

Social Scientists Want More Respect

■ The pressure is on National Science Foundation (NSF) Director Walter Massey to approve a proposal to give the social sciences more clout within the agency. A draft report of a task force composed of 20 outside social and behavioral scientists and biologists recommends that Massey form a new directorate for the behavioral and social sciences.

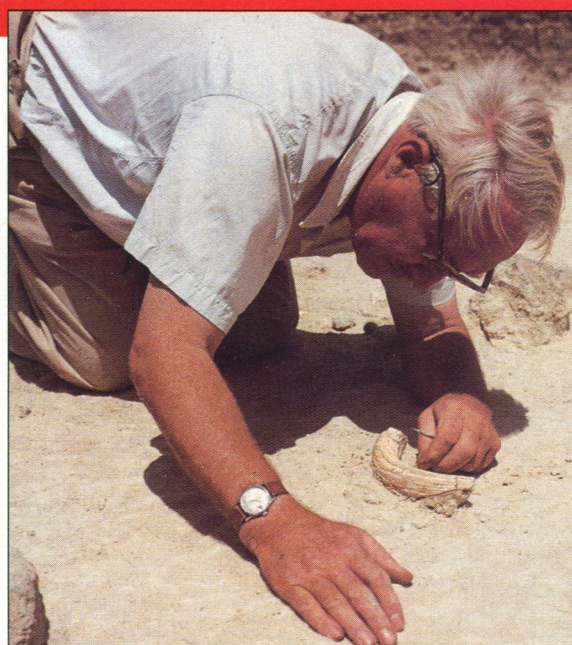
Those branches of science are currently part of the Directorate for Biological, Behavioral and Social Sciences (BBS), one of eight at the agency. Under the new proposal, BBS would be split into two new directorates, one for biological sciences and one for the social, economic, behavioral, and cognitive sciences.

Most social scientists are bullish on the idea—they say it would give them an advocate at the highest levels of the agency

and win them more funding and more respect. Social scientists “haven’t been happy at all with being led by biologists,” says Frank Harris, BBS executive officer. But some social scientists don’t want to leave the fold. Physical anthropologists and archeologists prefer the status quo, contending that they have almost as much in common these days with biologists as with social scientists.

Massey has apparently been waffling on the issue. But even if the release of the task force’s final report (due next month) does spur him to approve the reorganization, some NSF staffers say it probably won’t make much difference, since it won’t change how programs are funded and managed in the short run.

Would Richard Leakey have sided with the biologists or the social scientists?



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OSI Details Charges Against Sarngadharan

■ Even as former NIH researcher Mikulas Popovic defends himself against charges of scientific misconduct levied by NIH’s Office of Scientific Integrity (see p. 728), OSI is gearing up to investigate M.G. Sarngadharan, an industry researcher who collaborated with Popovic and Robert Gallo on a key 1984 AIDS paper that appeared in *Science*. Although sources familiar with the investigation have been reluctant to specify the charges against Sarngadharan, *Science* has received information that outlines the scope of the investigation.

The OSI investigation will cover several charges that had been brought earlier against Gallo and Popovic. Specifically, OSI will investigate whether

Sarngadharan improperly selected and possibly fabricated data in the paper’s figure 2a, which shows fluctuations in the reverse transcriptase production of a cell culture that had been infected with the AIDS virus. In addition, OSI intends to probe Sarngadharan’s possible misinterpretations of the cell culture in the paper’s text.

OSI apparently became interested in Sarngadharan’s role as a result of information it received late in the investigation of Gallo and Popovic. Sarngadharan, who is now vice president of scientific affairs at Advanced BioScience Laboratories in Kensington, Maryland, failed to return repeated telephone calls from *Science*.

Safety First in Germ Warfare

■ As the Department of Defense pushes forward with biological warfare research, it also plans to beef up safety in its research labs with a new Biological Defense Safety Program, set to start this fall.

The new program assigns several Army offices a host of oversight measures, such as establishing a medical surveillance program to monitor workers’ exposure to biological agents and investigating “biological defense-related mishaps”—events in which a laboratory failure allows the “unintentional, potential exposure of humans or the laboratory environment” to germs accidentally unleashed. The program also calls on the surgeon general to devise health standards and medical policy for the safety program.

Army safety manager William Wortley says that many safety measures to protect defense workers and the public from biological agents had already been in place before the Army

spelled them out in the program’s charter. “But we want to be more responsive to public concerns,” he says.



Wide World Photos

Avoiding “biological mishaps.”

A License for Hackers?

■ A bill now pending in the New Jersey legislature could foreshadow state regulation of a new “profession”: software design.

On 24 June the New Jersey Assembly passed a measure introduced by assemblywoman Barbara Kalik (D) that would require “software designers” to pass a written test and pay a biennial licensing fee. Kalik has said the legislation would provide an industry-wide standard for computer programmers, much like the proficiency standards that govern electricians and hairdressers.

Since the bill passed the Assembly, Kalik’s office has

been deluged with calls, “practically all” opposing the legislation, says one of her staffers. Most of the outcry has come from businesses that employ computer programmers—such as New Jersey-based AT&T, which would need to license an estimated 5000 programmers.

The state senate appears unlikely to pass Kalik’s bill this session, but lawyers for the computer industry worry that the regulatory ball is now rolling. Says Ronald Palenski, general counsel for the Virginia-based Computer Software and Services Industry Association, “I predict, unfortunately, a trend toward...consumer regulation [of computer programmers] in the future.”

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