Biobehavioral Training Grants Awarded

September 01, 2007

APS has been engaged in a long-term effort to get the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) to fulfill its Congressional mandate to fund behavioral science. One of the first items on the agenda was behavioral research training, and we're pleased to report some concrete steps in that direction.

NIGMS is beginning to incorporate behavioral science into its training grant portfolio. The Institute is accepting applications for one of its newest training grants: Predoctoral Training at the Interface of the Behavioral and Biomedical Sciences (PAR-06-503), which was announced last summer and will have one more round of applications during the current program announcement. After the last round, this program will be folded into NIGMS's regular training portfolio. This represents a new source of NIH funds for training basic psychological scientists. In these tight budget times, this is an indication of the commitment of NIH and NIGMS to this program. The ultimate goal is to train a new cadre of behavioral scientists who speak multiple disciplinary languages.

"We launched this program in recognition of the impact that integrating behavioral and biological approaches could have on our understanding of fundamental processes and on efforts to promote health and prevent disease," said NIGMS Director Jeremy Berg.

The NIGMS grants are for institutional training programs and the first two recipients were recently announced. They are APS Fellow and Charter Member Randy J. Larsen, Washington University at St. Louis, and APS Fellow Julie Fiez, University of Pittsburgh. Fiez will jointly oversee, with Lori Holt of Carnegie Mellon University, a predoctoral training program in behavioral brain research, which will receive $1.6 million over five years. Larsen's training program will focus on the interface of psychology, neuroscience, and genetics and will receive $1.2 million over five years.

"I am very excited about this training grant," Larsen said. "We plan to train PhD students at the interface of psychology, neuroscience, and genetics. When it comes to thinking about which biomedical fields connect to psychology and are themselves undergoing rapid developments and exciting breakthroughs, neuroscience and genetics come quickly to mind. Plus, these two fields are themselves integrating into a new field called neurogenetics. Our program will add psychology to this mix, and attempt to train people who can be informed consumers and collaborators of research in this exciting intersection between psychology, neuroscience, and genetics."

Fiez and Holt write jointly, "The value that NIGMS staff place on the behavioral research is terrific news for researchers in the psychological sciences. The response from faculty has been tremendous — they foresee a continued infusion of neuroscience into all areas of psychology and view this training program as an excellent way to support students who are extending programs of behavioral research into the realm of biomedicine."

Several APS members were involved in shaping this program as members of a special emphasis panel that NIGMS convened to review the grants, including APS Immediate Past President Morton Gernsbacher, APS Fellow and Charter Member Keith Rayner, APS Fellow Daniel Tranel, and Tim Strauman.

“The NIGMS initiative is an ideal mechanism for providing training that doesn’t just couple biological and behavioral approaches; it weds them. Trainees from these programs should emerge methodologically bilingual,” Gernsbacher said. “I’m delighted to see the program housed at NIGMS,” she added.

As stated by NIGMS, the goal of the program is to develop basic behavioral scientists with rigorous broad-based training in biology and biomedical science who will assume leadership roles related to the Nation’s biomedical, behavioral, and clinical research needs.

ecipients are expected to provide an interdisciplinary research training experience and curriculum for predoctoral trainees that integrates both behavioral and biomedical perspectives, approaches, and methodologies. They must also include coursework, laboratory rotations, and programmatic activities that reinforce training at this interface. Significant participation by faculty and leadership from both behavioral and biomedical science departments is required, as is co-mentoring of trainees by faculty from both components. Support will be for early-year support, typically for one to three years, generally during the pre-dissertation stage. For a full grant announcement, visit: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAR-06-503.html.

The next set of applications is due next fall. The receipt date for the next round is September 25, 2008, and the receipt date for letters of intent is August 25, 2008. If you have any questions, contact Allison Cole at NIGMS: colea@nigms.nih.gov, 301-594-3827.