

The Behavioral and Social Sciences:
Achievements and Opportunities (Washington, DC:
National Academy Press, 1988). Dean R. Geisman,
R. Duncan Lutz, Neal J. Smelser & Sonya Sperlich
(Eds.), pp. xi - xv.

Preface

This is a report on scientific frontiers in the behavioral and social sciences—leading research questions and fundamental problems—and on the new resources needed to work on them.

This volume is a successor to two earlier studies by the Committee on Basic Research in the Behavioral and Social Sciences. In one, *Behavioral and Social Science: Fifty Years of Discovery* (1986), we scanned the work of the past, identifying specific lines of accumulated knowledge and broad shifts in emphasis since the 1933 report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends. In the other, *Behavioral and Social Science Research: A National Resource* (1982), we considered particular cases and presented our judgments concerning the present value, significance, and social utility of basic research in these disciplines.

Against this backdrop, the current volume looks to the future. When this phase of the committee's work was first envisioned early in 1983, there was a clear federal policy of steadily rising science budgets tailored to specific research initiatives. Accordingly, we were asked by the National Science Foundation, the committee's initial sponsor, to help define some discrete priorities for increased investments in behavioral and social sciences research, which would be comparable to the priorities recommended by groups representing other fields of science, such as the National Research Council (NRC) "outlook" report, *Astronomy and Astrophysics for the 1980's* (1982). However, that report and several more recent NRC reports of the same genre, including *Renewing U.S. Mathematics* (1984), *Opportunities in Chemistry* (1985), and *Physics Through the*

1990s (1986), have dealt with a single scientific discipline. We were asked to represent all the behavioral and social sciences, a highly diverse congregation of separate disciplines. The task was not an easy one, and we can imagine that a different group of researchers might have taken a different approach to it than the largely interdisciplinary one that we chose.

The sponsorship of our study has broadened to include seven additional public and private agencies with differing missions and interests, reflecting the diversity of concerns and sources of support for behavioral and social sciences research: National Institute on Aging, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institute of Mental Health, U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Russell Sage Foundation, System Development Foundation, and the National Research Council Fund.* As a result of our multidisciplinary scope and breadth of sponsorship, the initial charge of defining priorities for the investment of incremental funds was extended to include consideration of the general institutional conditions and support system for behavioral and social sciences research.

From the outset the committee members recognized that we could not carry out the task by ourselves. A very important part in enlarging participation was played by two organizations that have formally cooperated with the NRC in the study: the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and the Social Science Research Council. With their assistance, we identified some 2,400 scientists, including both established and young behavioral and social sciences researchers, and asked them about their part of the research enterprise: Where is it heading with respect to intellectual ferment, the generation of empirical discoveries, and major theoretical and methodological developments? We also asked them to identify key researchers to help the committee examine these areas of ferment. We further broadcast our appeal for assistance to 150 journals.

We received detailed replies from about 600 researchers, who identified more than 1,000 topics or lines of research, many of them overlapping, and gave us more than 2,000 names to consider. The committee worked carefully and critically through this mass of advice, rejecting some ideas that appeared idiosyncratic or marginal and seeking common threads among the others. While some suggestions found rather little reflection in the ultimate course of

*The National Research Council Fund is a pool of private, discretionary, nonfederal funds that is used to support a program of Academy-initiated studies of national issues in which science and technology figure significantly. The NRC Fund consists of contributions from a consortium of private foundations including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation; the Academy Industry Program, which seeks annual contributions from companies that are concerned with the health of U.S. science and technology and with public policy issues with technological content; and the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering endowments.

the study and others were highly influential, the committee is indebted to and appreciative of everyone who responded to our call for assistance.

Ultimately, we selected 31 topics as the basis for working groups. Early in 1985 we gave the groups (which had from 5 to 11 members) all of the information and advice we had garnered with respect to the relevant topical areas. Some 6 months later we received back 31 concise papers on research opportunities and needs. These working papers very much informed and influenced this report. We take pleasure in acknowledging the generous assistance that the members of the working groups—especially their chairs—gave us in this study, and we record their names, with our thanks, in Appendix B. For readers interested in exploring more intensively the topics discussed in this report, the Russell Sage Foundation is currently preparing for publication a volume of those papers, which includes specific references to the large underlying scientific literature.

One major issue the committee faced was whether to organize this report along conventional disciplinary lines—to prepare separate chapters about anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and so forth—or to adopt some other scheme of organization. Disciplines are, to be sure, the basis on which academic departments in universities and colleges are usually organized, the structure under which the bulk of fundamental behavioral and social sciences research, training, and instruction is conducted, and the arena in which most scientific careers are made. Major professional associations are also organized by traditional disciplines, as is a large fraction of funding by research agencies. There is also ample precedent for a disciplinary approach, most prominently the "BASS" report, *The Behavioral and Social Sciences: Outlook and Needs* (1969) and its companion volumes, prepared by the predecessor committee most comparable to ours.

Notwithstanding these precedents and conventions, our committee from the beginning favored another approach. We did so partly from a sense that many of the opportunities currently visible in the behavioral and social sciences spring from and support the development of methods, tools, and concepts across disciplines. The topics and lines of research mentioned in our initial survey confirmed very strong interdisciplinary themes, and when we formed working groups, the great majority were interdisciplinary in composition. Finally, the recommendations regarding resource needs that emerged from the working papers and our further deliberations were far more inclined to cross the boundaries between disciplines than to be delineated by them. The interdisciplinary note is strong in all that follows.

All National Research Council reports are subject to review by an expert group other than the authors. In this instance, the review process has been more extensive than most. The boards of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences and the Social Science Research Council participated fully with the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education in the

review process. In addition, the draft manuscript was reviewed by the chairs of the 31 working groups, by scientists selected by the NRC Report Review Committee, and by others at the request of our committee. We are grateful to the many colleagues who read and formally commented on this report; their insightful critiques enabled us to improve it substantially. We have striven to use their advice, along with that of the many other colleagues who have written and spoken informally to us in the course of the enterprise, to more faithfully represent the full range of knowledge and perspectives bearing on our task.

We are indebted to all of the public and private agencies sponsoring this project for their encouragement, cooperation, and support. Among the many officials who have been important in our efforts, we wish especially to acknowledge the energy and vision of the former senior associate for behavioral and social sciences at the National Science Foundation, Otto N. Larsen, and the assistant director for biological, behavioral, and social sciences, David A. Kingsbury.

The former executive director of the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, David A. Goslin, provided experienced advice, analytic intelligence, and administrative backing. The Commission's associate director for reports, Eugenia Grohman, read successive drafts, joined committee discussions, and gave us many useful suggestions for revising the report and polishing the text. The behavioral and social sciences are fortunate to draw on the unusual talents and exacting standards of these two individuals.

We would also like to acknowledge those researchers whose guidance, published work, or other assistance enabled us to develop illustrations: Martin Baily, Patricia Carpenter, Paul Ekman, Robert Hall, Reid Hastie, Marcel Just, William Labor, Ian Madieson, James McClelland, Charles Nelson, and Herbert Pick.

Every committee member participated in the original drafting of the report, but we would like to express particular appreciation to John Ferejohn, Rochel Gelman, Leo Goodman, Eugene Hammel, and Barbara Rosenkrantz, who chaired drafting subcommittees. The tasks of organizing and shaping these texts and revising and completing the report were undertaken by the cochairs and the committee's professional staff, study director Dean R. Gerstein and senior research associate Sonja Sperlich. These two staff members, along with the committee's administrative secretary, Linda B. Kearney, her predecessor, Beverly R. Blakey, and assistant William A. Vaughan, Jr., also managed the administrative and logistical requirements of the study, an organizational effort spanning 3 years, scores of meetings, hundreds of participants in committee, working group and review activities, and forests of correspondence.

The national community of behavioral and social scientists is far too large and diverse—with more than 100,000 PhD's in more than a dozen disciplines—for there to be complete concordance in a single document. This is especially the case with regard to selecting for explicit mention a limited num-

ber of promising research opportunities. The issue here is not so much controversy over any particular selection as the realization that others might also have been singled out. The research opportunities discussed here are a purposive sample from a larger universe of such opportunities. But to the degree that it is a good sample, the resulting recommendations for strengthening the research support system and raising the scientific yield can be considered to speak for and serve the best interests of that larger universe.

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R. Duncan Luce, Neil J. Smelser, and
Dean R. Geisler (Eds.) Leading Edges in Social
and Behavioral Sciences (NY: Russell Sage Foundation,
1989)

Preface

The thirty papers that constitute this volume evolved under very special circumstances. In 1983, the Committee on Basic Research in the Behavioral and Social Sciences (National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council) was asked by the National Science Foundation to help define priorities for increased federal investment in behavioral and social science research. Early in its preparations for this "ten-year outlook" on research opportunities, the Committee polled some 2000 behavioral and social scientists throughout the country, asking them to identify the most promising areas of research in their fields.

With the benefit of about 600 responses, the Committee delineated thirty topical areas that appear to occupy the leading edges of behavioral and social science research in the United States. For each area, the Committee appointed an expert working group of five to ten scholars and asked the group to prepare a 20-page statement outlining the main directions of new research on that topic. These working papers eventually informed and were incorporated into the Committee's final outlook report, *The Behavioral and Social Sciences: Achievements and Opportunities* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1988).

The editors of that report, in consultation with the leadership of the Russell Sage Foundation, came to believe that the working papers themselves were of sufficient value to be published as a companion volume. Such a collection of papers would have the merit of exploring more intensively each of the relevant topical areas and providing specific references to the underlying scientific literature.

The papers that follow are remarkable from a number of standpoints. First, they are almost all interdisciplinary in character, reflecting the nature of the topics chosen and the composition of the working groups. Second, they represent a genuine and direct effort by leading scholars to reach consensus on the leading edges of research in the behavioral and social sciences. And third, these papers provide more detailed

guidance than did the summary report for those readers wishing to delve deeply into one or another of the topics.

Most of the working papers printed here were completed in 1986. The task of gathering the papers, obtaining the cooperation of each working group, and devising a format in which these disparate studies might appear was considerably facilitated by the efforts of the staff of the Russell Sage Foundation, without whose assistance this project would not have reached completion.

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