Mark Peffley, Political Science

The New NSF Rules for Political Science: How Bad Politics Can Hurt Good Science

2013: The Coburn Amendment

- Last March, 2013, Obama signed 600 pages of legislation to keep the government from shutting down.
- In the 2013 Continuing Resolution was an Amendment inserted by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) to eliminate the National Science Foundation's political science studies, except those the NSF director deems relevant to **national security or U.S. economic interests**.

Immediate Impact of the Coburn Amendment

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NSF 14-010

Dear Colleague Letter: Political Science Program

November 1, 2013

Dear Colleagues:

The Political Science Program at NSF will be holding its regular and dissertation competitions this spring. As usual, the deadline for both competitions is January 15th with results being announced between the middle of May and early June.

When developing proposals for these two competitions, please keep in mind that the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-6, enacted on March 26, 2013) stipulates that projects funded through the Political Science Program must either promote national security or the economic interests of the United States. The relationship of the proposed research to these goals should be addressed both in the broader impacts section of the project summary and within the project description.

The Political Science Program in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences will continue to engage panels to review grant proposals, using the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria (Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts). Panels will be asked to provide input on the degree to which the proposed research projects promote national security or the economic interests of the United States. Informed by the advice of the review panels, NSF Program Officers will make funding recommendations.

Questions about this Dear Colleague Letter may be addressed to the following SBE program contacts: Brian Humes (bhumes@nsf.gov) and Erik Herron (eherron@nsf.gov).

Sincerely,

Dr. Joanne Tornow
Acting Assistant Director, National Science Foundation
Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences

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- **August 15, 2013**: **NSF cancelled panels** for Political Science while it evaluated the new criteria.
- **Nov. 1, 2013**: NSF **Dear Colleague Letter** to Political Science: "Panels will be asked to provide input on the degree to which the proposed research projects **promote national security or the economic interests of the United States**."

Why It's Important

- **For Political Scientists,**
  - The new rules, *if strictly followed*, would make most political science research ineligible for NSF funding.
  - Virginia Sapiro, Dean of Arts & Sciences , BU: "we will now be the only democracy in the world that effectively refuses to support systematic, nonbiased research that can illuminate the dynamics of government and politics. How embarrassing."
- **For Everyone Else,**
  - All scientists should sit up, take notice and get involved to stop further anti-science intrusions into basic research.
  - If not, this can and will happen to other disciplines.
  - Other disciplines are already taking action:
    - APA: "Concerns arise about further moves against behavioral sciences"

Are these criteria *really* being applied?

- **Yes!** Dear Colleague Letter: Applicants need to "**keep in mind**" the Coburn language when preparing submissions for the next grant deadline, 15 January.
  - **Addressed in** the **broader impacts** section of the project summary and within the **project description**."
- **No!** NSF acting Director Cora Marrett:
  - "But does that mean we expect every proposal submitted to be about national security and economic development? **Not at all**. If the approach is broad enough, it should not be a problem to support the first-rate projects coming in."
- **(Yes) & No?** January 2014 submissions:
  - **Reviewers** "will be asked to provide input on the degree to which the proposed research projects promote national security or the economic interests of the United States." **Programs officers** will take those views into consideration when making funding recommendations.

How did this happen?

- "Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made." -- Otto von Bismarck
- Coburn Amendment:
  - Since 2009, Tom Coburn (R-OK) has been submitting hundreds of amendments into continuing resolutions to keep the government funded.
  - One regular amendment is to eliminate funding for political science.

2009 proposed Amendment

- "PS Research wastes taxpayer money because it supports research on "citizenship, government, and politics," such as the following:
  - bargaining processes;
  - campaigns and elections;
  - electoral choice and electoral systems;
  - citizen support in emerging and established democracies;
  - democratization, political change, and regime transitions;
  - domestic and international conflict;
  - international political economy;
  - party activism; and
  - political psychology and political tolerance."

The "biggest waste," according to Coburn?

- The University of Michigan "American National Election Studies" surveys since 1948 to study public opinion and elections.
  - **Why? Because: "**Americans who have an interest in electoral politics can turn to"**CNN, FOX News, MSNBC, the print media, and a seemingly endless number of political commentators on the internet"** who pour over this data and provide a myriad of viewpoints to answer the same questions."
  - "There is no shortage of data or analysis in this field that would require the government to provide funding for additional analysis."
  - Lepore, *The New Yorker*: "This is a little like saying, when your kitchen is on fire, that it's O.K. because, in a cupboard above the stove, you keep fifty boxes of matches."
  - ***"A conflict-crippled Congress has been keen to defund research into what ails it."***

What should political scientists do?

- Applying to the NSF PS Program:
  - "Address the new criteria in the broader impacts section of the project summary and within the project description."
  - Do not take the new criteria too literally.
- Apply to other, related NSF programs:
  - Law and Social Science Program
  - Sociology Program
  - Social Psychology
  - Geography and Spatial Sciences (GSS)
- Apply outside NSF

NSF DDIG Webpage for PS

- **Deadline Dates**: ABSOLUTE DEADLINE is January 15th. Decisions about support or declines will be made within six months of this deadline date.
- **Project Duration**: 12 months
- **Project Budget**: Maximum of **$14,000** in direct costs.* Proposals with budgets that exceed $14,000 in direct costs will be considered to be non-compliant and will be returned without review. The budget must include indirect costs at the institution's negotiated rate. Indirect costs are not included in the calculation of the $14,000 maximum. Students are strongly encouraged to work with personnel in their institution's Sponsored Research Office to develop the budget.
- **Principal Investigator**: List the dissertation advisor as Principal Investigator and the student as Co-Principal Investigator. It should be clear, however, that the proposal is written by, and the research conducted by, the student.
- **Proposal Title**: The title should begin with the phrase: "Doctoral Dissertation Research in Political Science: …"
- **Project Summary**: 1 single page. The project summary should be a summary of the proposed project. The project summary consists of an overview, a statement on the intellectual merit of the proposed activity, and a statement on the broader impacts of the proposed activity.
- **Project Description**: 10 single pages. Maximum length of the project description is 10 single-spaced pages. Otherwise, all other formatting rules found in the Grant Proposal Guide apply.
- **Letter**: The proposal must include a letter from the major professor who serves as the Principal Investigator. The letter should indicate his/her confidence in the scientific rigor and value of the proposed dissertation research project. The letter should be uploaded as a supplemental document via FastLane.

Why is this bad for everyone?

- "This is catastrophic intervention in peer review"
- Slippery slope:
  - Representative Smith (R-TX 21), Chairman, House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, has drafted legislation that would significantly restrict the types of research projects funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF).
  - It makes all **scientific research vulnerable to the whims of political pressure**.
  - In the end it's not just about political science, but all sciences. The Federal government is facing shortfalls. Basic research is seen as a luxury and eliminating one program may seem a reasonable sacrifice. But if one program is cut, why not two or three? Who should be on the chopping block? **Evolutionary biology? Climate science?**

What can we do to stop further misguided cuts in basic scientific research?

- Persuade UK to join the lobbying effort by these and other organizations:
  - *American Psychological Association*, American Political Science Association, American Sociological Association
  - Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), the Association of American Universities.
    - UK is currently not a member of these two associations.

Actions recommended by the APSA