# CSFR Begins Project on Secrecy and Openness in Technical Communication

In recent years, the traditional concept of scientific ideas and information as a public good, freely available to professional colleagues as well as the general public, has come under closer scrutiny. The post–World War II increase in the economic, political, and military value of scientific and technical information has fostered various private and public proposals to restrict open communication in university teaching and research activities. These proposals have cited many justifications, including national security interests, economic competition, patent protections, and quality control, as the basis for limiting access to new and important research data in selected fields.

Conflicts over secrecy and openness in science are essentially conflicts over values. In order to explore the fundamental values which promote the need for secrecy or openness in science, the AAAS has initiated a new project through the office of the Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility (CSFR). The project, titled "Secrecy and Openness in Scientific and Technical Communication," is being funded through the Program on Ethics and Values in Science and Technology (EVIST) in the National Science Foundation and the Humanities, Science and Technology Program in the National Endowment for the Humanities. Rosemary Chalk, CSFR program head, is project director.

The tradition of openness in basic research is the foundation for objectivity in science. It is through the free exchange of information and data that new ideas and experimental results are subjected to the rigorous test of peer review and verification. The origins of openness, however, have their roots in a period when science was essentially a private intellectual activity. Also, many scientists are not completely "open" in their exchange of data and information. Self-imposed restrictions on the release of new but unconfirmed theories or preliminary experimental data are quite common in traditional scientific work.

In modern times, government, industrial, and university groups have increasingly recognized the importance of applying scientific and technical resources to selected public and private objectives. Access to new information, including basic research, has emerged as a source of competitive advantage in the pursuit of various social, military, and economic goals. As a result, the concept of intellectual property has expanded in the post–World War II period to justify occasional controls on the disclosure of basic research findings supported by public or private funds.

These public and private pressures foster secrecy in science. Such restrictions on communication often serve legitimate and important social purposes. But they may, at times, also result in arbitrary or abusive practices or promote bias and the loss of objectivity in research.

Although there is reason to believe that secrecy is increasing in science, and that it may affect values other than openness, very little is known about the ways in which secrecy or openness influence the conduct of scientific research. It is the purpose of this project to encourage attention to such relationships and the values which affect professional behavior and education.

The project will consist of a series of background papers and regional seminars to be organized in 1984. Ten background papers will be commissioned through the project. Five project seminars will be held in Boston, and one each will be held in Chicago, Nashville, San Diego, and Washington, D.C. A project symposium also will be held as part of the 1984 AAAS Annual Meeting in New York.

In addition to the AAAS Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, other cosponsoring institutions are the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology (CSEP/IIT); Management of Technology Program, Vanderbilt University; Program in Science, Technology and Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); Science Technology and Public Affairs Program, University of California, San Diego (UCSD); and the journal *Science, Technology and Human Values* (MIT).

Regional hosts for the project are: Rosemary Chalk, project director; Robert House, director, Management of Technology Program, Vanderbilt University; Marcel La Follette, editor, *Science, Technology and Human Values*, MIT; Sanford Lakoff, professor of political science, UCSD; and Vivien Weil, senior research associate, CSEP/IIT.

Advisory committee members guiding the development of the project are: Loren Graham, professor of the history of science, MIT; Harold P. Green, professor of law, George Washington University; Lee Grodzins, professor of physics, MIT; Louis Menand, senior lecturer in political science and special assistant to the provost, MIT; and Eugene Skolnikoff, director of MIT Center for International Studies.

For further information about the project, contact Rosemary Chalk at 1515 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, or call 202-467-5238.

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*Committee on Scientific Freedom and Responsibility*

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The *Directory of Science Communication Courses, Programs, and Faculty* is published by the Department of Chemistry, State University of New York (SUNY) at Binghamton, in cooperation with the AAAS Office of Communica-