



Two Strikes and You're Out at NIH?

Persistence may no longer pay as a strategy for winning grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Although applicants who submit revised proposals may increase their chances of success, NIH is considering curbs on repeat revisions as part of an ongoing effort to streamline the NIH grants process.

NIH has already instituted a triage system, in which applications judged to have little chance of success are screened in advance and omitted from review by the full study section. Now, says Wendy Baldwin, deputy director of NIH for extramural research, an internal NIH panel is getting ready to debate another work-saving measure. Instead of allowing applicants an unlimited number of "amended" applications—revisions that attempt to remedy problems identified by peer reviewers—NIH is thinking

about giving scientists only a single shot at fixing unsuccessful ideas, Baldwin says. Under this rule, study sections would consider only initial or second-draft applications.

The number of amended applications has been rising sharply

in recent years, says Anthony Demsey of NIH's division of research grants, climbing from 22% of all grants submitted in 1984 to 30% in 1993. And NIH officials think there should be a limit to the free advice from reviewers. Once a proposal gets to the third revision, Demsey says bluntly, "it's really the study section's" application.

Demsey concedes that eliminating the heavily revised grants from review probably wouldn't reduce paperwork a great deal. But it should raise the integrity of the system, he says.

NSF Gets Time Off for Good Behavior

Next week the House of Representatives is expected to adopt language that urges the National Science Foundation (NSF) to think seriously about eliminating its social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBE) directorate as part of an administra-

tive streamlining. But social scientists aren't panicking. Unlike last spring, when the long knives were out on Capitol Hill, their disciplines seem to have acquired enough legislative armor to protect them well into 1996.

Last week, during debate on NSF's new budget, influential senators from both parties spoke glowingly of the social sciences and said they would defer to NSF's wishes to continue funding research in this area. And the suggested cut—part of an omnibus bill authorizing several science-related agencies set to reach the House floor next week—will face an uphill battle because there is no companion bill in the Senate. The House bill calls on NSF to reduce the number of directorates from seven to six, targeting SBE because it's the newest and most interdisciplinary.

Social and behavioral scientists also take heart from the tenor of a recent meeting between the two protagonists, NSF Director Neal Lane and Representative Robert Walker (R-PA), chair of House Science Committee, which drafted the bill. "There was a broad discussion" of reorganization that went beyond SBE, says a committee staffer. NSF officials say the restructuring issue is under review by the National Science Board, NSF's governing body.

Senate Sours on EPA Grants Program

A key part of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) 2-year effort to beef up science at the agency—more grants for academic researchers—is now threatened by an amendment passed last week in the Senate.

EPA launched an initiative called Science to Achieve Results (STAR) this year, doubling an existing \$22 million for extramural grants by reallocating funds for contracts. The agency planned to double funds for STAR again in 1996. But Senator John Warner (R-VA) blocked the move by pushing through an amendment to the EPA spending bill that requires prior approval for STAR funding from House and Senate appropriations committees. Warner's reason, a staffer says, is that the senator is concerned that EPA will neglect applied science and fail to revise its "overly stringent" regulatory decisions.

Warner's move "seems to be 180 degrees off of what the Congress has been telling us to do," says a puzzled Robert Huggett, director of EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD). Last year, the Senate appropriations committee wanted "more peer-reviewed research and more support to investigator-initiated grants" in fundamental research, he notes.

The House and Senate must now resolve differences in their versions of the bill, including overall funding for research. The House gave R&D \$384 million, a 15% increase over 1995, but slashed ORD personnel funds 34%. The Senate pooled R&D, personnel, and lab funds in a "science and technology" account of \$500 million—which would cut ORD's budget 25%, but could give it more flexibility to fund basic research. An EPA analyst predicts they'll split the difference using the new account.



John Warner

Anticancer Drug Under Scrutiny as Carcinogen

Next week, a California toxics review panel is planning to reopen a long-running debate over the risks of tamoxifen—a cancer therapy drug now being used in a national experiment to prevent breast cancer in women at risk for the disease. At issue: Should tamoxifen be labelled a carcinogen under Proposition 65, the law that requires California to publish a list of known cancer-causing compounds?

The matter is now before the Carcinogen Identification Committee (CIC) of the state's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHH). In May, the CIC issued a preliminary finding that tamoxifen—a hormonelike prescription drug used since 1978 to treat breast cancer—can itself cause endometrial cancer. CIC will hold a public forum on the listing on 10 October, then deliberate for 6 months before making a final decision. But its actions have already revived an old debate among cancer researchers (*Science*, 10 June 1994, p. 1524).

Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, tamoxifen's manufacturer, claims the panel based its decision on studies not designed to determine if the drug causes cancer—only how well it treats breast cancer—and that the data are insufficient to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. Leslie Ford of the National Cancer Institute, who coordinates the breast cancer prevention trial, agrees: She told the OEHH in a June letter that "it is premature to make a determination as to whether tamoxifen plays a causal role in the development of endometrial cancer." Besides, argues tamoxifen pioneer Craig Jordan of Northwestern University Medical School, the benefits to cancer patients far outweigh the risks.

Zeneca holds that, by listing tamoxifen as a carcinogen, the OEHH would interfere with the physician-patient relationship. The company says a woman's doctor, not California, is best able to interpret the drug's risks for any given patient.