

# PEER REVIEW NOTES

## January 2005

### CSR Reviewer Wins Nobel Prize

The news came to the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) on Oct. 3, 2004. Dr. Dan Kenshalo learned one of his reviewers would not likely attend the Oct 5-6 meeting of his Somatosensory and Chemosensory Systems Study Section. Such news is unsettling because it is usually associated with a tragedy and the review of NIH grant applications is disrupted. This time, however, Dr. Kenshalo could not help but be pleased: Dr. Linda Buck at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle would share the 2004 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine. She and Dr. Richard Axel at Columbia University were going to be recognized for their discoveries of odorant receptors and the organization of the olfactory system. Dr. Kenshalo understood all the demands that had descended on her, so he was grateful when Dr. Buck offered to participate in the Oct. 6 session via a conference call. Everyone at CSR wishes to congratulate Dr. Buck and thank her for her service to the scientific community.

### CSR Creates LISTSERV to Deliver News

A new CSR/NIH LISTSERV will now e-mail CSR news and information useful to biomedical researchers who submit and review NIH grant applications as well as administrators at their institutions and at NIH. This LISTSERV will e-mail the *Peer Review Notes* three times a year as well as CSR press releases and other relevant news items as they arise. To subscribe, send a message to [listserv@list.nih.gov](mailto:listserv@list.nih.gov). The message should read as follows: SUBscribe CSR-NIH-L [your full name]. The message is case sensitive, so capitalize as indicated but do not include the brackets. The subject line should be blank. CSR's Scientific Review Administrators (SRAs) will still distribute the *Peer Review Notes* to their current reviewers.

### Stained Glass Gives CSR Research Integrity Officer a Clear View

No one can accuse [Dr. Anne Clark](#) of looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. As CSR's Research Integrity Officer, she discerns complex issues related to possible scientific misconduct by applicants and reviewers. And as Associate Director of CSR's Division of Receipt and Referral, she resolves a host of complicated questions dealing with incoming NIH grant applications and their assignment to the most appropriate review venue and NIH Institute or Center. Bright colors nonetheless blaze in her office when the sun shines through stained glass she has crafted and hung in her windows . . . Clark's stained glass has a unique way of casting light on her NIH career . . . **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).

### Reviewer Worries—Conflicts of Interests

Reviewers are routinely asked to speak up when they believe they have a possible conflict of interest reviewing an application. Most of the time they know when they need to say something, such as when they have a financial and/or professional relationship with an applicant, when a funding decision could benefit them directly, or when there could be a perception of a conflict. There are, however, many gray areas such as having discussed a possible collaboration with an applicant, having collaborated with a consultant listed on the application, or having had a close relationship with the applicant in the past. A significant conflict may or may not exist depending on a multitude of factors. Then there are places where conflicts can arise unexpectedly, such as reviewing an application from an institution where the reviewer has recently applied for a job. Reviewers, however, need not lay awake at night worrying about potential conflicts. They should go to their SRA, who can help resolve the questions.

*Please send your comments or suggestions regarding this newsletter to [PRN@csr.nih.gov](mailto:PRN@csr.nih.gov)*

## Top Ten on CSR's Web Site

CSR's Internet Web site receives approximately 65,000 visitors and 350,000 page views per month. It is not surprising that CSR's "Home" page <http://www.csr.nih.gov> receives the most views (over 13%) since it is the top level navigation point for all content available on the site. However, peeling back the layers of usage a bit further provides some interesting information about the focus of visitors to CSR's Web site. The remaining top nine pages in descending order of traffic are listed in the box to the right.

Pages that did not make the top ten most visited pages on the CSR Web site but hold interesting and possibly important information for applicants and reviewers include:

- **Overview of the Peer Review Process**  
[http://www.csr.nih.gov/Welcome/Grant\\_Application.htm](http://www.csr.nih.gov/Welcome/Grant_Application.htm)
- **CSR Scoring Procedure**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/scoringprocedure.htm>
- **FAQs About Submitting An Application**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Welcome/FAQ.htm>
- **Reorganization Activities**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/reorgact.asp>
- **Reports on Peer Review Topics (Includes links to CSR's Annual Reports)**  
[http://www.csr.nih.gov/events/peer\\_review\\_topics.htm](http://www.csr.nih.gov/events/peer_review_topics.htm)

- **Roster Index**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/rosterindex.asp>
- **IRG Index**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/irgdesc.htm>
- **Schedule of Scientific Review Group Meetings**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Committees/meetings/ssmeet1.asp>
- **Inside the NIH Grant Review Process –Video**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Video/Video.asp>
- **Phone and E-mail Directory**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/Phone/phone.asp>
- **Policy, Procedure, and Review Guidelines**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/review/policy.asp>
- **Welcome**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/welcome.htm>
- **Resources for Applicants**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/resources.htm>
- **What Happens to Your Application**  
<http://www.csr.nih.gov/REVIEW/peerrev.htm>

## Recalibration During Reorganization and the Third Amendment Rule

CSR study sections that are reorganizing as a result of CSR's Panel on Scientific Boundaries in Review process have an excellent opportunity to recalibrate and to decompress scoring. Spreading scores may seem to involve imposing artificial assessments of the proposed research, but when scores are compressed into only a small fraction of the scoring range, the scores are less useful for the NIH funding Institutes, and densely clustered priority scores can translate into artificially large differences in percentiles. It is far easier to maintain good score spreading than to reverse compression. When giving an orientation on scoring, SRAs should offer reviewers some guideposts or anchors. For example, the SRA might give the median and the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile for the last round to give reviewers some indication of what their scores translate into. The SRA can then provide some guidance regarding what direction the study section should try to migrate their scores. Committees should avoid using a presumed payline as an anchor.

Reviewers and applicants are also reminded that NIH policy normally allows consideration of revised applications for only two additional versions (A1 and A2)—see the *NIH Guide* notice <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-03-041.html>. However, because of CSR's reorganization, some investigators may be concerned that amended applications may be assigned to a new study section. Accordingly, NIH has decided to allow a third (A3) revision of those applications where (1) the first revision (A1) was reviewed in a to-be-disbanded study section and not funded, and (2) the second revision (A2) was reviewed in a newly created study section and not funded. For more information on this special exception, see the *NIH Guide* notice <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-03-065.html>.

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