

Published by the Office of Foundation, Corporate and Government Relations, *Faculty Grants Quarterly* is an internal newsletter created for Hamilton College faculty members to report on funding and research trends of public and private funding sources, as well as the grant and scholarly activities of their colleagues.



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Heidi Ravven will help the Ford Foundation examine democratic pluralism in America.

Ford Foundation Taps Ravven to Engage in New Philosophical Study

The Ford Foundation — one of the nation's preeminent granting agencies — has asked Heidi Ravven, professor of religious studies, to play a key role in the foundation's examination of democratic pluralism.

The foundation, whose goals include strengthening democratic values, sought out scholars with expertise in the study and critique of religion to develop models that better convey and translate the transnational identity of America. This is an honor for Ravven; rather than issuing a request for proposals, Ford hand-picked noted scholars from various fields and asked them to develop projects on different aspects of religious and cultural pluralism in America.

Ravven is a scholar of Benedict De Spinoza and of the Judaeo-Arabic philosophic tradition of which Spinoza is the final representative. Spinoza is

considered one of the most important of the post-Cartesian philosophers. While Descartes can be seen as the originator of a modernity stemming from medieval Christianity, Spinoza is the originator of another version of the modern sensibility originating in the Judaeo-Arabic world view.

Ravven postulates that most discussions of philosophical ethics are still driven by what she describes as "unveiled and unacknowledged Christian theological assumptions." Therefore, she argues, they capture a cultural group and are not, as they claim, descriptive of how human beings cross-culturally and universally engage in ethical thinking and practices. She suggests that the claim of free will, upon which the various versions of Western philosophical ethics rely, is both highly problematic and also

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culturally narrow and idiosyncratic.

Last spring, Ravven was contacted by the Ford Foundation. A program officer was familiar with her work and thought she could substantively add to the foundation's interest in developing a workable model of American pluralist polity.

ways of thinking about ethics that further illustrate the cultural provinciality of the standard free will account.

"What Ford really wanted out of the last part of the project was for me to develop a workable model for the U.S. based upon Spinoza's understanding of ethics and politics," she added. "They challenged me to look at three historically disenfranchised communi-

a life developed through free choices have impacted them, if at all. She would like to elicit stories of such encounters and consequent mutual misunderstandings between people in the minority and those in the mainstream. Her project will culminate in a book, which will give an account of her study and travels in the form of a memoir titled *Searching for Ethics in America*.

The Ford Foundation grant enables Ravven to take half a year's leave from her teaching responsibilities. Aside from the intensive reading and writing, she has been traveling the country, meeting with scholars, philosophers, religious leaders and members of marginalized groups. She has visited a Navajo reservation, met with Buddhists and Moslem leaders, clerics and lay people in Los Angeles, talked with sociologists studying the recent waves of immigration, met with anthropologists to learn how to conduct interviews and how to do qualitative research, and discussed her project with philosophers and historians of religion. She has several further trips planned to Boston, Chicago and San Francisco.

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— **Heidi Ravven, professor of religious studies**

"When I initially met with the foundation, they had a pretty specific idea of what they wanted me to do," Ravven said. "While the project itself was fundamentally tied to Spinoza, the idea of coming up with this working model was a new challenge for me. I was asked to read a number of books, take some time to think about the project, and, after some discussion with the program officer, I submitted a proposal that, using Spinoza's theories, would develop a new perspective that could change society's vision of the pluralistic polity."

The submitted proposal requested \$150,000 to fund a research-intensive planning year; in July, she received official confirmation that the grant was awarded.

Ravven's project begins with exposing the origins of the notion of free will as a historic development in Medieval Christian doctrine. She then plans to describe Spinoza's Judaeo-Arabic alternative account of human freedom and ethics. Finally, Ravven will begin a tour of America to find other cultural

ties and argue how they could be better integrated into the American polity using a Spinozist model." She opted to investigate Native American Navajos and immigrant Buddhist and Moslem communities.

Her hope is to initiate a paradigm shift in both philosophical ethics and American civic discourse by showing how several non-Christian and marginal American communities conceive ethics without the Western presupposition of an independent free will.

Ravven will also be exploring the three cultural communities' ideas of freedom, America's central civic value. She believes their views will come as further proof of the provincial character of standard mainstream ethics, and she hopes to find that they provide ways of rethinking one of the most basic American civic values (freedom) from different cultural perspectives.

In the course of speaking about values, Ravven will ask people in the three communities about how mainstream versions of ethical values and the culturally mainstream notion of

Meanwhile, she has been able to maintain her primary research agenda, which focuses on Spinoza, Maimonides, contemporary Jewish philosophy and the philosophical implications of the neuroscience of emotions. In fact, she received a Best Paper Award for her paper "Spinoza's Systems Theory of Ethics" delivered at the 16th International Conference on Systems Research, Informatics and Cybernetics of the International Institute for Advance Systems Research in Baden-Baden, Germany, in August 2004.

She has, as a consequence, been invited to deliver a keynote address at the 17th annual conference of the institute this August. She has also been asked to organize and chair a symposium for the 2005 conference on Spinoza, Systems Theory, Ethics and Cognition. Ravven's introduction to the Barnes and Noble Edition of *Spinoza's Ethics* has just been released and is now in stores.

NIH to require public access to published articles

Arguing that the public should have access to the published results of tax-funded research, National Institutes of Health Director Elias Zerhouni recently announced a new policy — instigated by Congress — that is intended to accelerate the public's access to published articles resulting from NIH-funded research (Federal Grants and Contracts Weekly, Feb. 28, 2005). The new policy, which will become effective on May 2, 2005, will request that researchers submit manuscripts to NIH's Web-based archive within 12 months of the final publication.

NIH has argued that the Web-based archive, to be managed by the National Library of Medicine, would 1) permanently preserve all NIH-funded research findings; 2) provide a searchable compendium of research publications that would allow both NIH and researchers to more efficiently understand research portfolios and better monitor scientific productivity; and, 3) make the results of NIH-funded research more accessible to the public.

Not everyone is pleased with the new policy. Journal publishers, in particular, strongly opposed the new policy, claiming that such a move would undercut their business. NIH counters by noting that the policy is not a requirement and, further, does not ask investigators to submit their articles until a full 12-months after the original publication. After NIH posted the policy for public comments, they received well over 6,000 comments.

Zerhouni explained, "NIH recognizes the importance of preserving quality peer review and the viability of a diversity of publishing models. Nevertheless, we expect that only in limited cases will authors deem it necessary to select the longest delay period."

Discretionary spending to be cut in FY2006

Discretionary spending packages, which fund federal grant programs, are expected to be drastically cut in the FY2006 budget (Federal Assistance Monitor, Jan. 20, 2005). Cuts of this size have not been proposed since Ronald Reagan released his first budget proposal. The Defense and Transportation Departments will get modest increases, while programs pertaining to education, commerce, natural resources and social services will likely see significant cuts.

FIPSE falls to pork funding

The Education Department cancelled the 2005 FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) competition due to lack of funds. FIPSE is a highly competitive program that promotes and funds projects that address issues of national significance in higher education. Congress appropriated some \$163 million for FIPSE. However, lawmakers earmarked more than \$146 million of the original appropriation for "pork barrel" projects.

Colleges and universities have had a growing presence in Washington, and earmarked appropriations to institutions of higher learning have increased dramatically in recent years. The FIPSE program has always been filled with earmarked appropriations, but not to the extent as this year. The administration's FY2006 budget request would provide sufficient funding for a competitive grant competition in the coming year, provided few additional earmarks are added.

FIPSE is not the only education program feeling pressure. In the 2005 budget for the department, more than 1,800 earmarks — totaling over \$417 million — were written into law. Education officials have simply said, "This is what Congress did, and we implement the laws as written."

Success rates hit a 15-year low at NSF

The National Science Foundation recently released its annual report to the National Science Board, which monitors NSF's merit review process (www.nsf.gov/nsb). The report confirms what many applicants have suspected: success rates at NSF are dropping and, in fact, have hit a 15-year low. The percentage of successful proposals, which has traditionally hovered around 30%, has, since 2000, dropped to 25%.

Success rates varied across programs and differed by applicant category, however two agency-wide issues are being blamed. First, NSF is processing a record number of proposals. In 2000, NSF received 29,508 applications. In 2004, that number jumped to 43,851. While proposal pressure steadily rose, NSF's budget did not; therefore, the number of awards could not keep pace. In 2004, 10,380 proposals were awarded; in 2000, 9,850 awards were made.

More sobering, the report also found that experienced grant winners have more success in garnering grants than those with less experience. The funding rate for new PIs was 17%, while prior grant winners had a success rate of 29%. Further, success rates for smaller, teaching-intensive institutions (17%) trail those of larger, research-intensive, Ph.D.-granting institutions (26%).

The report was not without some encouraging news. NSF has increased the size and duration of its awards, enabling investigators to address more complex research questions. The average annual award for 2004 was \$139,522, a 3% increase from 2003 and a 22% increase from 2002. Additionally, NSF is processing grant applications quicker. More than three-quarters of applicants received notification about their proposal within six months of submission.

A Sampling of Awards and Submissions

Please join the Office of Foundation, Corporate and Government Relations as we extend congratulations to the following faculty members who have recently received awards or submitted proposals.

David G. Bailey, associate professor of geosciences, submitted, with **Timothy E. Elgren**, associate professor of chemistry, a proposal to the National Science Foundation's Major Research Instrumentation Program requesting \$320,073 for support of their project "Enhancement of faculty-student, cross-disciplinary research through the acquisition of an ICP-MS system."

Karen S. Brewer, associate professor of chemistry, has received a \$50,000 grant from the American Chemical Society's Petroleum Research Fund for support of her project "Rare Earth Calixarene Complexes in a Sol-Gel Matrix: Synthesis and Luminescence." She also received a \$36,500 grant from the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation's Special Grant Program in the Chemical Sciences for support of her project "Materials Chemistry Project Laboratories for Descriptive Inorganic Chemistry."

Timothy E. Elgren, associate professor of chemistry, has submitted a proposal to the National Science Foundation requesting \$279,428 for support of his project "RUI: Mechanistic Studies of Encapsulated Metalloenzymes."

Seth A. Major, assistant professor of physics, submitted a proposal to the Research Corporation requesting \$26,032 for support of his project "Discrete Geometry Phenomenology and an Inner Product for Cosmology."

George C. Shields, professor and chair of chemistry, submitted a proposal to the Department of Defense's Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program requesting \$113,620 for support of his project "Development of a Computational Assay for the Estrogen Receptor." Shields also submitted, with visiting assistant professor **Karl N. Kirschner**, a

proposal to the National Science Foundation's Research in Undergraduate Institutions requesting \$278,377 for support of his project "RUI: Water Clusters and the Biogeochemical Cycle of Sulfur."

Ann J. Silversmith, professor of physics, was awarded, in collaboration with a colleague from Davidson College, a \$50,000 grant from the American Chemical Society's Petroleum Research Fund for support of her project "Fluorescence From Sol-Gel Materials Doped with Rare Earth Impurity Ions."

Steven Yao, assistant professor of English, has been selected as a Stanford Humanities Center fellow for the 2005-2006 academic year. He was also awarded a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. Both awards will support the completion of his manuscript *Foreign Accents*.

Leavitt appointed to head DHHS

President Bush has chosen Michael Leavitt to head the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Leavitt was the former governor of Utah and, more recently, an administrator in the Environmental Protection Agency.

DHHS, which has oversight of the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institutes of Health, is the largest federal grantmaker. Leavitt has yet to comment on grant-making issues and has so far left all research priorities intact. He has, however, consistently touched upon the importance of integrity in research.

"At NIH, we must march forward with life-saving research and always hold the scientists, universities and laboratories accountable for results," Leavitt recently said.