

A Closer Look at the Trend

January 12, 2003

Federal support for research and development activities at the nation's colleges and universities continues to rise for psychology, according to data compiled by the National Science Foundation.

Top 15 Total R&D Expenditures in Psychology: FY2000 (in thousands of \$)	
University of Wisconsin Madison	\$23,237
University of Oklahoma	\$13,927
Pennsylvania State University	\$11,227
New York University	\$9,909
University of Washington	\$9,493
University of Memphis	\$9,375
University of Michigan	\$9,076
Indiana University	\$9,073
University of California, Los Angeles	\$9,012
University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign	\$8,872
University of Minnesota	\$8,218
University of Rochester	\$7,975
University of Connecticut	\$7,876
University of Colorado	\$7,799
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey	\$7,758
http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/nsf03333.pdf#163.html	
Top 15 Federally Financed R&D Expenditures in Psychology: FY2000 (in thousands of \$)	
University of Wisconsin Madison	\$17,657
University of Washington	\$8,716
New York University	\$7,874
University of Miami	\$6,725
University of California, Los Angeles	\$6,501
University of Colorado	\$6,284
Indiana University	\$6,090

Pennsylvania State University	\$6,049
University of Alabama, Birmingham	\$5,763
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	\$5,512
University of Minnesota	\$5,175
University of Memphis	\$5,143
Oregon Health Sciences University	\$4,980
University of Rochester	\$4,761
University of Oklahoma	\$4,632

[Source: [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3388716/figure/fig1/](#)]

Long considered a field that received less attention compared to other types of science, psychology began to receive an increasing share of federal support in the 1990s, in contrast to a period of modest support for social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s. (The 90s is also the time APS emerged. Hmmm.)

While funding dollars for psychology have increased, federal funding for academic institutions as a whole has declined since the early 1970s but has been balanced by greater support from various industries and other non-federal institutions. Although the government still provides the majority of funds for R&D at colleges and universities, federal support comprised only 58 percent of all academic funding in 2000 compared to 68 percent in 1972, according to Alan Rapoport, Division of Science Resources Statistics at NSF.

Compared to the NIH where many institutes sponsor behavioral research that totals hundreds of millions of dollars, the NSF is a much smaller organization, said APS Executive Director Alan Kraut. In 2000, for example, the NSF component of federal R&D funds for psychology research at academic institutions was officially listed at only \$5 million, whereas the NIH number was \$872 million. What is more, the NSF normally grants smaller awards with an grant average of perhaps \$70,000 including overhead, Kraut noted.

Still, Kraut believes the official 2000 figures for both agencies are nowhere near true indicators of how much funding is really devoted to psychology at both agencies. For example, according to Kraut, much more behavioral research is conducted by psychologists outside traditional departments of psychology, which has been one way agencies have tracked psychology's funding. Besides psychology departments, psychologists are conducting funded research in departments of psychiatry, neurology, anatomy, cognitive science, neuroscience, in various clinical departments, in schools of public health, departments of computer science, linguistics, management, schools of business, schools of communications, and at a host of emerging interdisciplinary centers at the nation's colleges and universities.

A more effective marker of behavioral R&D expenditures, he said, is the priority areas outlined in research announcements. He credits behavioral investigators with helping federal agencies identify areas of research by submitting their ideas.

"It's our influence over the supply side," he explained. "Psychology is insinuating itself into so many research agendas."

At NSF, Kraut sees promise for more behavioral science funding this year. In its 2003 budget proposal, the NSF requested \$5.036 billion in its budget request to Congress, an increase of \$239.9 million, or 5 percent, over 2002. The current status of that funding request (still not final) would have behavioral science receiving a more than 20 percent increase. The Foundation identified social, behavioral, and economic sciences as its second priority research area (behind mathematical sciences), and will seek \$10 million more each year until 2007 to support both individual grants and interdisciplinary centers for studies on complex interactions among society, its institutions, and technology.

The NSF increase, Kraut said, makes sense this year as the five-year period for doubling NIH's budget is ending. The boost in funding is expected to lead to more applications from behavioral scientists, many of whom did not bother to apply to the NSF in the past.

Much of the behavioral science research sponsored by the NSF, he believes, will be cross-disciplinary in the future with exploration in the areas of computer science, economics, organizational behavior, public health, epidemiology, military readiness and education.

While core issues in psychology are still getting their share of research dollars, the funding pattern toward more cross-disciplinary research follows a recent national trend of psychology moving its tentacles into cross-disciplinary topics, said Kraut. He believes the field is undergoing an evolution.

“Our traditional core researchers are growing older and their students are becoming more cross-disciplinary,” he said. “The trends on research funding show that psychology is making itself more meaningful and making the disciplines it touches more meaningful.”