

# PEER REVIEW NOTES

## May 2004

### Images of Peer Review

Investigators who have never served as reviewers often wonder what actually happens at a study section meeting. They may even have misconceptions, envisioning a “smoke-filled room” where “deals” are struck. Review staff can explain what goes on and the careful deliberations that occur, but it might help simply to show them reviewers in action, studying and debating the applications. CSR decided to do just that by recruiting a professional photographer on our scientific staff to produce an exhibit entitled "Images of Peer Review." To learn more and see these photos, go to our Web site (<http://www.csr.nih.gov>) and click on the "Images of Peer Review" link under our What's New section.

### NIH Grant Application Numbers

The numbers of NIH grant applications continue to rise. CSR expects to receive another record-breaking number of applications in fiscal year 2004 (October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2004), although the trajectory of the increase has decelerated somewhat for the first time in over a year. Through April 2004, CSR received 47,931 applications in this fiscal year—an increase of 9.5% over the same time period last year. In fiscal year 2003, NIH experienced a staggering 24% increase in the number of applications that it received over the previous fiscal year. Needless to say these increases have strained CSR staff as well as reviewers.

### Internet Assisted Review

Last fall, NIH deployed a new Internet Assisted Review (IAR) system. This system allows reviewers to submit critiques and preliminary scores for applications they are reviewing and also allows reviewers and our Scientific Review Administrators (SRAs) to view critiques and preliminary scores in preparation for a meeting. Use of this important tool has grown rapidly from 117 meetings in October/November 2003 to 501 meetings in February/March 2004. CSR's adoption of the new IAR system is complete, and it is now available to all SRAs and study sections. To date, over 10,000 reviewers have used the system for CSR or other NIH peer review meetings.

There were some growing pains associated with the ramp-up in use of the new IAR system, particularly associated with reviewers registering with the NIH Commons—a prerequisite for using IAR. However, these problems appear to be largely behind us now that additional staff has been added to assist with account creation and that help desk coverage has been expanded on weekday evenings and Saturdays. Several enhancements to the system are planned for the coming year, including clearer prompts during the registration process, more server capacity to speed screen refresh, and many features to assist SRAs with pre-meeting tasks, such as identifying applications that are candidates for streamlining (unscoring). There will also be enhancements that will directly facilitate the job of reviewers, such as a meeting folder that will allow reviewers to access materials posted by SRAs, such as review guidelines and supplemental material submitted by investigators.

For additional information about the IAR system visit the NIH eRA Commons Web site (<http://commons.era.nih.gov>).

## **Reorganization Update**

### **Implementation Cycle 4: Three New Integrated Review Groups to Meet**

The fourth implementation cycle for Integrated Review Groups (IRGs) restructured under the Panel on Scientific Boundaries for Review (PSBR) reorganization is underway. In June/July 2004, study sections in three new IRGs will hold their first meetings: (1) Immunology; (2) Endocrinology, Metabolism, Nutrition and Reproductive Sciences; and (3) Surgical Sciences, Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering. The first meetings of study sections for nine of the 16 IRGs reorganized as part of the PSBR process were held during previous implementation cycles.

### **Implementation Cycle 5: Provisional Rosters and Descriptions for Two More IRGs Are Available**

In June 2004, application receipts will begin for the new Genes, Genomes and Genetics IRG and the reorganized Infectious Diseases and Microbiology IRG. The provisional rosters for the new study sections, which will first meet in October/November 2004, are currently available via the PSBR Implementation Timeline (<http://www.csr.nih.gov/events/timeline.htm>) and CSR's Roster Index (<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/rosterindex.asp>) Pages. The guidelines for each IRG are also available on CSR's IRG Description Page (<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/irgdesc.htm>).

### **Implementation Cycle 6: CSR Advisory Committee Recommends Approval of the Last Two IRG Guidelines**

A reorganization milestone was reached in January 2004 when our advisory committee endorsed the recommendations for the last IRG guidelines to be implemented in the PSBR reorganization: Biological Chemistry and Macromolecular Biophysics (BCMB) and Cell Biology (CB). Applications will be referred to study sections within these IRGs starting in October 2004, for their first meetings which will occur in February/March 2005.

### **Evaluation of PSBR Reorganized IRGs**

CSR will examine the functioning of its newly created IRGs and their component study sections in an upcoming round of evaluations. For information concerning the evaluation process please visit the following link <http://www.csr.nih.gov/events/postcsracomment.htm>.

To keep abreast of the latest news on the reorganization, visit our Reorganization Activities Page: <http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/reorgact.asp>

### **High Hopes and Hurdles—Medical Research Impacts Lives at CSR Too**

The minute Dr. Marian Wachtel heard her mother had septicemia she knew it spelled serious trouble. "My mother wasn't your normal 65-year old," says Wachtel. "She was an insulin-dependent diabetic with many health complications." A blood infection could send her downhill fast. Wachtel knew this because she is a microbiologist at CSR, where she manages reviews of small business grant applications for the Infectious Diseases and Microbiology Integrated Review Group . . . Read her story on the CSR Staff Stories Web site: [http://www.csr.nih.gov/staff\\_stories/staffstories.asp](http://www.csr.nih.gov/staff_stories/staffstories.asp).