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UH CENTER HEADS WORKSHOP ON FUTURE OF NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION PROGRAM
Current Training of Future Social Scientists to be Evaluated at NSF Event

HOUSTON, Sept. 28, 2009—A gathering of some of the nation’s best social scientists will strategize about the future of their research fields and how best to prepare the next generation.

In a workshop led by the University of Houston’s Center for Public Policy (CPP), researchers from different social science arenas and mathematics will brainstorm about the future of training programs of the National Science Foundation (NSF), the largest federal funder of non-medical science and educational research.

“It’s a great opportunity to come up with new ways to leverage what we know to improve the research capability of social science,” CPP director Jim Granato said.

The Workshop on the “Integration of Emerging Formal and Empirical Methods and Tools to Enhance Social Scientific Development” will take place Oct. 29 at the NSF headquarters in North Arlington, Va. Researchers representing economics, political science, sociology, public policy, statistics and mathematics will attend.

In the past, NSF has supported summer institutes to promote new ways to train future researchers. Funding for the summer institutes will be exhausted in 2010, prompting an evaluation of the impact of the forums and the student benefits. Additionally, participants will consider their own disciplines, and their varied approaches to research, discussing, for example, how best to characterize human behavior using a mathematical approach and how their fields can integrate the tools of researchers in non-social science disciplines.

“We’re interested in both continuity and change. There are elements in the existing initiatives that a scientific consensus has built around, but we also want to consider the next big things that can enhance what exists,” Granato said.

To that end, participants will consider, among other issues, new visualization technology being used to illustrate more dynamically social science data in an interactive manner. The CPP, for example, has used multi-dimensional visualization images to illustrate data relating to demographics of Texas Lottery players, the use of Conductive Energy Devices by the Houston Police Department and other Houston and Texas public policy research projects.

“We will talk about harnessing the analytic power of visualization technology, where we transition from presentation devices such as bar graphs to comprehensive, dynamic visualization of actual data. For many social scientists, this is a relatively new way to integrate data in both space and time,” he said.

Following the gathering, the CPP is tasked to compile a report for the NSF, from which the organization will consider implementing ideas from the workshop.

Established in 1981, the Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston serves the Houston community as an impartial research organization within the College of Liberal Arts and Social Science. It is dedicated to providing scientific, nonbiased data and analysis to public officials, business professionals, community leaders and residents.

For more information on the UH Center for Public Policy, visit <http://www.uh.edu/cpp/>.

For more information on the National Science Foundation, visit <http://www.nsf.gov/>.

For more information on the UH Center for Public Policy's Concept Visualization Lab, visit <http://www.uh.edu/cpp/cvl.htm>.

About the University of Houston

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