable burden on support staff, science assistants, administrative staff, program directors and management. Problems were dealt with satisfactorily but much needs to be done to

make the grant awarding process more efficient. It is worth noting that the Sociology Program is hiring a Temporary IPA to assist the program with the significant increase in proposal numbers they have received.

2) COV members were concerned that the COV mechanism for reviewing disciplinary programs did not allow for close examination of related disciplinary work going on in cross-cutting programs and initiatives. An SBE Human and Social Dynamics Committee of Visitors undertaken in 2008 commented favorably on the way in which disciplinary and cross-disciplinary research is evaluated. The SES Division thinks that this deals satisfactorily with the issue.

3) The COV recommended the establishment and maintenance of an effective balance between permanent and rotator staff within SES. The SBE Directorate has long appreciated advantages in organizational memory and institutional capability that permanent staff bring while recognizing the value of visiting scientists and IPAs. The balance in current distribution across the division and within Programs is now effective and is being maintained. Considerable attention is directed toward affording permanent staff with independent research opportunities and providing resources for them to undertake them. In addition, permanent staff is encouraged to apply for Long Term Professional Development and the Division currently has a permanent Program Director on one such assignment for a full year. It is worth noting as well that the Directorate management provided the resources so that a one-year hire could be made to cover the absence of the permanent staff member.

4) The COV recommended that the SES Division give clear guidance to prospective investigators and reviewers concerning a common framework or vocabulary for describing broader impacts. The Division has adopted the Broader Impacts considerations and examples provided in the NSF GPG and provide them to Program Directors for use in outreach sessions organized by OLPA, OIA, or individual Program Directors. Guidelines are also provided to Programs for their use in conducting Advisory Panel sessions. The Division has adopted the one-page document “Focus on Transformative Research—Charge to Panelists and Reviewers.”

5) The COV commented on what they called a “deeper impact” concern. They specifically mentioned the relationship between theoretical work and empirical work in the disciplines. They noted that several Programs have been very active in promoting both theoretical work and empirical work and other Programs lag in this regard. The COV recommended computational approaches to the assessment of the balance between theoretical and empirical. This is being developed in the Division’s establishment of guidelines for complexity research and in encouraging submissions for a competition announced by way of a Dear Colleague Letter. The Political Science Program held a workshop in July of 2010 on genetics and political behavior. While Political Science is leading the effort, the workshop is an interdisciplinary mix of high quality scholars and all members of the SES Division and the BCS Division will be invited to participate.

6) COV members expressed the need for the social sciences to develop mechanisms for transforming lore into written record, both within core disciplinary programs and more generally in the Science and Society Program. To this end, both the Sociology Program and the Political Science Program have encouraged research employing qualitative research methods following workshops they held focusing on the topic. The Political Science Program has funded a long-running workshop on qualitative methods. The Science and Society Program specifically the History and Philosophy component, encourages research that has the potential to transform lore into written record. An Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training Award was just granted to a former SES Sociology Program Director at the University of Kansas to enhance the qualitative research skills of graduate students.

7) The COV urged stronger preparation in quantitative skills across the SES fields, starting with mathematics and extending into the wide array of quantitative techniques. The Sociology Program and the Political Science Program support workshops to broaden participation of underrepresented minorities and enhance their quantitative skills. Political Science and Economics support methodology workshops each summer. All Programs in the Division support Doctoral Dissertation Research Support, especially for projects employing quantitative research techniques. Given current budgetary constraints it has not been possible at this time to support post doctoral fellowships in any large number. However, Programs have this on their agenda for future activities to enhance the quantitative skills of members of their communities. It should be noted also that an Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training award was made to a social science program at the University of California, Berkeley with the express goal of transforming doctoral education for graduate students in the empirical implications of theoretical models.

8) COV members noted that Economics, Sociology and other social and behavioral sciences are conspicuously absent from the scientific research aspects of the American Competitiveness Initiative. This led them to conclude that the SES Division is under-leveraged, both within the SBE Directorate and within the NSF itself. SBE management has worked continuously to correct this exclusion and continues to do so. SES has two representatives to the NSF ACA committee and has been very active in subcommittees for responsible conduct of research and mentoring of postdocs. The SES Division also has Program Directors on numerous NSF committees as partners with other NSF Directorates: Decision Making Under Uncertainty, NANO, IGERT, CDI, to name just three. SES also has representatives on the US National Bio-defense Security Committee, the US DOD-NSF Minerva project, the US Science Committee. SES interacts with EUROCORES, the European Science Foundation, and the Comparative Study of Elections Committee.

9) Finally, the 2007 COV agreed with previous COV reports, there is insufficient funding for SES Programs. This has been partially alleviated with the addition of Human and Social Dynamics funds to the core Programs of the Division and with

the addition of infrastructure dollars to alleviate the stress placed on the Economics, Political Science, and Sociology Programs due to the high cost of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the American National Election Studies, and the General Social Survey. Further, the ARRA program allowed smaller program in SES to compete on an equal basis with larger programs and this resulted in work supported that would not have otherwise received support. This included graduate students and young investigators.