

CANADIAN
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Scientific Affairs Committee Report

November, 2009

A pressing issue facing scientific psychology pertains to the restructuring of the granting councils. Following the granting council symposium at the conference in June, some CPA board members met with the representative from NSERC explaining our position re: studentship applicants from clinical psychology. Although NSERC overturned this decision for the student in question, clinical students will no longer be funded through the NSERC program regardless of the content of their research. The assumption is that the career intention of clinical students is health-based. SSHRC is no longer funding research that has health as the intended outcome. All health-oriented research is supposed to be submitted to CIHR for funding. The ramifications of these changes are potentially devastating as CIHR has not received additional funds to accommodate the increase in applications. CPA staff has met with representatives from all 3 granting councils, attempting to advance CPA's position. A letter to the tri-council agencies is being written and a letter-writing campaign is in the works.

The student representative from the Scientific Affairs Committee has completed an online survey of students asking, among other things, how CPA can optimally meet their needs. The results from this survey are being tabulated and will be used to guide the SAC's plans for advocacy and scientific education.

I have met with Dr. Lisa Votta Bleeker about how the SAC can best interface with the Science Directorate. In order to facilitate communication, Lisa and I will commence monthly phone calls. These phone calls will be used to bring the Chair of the SAC up to speed on reactive items and move forward on proactive items. One item that we discussed had to do with developing an advocacy workshop for the next CPA conference. Although there are a few ways that such a workshop might be organized, the general idea is that the first half would focus on government relations and the second half would involve smaller break-out groups focusing on specific science or practice advocacy. We will also arrange for another joint SAC/Student Section grants workshop.

In conjunction with SAC, Lisa will also be working on some advocacy papers for science. We plan to develop different advocacy papers for different audiences. For example, we intend to write a health-oriented manuscript focusing on psychology's contributions to each of the CIHR institutes. This could then be used as a template for other papers oriented more toward the SSHRC and NSERC side of things. A paper organized by areas of psychology might also be useful for the public and for government to gain a better understanding that psychology is for all.

A science survey was also sent out to the membership recently. Part of the feedback was mixed news. Many of the suggestions had to do with things that CPA is already doing. Part of this is good news - we are doing what we should be. However, an effective communication strategy also sounds warranted. Lisa and I have discussed some possibilities for enhancing communication to the membership (e.g., revamping the science information on the web page; more effective messaging in CPA news). Another issue this fall had to do with the Minister of Finance and allegations of political interference. Apparently, Mr. Goodyear telephoned the president of SSHRC to ask him to reconsider a peer-reviewed decision to fund an academic conference called "Israel/Palestine: Mapping models of statehood and prospects for peace." I consulted with Drs. Karen Cohen and Lisa Votta-Bleeker to see if SAC should respond to this issue. Apparently Mr. Goodyear was misinformed that one of the speakers had some history or record of anti-Semitic /anti-Israel leanings when in fact this was not the case. The Minister never did retract his statements or demands of SSHRC but the concerns that motivated his statements were later determined to be unfounded. SSHRC did as it should which was to defend its rigorous peer review process. The CAUT went public in its response. Other organizations did not go public but responded to the Minister defending peer review and academic freedom. Defending the peer review process is extremely important; however a complicating issue is the fact that CPA is trying to work on addressing pre-budget issues. Given that we are now going into a new budget year, we thought that chastising or holding the Minister to account for something past is not likely to be helpful, especially at a time when scientists are advocating for research dollars. We have decided to send a pre-budget letter to the Minister of Finance focusing on funding for research (the importance of academic freedom can also be woven into this messaging).

The SAC was also consulted about CPA's request for participation in a CIHR research proposal. A multi-disciplinary team of researchers have submitted to CIHR a proposal titled: "Advancing the evidence base in tobacco use and dependence education available to Canadian health professional students: A survey of Canadian entry level programs and professional associations/colleges". Although the members of the SAC provided good feedback on the methodology of this grant, the consultation was also useful in that it helped us to iron out the role of the SAC in such consultations. One of the members of the SAC asked whether CPA had a policy surrounding its involvement in such projects. As the Science Directorate moves forward, the SAC will begin to function like the Council of the Science Directorate. They will work in concert with CPA staff in charting a vision and priorities for Science. CPA increasingly receives requests for their participation in any number of science-related projects. Requests to Head Office are not always predictable and often come with quick turn-around times. Further, the SAC may not always be aware of the contextual reasons or issues that might make an opportunity especially important to take on (e.g., developing important partnerships). In order to be consistent with CPA's governance model (policy-oriented not operational), we have clarified the consultative function of SAC – providing broad feedback (e.g., Is the project a non-starter? Is it so methodologically flawed or its content so inappropriate or ill conceived that we don't want to be part of it? [Likely such proposals will be screened out

before SAC even sees them], Is there something about the project that we must see changed before we signal our participation? Is there something about the project that Karen and Lisa might have missed that might meet with the disapproval of any among our constituency?

Respectfully submitted,
David J. A. Dozois, Chair