

Coalition of Biological Scientists Meets to Address Report of Commission on Research Integrity

FASEB organized a meeting of over 40 biological and biomedical research organizations to discuss a report by the Commission on Research Integrity (CRI). The CRI report contains recommendations for consideration by Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala. There is strong concern among FASEB societies and many other members of the life science community that these CRI recommendations would be harmful to investigators if they are adopted.

The April 30 meeting of the Coalition of Biological Scientists took place in Arlington, Virginia. Speakers at the Coalition meeting were: **France Ann Cordova**, chief scientist, National Aeronautics & Space Administration; **William Raub**, science advisor, Office of Science Policy, Department of Health and Human Services; **Kenneth Ryan**, chairman, Commission on Research Integrity; **Howard Schachman**, former member, NAS Panel on Scientific Responsibility and the Conduct of Research. **Ralph A. Bradshaw**, FASEB President, convened the meeting and presided.

Cordova heads a working group of the National Science and Technology Council that was charged with considering a government-wide definition of scientific misconduct. Raub was appointed by Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Secretary Donna Shalala to review the CRI report and to advise the Department about implementing the CRI recommendations.

Kenneth Ryan described the Coalition meeting as "constructive interaction" and praised FASEB for organizing the event. Ryan presented the history which led to the creation of the CRI, and reviewed the main recommendations of the commission. Ryan also observed that the science community isn't as aware as it should be of the recommended changes, an opinion shared by many in attendance. Howard Schachman cautioned if rules or regulations are written as an overreaction to problems, that overreaction could be very detrimental to research.

The Coalition went into a closed session for discussions among the society representatives in an effort to develop a unified position. The product of that meeting was a joint letter to DHHS about the CRI recommendations.

The Coalition letter begins by affirming support for "the highest standards of ethical conduct, public accountability, and responsibility in research," and continues: "To this end, we are extremely concerned about misconduct in science, in particular its definition and regulation. The recently released report of the Commission on Research Integrity (CRI) addresses these issues, and some parts have considerable merit. However, there are many recommendations that we consider inappropriate and, therefore, form an inadequate basis for policymaking by the Department of Health and Human Services."

For leading society representatives attending the meeting, the definition of misconduct is an important issue. Many scientists have long supported a precise, unambiguous definition of misconduct in science, such as the definition developed by the Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy (COSEPUP) of the National Academy of Sciences. It is a definition which FASEB believes provides a clear guide for practicing scientists: *"Misconduct in science is defined as fabrication, falsification, and plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reporting research. Misconduct in science does not include errors of judgment; errors in the recording, selection, or analysis of data; differences in opinions involving the interpretation of data; or misconduct unrelated to the research process."*

On the other hand, the CRI Report recommends a broader definition: *"Research in misconduct is significant misbehavior that improperly appropriates the intellectual property or contributions of others, that intentionally impedes the progress of research, or that risks corrupting the scientific record or compromising the integrity of scientific practices. Such behaviors are unethical and unacceptable in proposing, conducting, or reporting research or in reviewing the proposals or research reports of others."*

Many see the CRI-recommended definition as open-ended and requiring extensive litigation to produce clear standards.

The Coalition's letter to Raub goes on to express other concerns with the CRI recommendations:

"... All issues of misconduct should be handled at the level of the research institution, whenever possible. Falsification, fabrication and plagiarism are so detrimental to the conduct of science that government action is appropriate when institutions fail to provide proper oversight of federally-funded research. There are other issues that present a less severe danger to the scientific enterprise. These matters should be dealt with at the institutional level, and government involvement should be limited to encouraging institutions to establish germane principles and educational programs for the full range of individuals involved in the research process."

The Coalition letter to Raub was endorsed by 53 professional societies (*see box on page 7*) with combined membership of over 290,000 biomedical and bioscience researchers.

The Coalition letter is posted on the FASEB web site (www.faseb.org - advance to FASEB Web Server, move to Public Policy, and then to Statements on Research Integrity). Any new developments regarding the CRI recommendations or FASEB actions on the misconduct in science issue will also be posted on the FASEB public policy homepage.

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