

Federal Job Exam Reformed

The government has had no exam for entry-level professionals since 1982, when the Professional and Administrative Career Exam (PACE) was dropped because of allegations it was racially discriminatory.

This June, a new set of six tests based on six broad occupational categories will be adopted. Items on general cognitive ability that were included in PACE have been replaced by multiple-choice items about specific job situations. Each applicant will also fill out an Individual Achievement Record which elicits biographical data and information on general experience, skills, and work habits.

PACE was the subject of heated controversy for years—only 5.9% of black and Hispanic applicants passed, according to Richard Seymour of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and fewer than 1% got high enough scores to be hired. After agencies were left to fill minority hiring goals on their own, the proportion grew to 26% in 1988.

While minorities still fare worse than whites on the new occupational tests, the discrepancy has been substantially reduced with the addition of the biographical test. According to the Office of Personnel Management, this test has been validated on a sample of 6600 peo-

Climate expert James Hansen is ready to put his money where his mouth is.

Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Sciences in New York, told a group of climatologists last week that his confidence that the greenhouse effect has arrived is even higher than it was in 1988, when he testified before Congress that he believed the global warming of recent decades was driven by gases produced by human activity. So sure is he now of this conclusion that he said he'd bet even money that one of the next 3 years will be the hottest in 100 years.

The climatological odds favor his prediction, said Hansen: most of the complicating factors that can counteract the greenhouse warming—volcanic debris in the stratosphere, variations in the sun's brightness, and the El Niño cycle—are now acting in concert with



James Hansen. Testifying before a Senate panel last year, when he charged that Administration officials had watered down his global warming conclusions.

greenhouse gases to accentuate the warming.

People aren't going to believe such an "incredible" and "scientifically outrageous" prediction, Hansen said, but his audience, meeting at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, to talk about the climatic impact of solar variability, seemed too intimidated by this prominent researcher to argue with him.

Except physicist Robert Jastrow of Dartmouth College. Of late Jastrow has become famous for his contention that, if trends of the past millennia hold in the next century, a long-term decline of solar activity will tend to counteract any greenhouse warming. After a bit of friendly sparring between the long-time colleagues, however, Jastrow, too, refrained from taking up Hansen's challenge, citing the likely warming effect of the current 11-year peak in solar brightness.

ple. Items were weighted according to how answers coincided with those of employees who perform their jobs successfully. All test items that showed significantly different response rates between whites and blacks were eliminated.

Top Focus Needed for AIDS Effort

The National Commission on AIDS, in its second report to the President since it was

formed last August, has reiterated its concern over inadequate coordination of the government's AIDS offensive.

AIDS policy is like "an orchestra without a conductor," said the group, which is headed by June E. Osborn, dean of the University of Michigan's School of Public Health. It called for the creation of a top-level interagency group that would focus the government's efforts and respond quickly and flexibly to new challenges in the struggle against AIDS.

The four other major recommendations were:

- "Disaster relief" money for cities and states hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic.

- Federal housing assistance "to address the multiple problems posed by HIV infection and AIDS."

- Passage of laws forbidding discrimination against those infected with HIV.

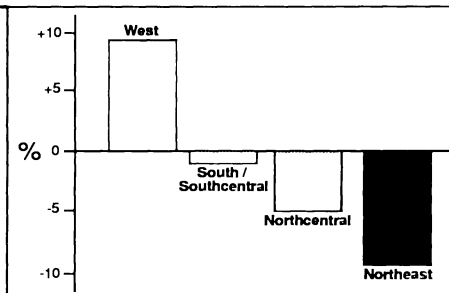
- Lifting of federal restrictions that are "impeding the effective use" of funds for AIDS prevention and education.

High School Science

The flood of dreary reports on science education continues with an entry from the American Institute of Physics documenting the sorry state of science and math in high schools. The study* looks at trends by region, course content, race, sex, and intent to go to college.

Some findings:

- Sixty percent of high school seniors have taken neither physics nor chemistry. The proportion of seniors taking physics rose only marginally, from 18% to 20%, between 1980 and 1987.



Regional shifts in high school graduates 1990-95.

Source: "High School Graduates: Projections by State, 1986 to 2004," by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, The College Board, and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association.

- The number of students attending high school in states that currently come out near the bottom in science and math—mainly in the South and West—is going up, while the number going to the more rigorous schools in New England and Middle Atlantic states is going down.

- High school graduation rates for blacks are going up, but college attendance remains low. Racial disparities in math achievement also remain depressingly high: 84% of blacks and 78% of hispanics score lower than the average white on standardized tests.

- The aspirations of high achieving females often look more like those of low achievers than to those of high achieving males—for instance, females, regardless of ability, are not very interested in engineering and physics.

*"Who Takes Science?" is available without charge from the AIP, 335 East 45th Street, New York 10017.