

Letters

HHS Wants Unwanted Assurance

The Office for Protection from Research Risks of the Department of Health and Human Services has circulated to universities a sample general assurance for them to submit to HHS.

Warning: that catch-22 draft is hazardous to the health of universities.

The 21-page so-called "general" assurance drafted by OPRR formulates procedures as detailed (and sometimes more so) as the regulations which HHS has issued for research that it funds. A university signing the sample assurance or one like it would suffer the following consequences:

(1) It would incur thousands of dollars a year of expense for staffing to handle the massive activities required by the assurance, not to mention the man days of faculty and administration time.

(2) Should the university later wish to change any of the detailed procedures in the assurance, it could do so, after it has signed the assurance, only with the consent of HHS. The university thus surrenders its autonomy to HHS, which acknowledges that it has no authority by law to establish regulations on human subjects for research that it does not fund. It is asking universities to voluntarily place themselves under HHS control on this matter.

(3) If a different funding agency, other than HHS, sets different conditions for its grants, a university signing the suggested assurance could find itself caught

in conflict between the requirements. HHS is attempting to pre-empt control of the rights of other funding agencies.

(4) Since many social science faculty members and students, as a matter of First Amendment principle, will refuse to submit research on social and political matters to prior censorship by a review board, universities which sign assurances like that suggested by HHS will find themselves in the dilemma of either having to discipline faculty or student body members or risk losing their HHS grants or contracts. No university should choose to get into that kind of controversy.

Many major universities, such as Harvard, are declining to follow the HHS suggestions and are writing short assurances that are truly general and which do not surrender their rights to run their own affairs. Some of the major educational organizations such as the American Council of Education are engaged in consideration of appropriate language for an assurance, which will both confirm the universities' determination to protect human subjects and retain its own autonomy.

There is no urgency. No university should sign an assurance until it has consulted its lawyers, the major educational associations and its faculty in the social as well as behavioral and biomedical departments.

Ithiel de Sola Pool
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Setback for Women

Following is my annual tabulation of participation by women in the program of the Annual Meeting. 1982 appears to have been a year of setback for female activity. (As usual, I base my calculations on the final program. Inasmuch as there's a new policy of not including the names of panelists who failed to prepay their registration fees, this may distort my findings.)

	Section Heads			Chairpersons		
	T	W	%	T	W	%
1981	16	3	18.8	137	16	11.7
1980	18	3	16.7	139	29	20.9
1979	16	4	25.0	128	23	18.0
1978	15	3	20.0	131	20	15.3
1977	13	1	7.7	129	20	15.5

	Paper Givers			Discussants		
	T	W	%	T	W	%
1981	520	98	18.8	161	28	17.4
1980	453	99	21.9	160	19	11.9
1979	525	77	14.7	184	35	19.0
1978	500	99	19.8	210	35	16.7
1977	531	89	16.8	204	30	14.7

As usual, when women headed sections or panels, other women were more apt to be selected:

	In Sections Headed by Women		
	% Chairpersons	% Paper Givers	% Discussants
1981	30.8	27.4	17.4
1980	30.4	14.7	12.2
1979	28.1	16.2	29.4
1978	41.2	18.2	33.3

	In Panels Headed by Women	
	% Paper Givers	% Discussants
1981	31.7	25.0
1980	29.3	18.4
1979	26.5	30.0
1978	32.9	32.3

Fifty percent of the 1981 convention's women chairs came from the three women-headed sections as did 31.6 percent of the convention's female panelists and 28.6 percent of the female discussants. 19.4 percent of the convention's women panelists and 17.9 percent of the discussants came from women-headed panels.

One section in which women were conspicuous in their numbers in recent years, when women were the section's heads, but which had few women in 1981 when headed by a male, was that on The Profession of Political Science. (In 1982 this section will again be organized by a woman.)

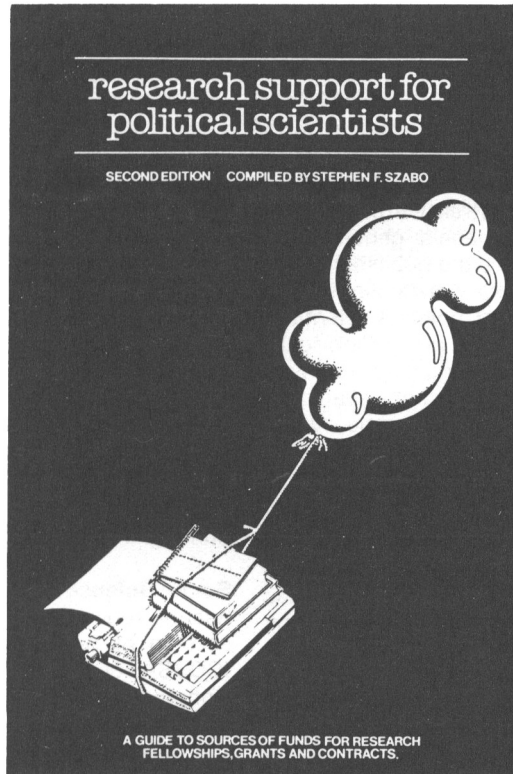
The best showing by women in 1981 came in the section (headed by a woman) on Cities, States and the State. Women were 33.3 percent of the chairs, 31.9 percent of the paper givers, and 21.1 percent of the discussants. The next best record came in the section (headed by a man) on Politics in Advanced Industrial States. Women were 10.0 percent of chairpersons, 26.5 percent of the paper givers, and 40.0 percent of the discussants.

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For once a woman was included in an evening plenary session. There were the usual assortment of stag panels, though none with more than seven males (unlike previous years). There were also large panels with a token female. Whereas some panels, by the nature of their subject matter, would as expected be composed predominately of women (The State and the Liberation of Women; Women, Women's Movements and the Challenge to the State), there were other panels which unpredictably had strong female participation (The Capacities of Governments in the Federal System; The Role of Labor Unions in a Changing Urban Economy; The Urban Fiscal Crisis).

Martin Gruberg
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

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