

TO: France Córdova, Vice Chancellor for Research

FROM: Richard P. Appelbaum, Director
Institute for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research

RE: ISBER 15 Year Review: Response to External Review
Committee Report

DATE: May 30, 2001

The ISBER Advisory Committee met May 15 to discuss the report of the external reviewers. I have taken their thoughts and recommendations into account in preparing this response. I would like to request that when you forward copies of this memo and the Committee Report to the various administrators (the Chancellor, EVC, Provost, and Social Science Dean), you include a copy of our self-study as well. This is important because the External Review Committee Report is based in large part on the self-study, which provides context and more detailed information necessary to interpret the Report.

ISBER's Current Role and Continued Existence

Overall, the Report was highly favorable in its assessment of ISBER, and we concur with many of its observations and recommendations (most of which derive from observations and recommendations made in our self-study). The Report heaped lavish praise on ISBER for excellence in proposal development, grants preparation and administration, overall research productivity, leadership, contribution to graduate and undergraduate training (for those students working on ISBER-administered projects), and overall service to the social sciences in particular and UCSB in general. It says in various ways and at different points in the Report that ISBER “has functioned extraordinarily effectively as the campus Organized Research Unit (ORU) for sponsored research in the social sciences” (p. 10). And its conclusion with regard to Question 11, “Has ISBER made a persuasive rationale for continuation at UCSB as an ORU,” is worth quoting in its entirety (pp. 13-14):

The ISBER 15 Year Review Self-Assessment and Proposal for Continued ORU Existence (March 2001), coupled with prior reviews and review committee reports from years 5 and 10, make an exceedingly strong case for the value—and increasing value—of ISBER as an Organized Research Unit at UCSB. These materials alone, and what they reveal about the volume and quality of ISBER work under its current operations, more than commend the continuation of ISBER. From every perspective probed during the intensive 2-day site visit, our External Review Committee only gained in knowledge regarding the essential services that ISBER provides in bringing externally funded research projects to the fore and administering them commendably. Problems cited in prior reviews in years 5 and 10 have been effectively addressed over the last review period. Under the able and dedicated leadership of Richard Appelbaum and a committed

staff, ISBER is more than meeting expectations to justify its continuation as an ORU.

Our Review Committee was impressed with the effectiveness with which ISBER worked with faculty researchers at all stages of the careers ladder and with projects large and small on the preparation of extramural research proposals and on the administration of these grants. Also, the high degree of substantive support provided to centers and even to other ORUs in executing these functions is commendable. We concluded based on the written reports and related documents, direct and indirect questions during our interviews, and direct and indirect sources of data that ISBER is doing a fine job in the context of its mission as it has been defined, and it should be continued with enhanced infrastructural support to achieve these important goals.

As a Review Committee, we suggest not only that ISBER should be continued but also that UCSB should give considerable thought to moving a step beyond during the next period of operations. We felt so reassured about the quality of the basic functions performed by ISBER that we think that, with appropriate planning, resources, institutional commitment, and leadership, ISBER could build on its very effective base to become a vital interdisciplinary research institute at UCSB. We believe that the campus would benefit from an expanded role and vision for ISBER. Absent the decision to move to a new stage in ISBER's development, however, we still conclude that ISBER is very effective in its own terms and, without doubt, should be continued.

ISBER obviously welcomes these conclusions, although I will have more to say concerning the final paragraph momentarily. With regard to the recommendation for "enhanced infrastructural support," the External Review elsewhere concludes that (pp. 4-5):

The shortage of space is of concern since it discourages all of the ISBER projects from locating in the same space and taking advantage of the greater communication and collaborations that can evolve from contingent locations. We encourage the UCSB administration to do all that it can to locate more space for ISBER in its future home in the social science building.

Our impression is that the current ISBER budget falls short of its needs and what is budgeted has too large of a temporary component. The length of our visit and the information made available do not provide us with the expertise to give a formal and detailed evaluation of the budget. However, based on the information that we have, we believe that the budget requests in the ISBER Self-Assessment are reasonable and perhaps even modest. These include a permanent 100% FTE budget line for the Financial Assistant position, a 50% funding for a webmaster position, a permanent budget line for capital equipment needs, a 50% FTE budget line for the Research Development Assistant, and moving the Director of Social

Science Research Development position into ISBER and having it funded at 85% or more.

I agree with all of these recommendations; indeed, I initially made them in the self-study. I do note that at this time ISBER is no longer included in the new social science building, and therefore will need not only to retain its existing space in North Hall, but to expand that space by at least 50 percent simply to serve its rapidly-growing client base.

Finally, I support the following recommendation concerning ISBER's future administrative location:

Our conclusion is that the current arrangement, with ISBER located within the Office of Research, is working well and should be continued. Because social science research is conducted in all colleges and schools on campus, not just by faculty in the Division of Social Sciences, the campus-wide scope of the Office of Research is appropriate for ISBER. Being located in the Office of Research reaffirms ISBER's primary identity as a research institute, not simply a collectivity of social scientists (p. 6).

An Expanded Role for ISBER?

The Report, although positive overall, was also implicitly critical of what it regarded as ISBER's failure to develop a greatly expanded role in promoting new initiatives for concerted research focus at UCSB, one that in the reviewers' eyes would gain ISBER visibility not only at UCSB but nationally as well. The Report stated, for example,

Our only criticism is that ISBER's leadership has not given enough thought to the new directions that the organization could take beyond grant administration. We were struck by the silence that greeted our questions about new visions for ISBER when we asked about this at the ISBER Advisory Committee meeting and in discussion with other ISBER staff. We feel that part of this silence is due to the fact that ISBER has been so dedicated to creating excellent services and so preoccupied with the talk of moving into the College that ISBER leadership and advisors have not had sufficient time to think about the future (p. 6).

In fact, as pointed out in the self-study, ISBER has played a significant role in developing new social science initiatives at UCSB, both through the research development efforts of Barbara Harthorn (largely unacknowledged in the Report although emphatically praised by them in person, including the repeated comment that there 'must be three of her'), and through the seed grant programs she and I administer (the Report acknowledges these, and recommends that ISBER "Permanently continue and, if possible, expand the new "seed grant" programs. These programs are widely regarded as successful and serving a useful purpose;" p. 8).

I feel that despite their excellent and thorough review, the reviewers still misconstrue ISBER's role, which is to serve as an infrastructure for individual researchers and

Centers. This is very different from the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which was recommended as one possible model for ISBER. (Kenneth A. Bollen, who chaired the external review committee, is the Director of the Odum Institute.) Although the reviewers state that the Odum Institute “has a similar mission to that of ISBER” (p. 9), in fact the two are very different: the Odum Institute exists primarily as a “center offering many diverse services to support the research and training of social science faculty and graduate students,” but does not administer a significant amount of contract and grants. During the 1999-2000 academic year, for example, the Odum Institute administered \$1.3 million in grants, reported as a 15 percent increase from the previous year (www.odum.unc.edu). During the year-to-date, ISBER has received over \$3 million in awards, and submitted \$16.5 million in proposals.

The Report recommended a number of ways that ISBER could expand its role, should it so choose (pp. 7-9). These include:

1. *Develop “faculty work groups...to develop ideas for collaborative research,” which could be seeded with small grants (\$1,500 per group).*

This idea originates in our self-study, and we urge that it be given serious consideration. This would involve hosting monthly meetings of 6-10 faculty scholars, to address common interests through shared readings or the pursuit of a collaborative research project. Each RDG would invite 1-2 outside scholars for one of the monthly meetings, for purposes of advancing the research agenda. Visiting scholars would be expected to offer a public lecture as well as work with the RDG over a 2-3 day period. ISBER could begin a pilot project with 2-3 RDG’s, then expand the program if it proves successful. ISBER would provide meeting space; funding for publicity, photocopying, and visiting scholars; office space for visiting scholars; and help with publicizing events. A modest budget of \$10,000 per year would support a pilot program of several RDG’s. (This budget would cover the costs of 3 visitors, as well as fund a graduate research assistant to handle the administrative aspects of the program.)

2. *Continue and if possible expand the seed grant programs.*

This recommendation also originates in our self-study, and is a high priority. The seed grant program has been enormously successful. Barbara Harthorn and I have already sent a proposal to the EVC (dated 5/14/01) via the Social Science Dean, requesting five years of additional funding at \$50,000 per year, divided equally between the EVC and the Social Science Division, to begin July 1, 2001.

3. *Enhance ISBER’s visibility by promoting and/or co-sponsoring colloquia and speakers series, and maintaining a social science calendar of events.*

We plan to pursue this recommendation, although our ability to do so is limited by budgetary constraints. Co-sponsorship costs money we don’t have; promoting original events is more costly. Both of these activities, as well as maintaining a social science

calendar, require staff time we do not currently have available. Limited funding could be provided through the ISBER Director's discretionary fund (\$12,000 per year), along with some staff time, if all of the additional infrastructural support requested above is forthcoming.

4. *Sponsor workshops to upgrade research skills among both faculty and graduate students.*

This recommendation is already planned for implementation with regard to skills related to survey research, which will be provided through ISBER's survey research center. Other possible workshops will be discussed by ISBER's Advisory Board in the fall.

5. *Provide funding and proposal development workshops for graduate students.*

Barbara Harthorn already provides such workshops, and also offers one-on-one consulting to graduate students.

6. *Build training opportunities within ISBER-supported projects at the undergraduate, graduate, and/or postdoctoral levels.*

This is already being done on ISBER projects and in ISBER Centers, which provide extensive undergraduate as well as graduate training opportunities, as documented in our self-study. It could be expanded with a limited number of intramurally-funded fellowships, if additional funding were available. We will discuss this further at the fall Advisory Committee meeting.

7. *Establish a mechanism for archiving, disseminating and/or or providing access to audio and visual data sources, along the lines of ICPSR.*

ISBER is currently storing the extensive videotape library from the National TV Violence Study. This is an invaluable resource, which could be digitized and possibly made available to researchers through streaming video on ISBER's website. Another potentially invaluable source of data is found in the vital statistics collected by ISBER's Health Data Research Facility under its Automated Vital Statistics System, for the State of California; we have already initiated discussions exploring how this data could be made available to researchers through a website. Other ISBER researchers have also developed datasets which could also be disseminated. Such projects could be pursued by the PIs and Centers that originally developed these resources, if additional funding were available to support the substantial costs that would be required. ISBER can provide its PIs with assistance in identifying and seeking outside funding, but lacks the staff or financial resources to engage in such activities itself.

The Report acknowledges that ISBER is short on resources, and that none of the foregoing is possible without greatly increased support:

ISBER and its core staff get uniformly high praise for doing a lot with a little and making very modest dollars stretch to get the necessary jobs both done and done “on time.” Short of additional venture capital and a commitment of resources from across the University to support and promote the growth of this institute (which is strongly recommended), ISBER seems to be doing as well as it can at leveraging resources with as much as it has. The absence of enhanced resources for ISBER in direct support or in a larger indirect cost allocation is indeed a serious problem. While doing more with less is admirable, in the long haul it may not be sustainable, even for the fine work it does, because it limits innovation and is highly dependent on the dedication of individuals who routinely go well beyond the “call” (p. 12).

This is clearly the crux of the matter. As noted below, until ISBER is funded at a level that supports its current rapidly-expanding needs, we will be unable to take on any significant new projects. These needs include, at a minimum, permanent 100% FTE budget lines for the System Administrator and Financial Assistant positions, a 50% funding for a webmaster position, a permanent budget line for capital equipment needs, a 50% FTE budget line for the Research Development Assistant, and funding the Director of Social Science Research Development at 85% or more.

Among its recommendation for increasing ISBER’s resources, the Report suggests the following (pp. 12-13):

1. *Dedicated “time and consultation from a development expert.”*

We assume this means assigning ISBER a consultant from UCSB’s Office of Institutional Advancement, who would assist ISBER in identifying possible donors for various ISBER projects. We have had such meetings (typically involving the Social Science Dean and a development officer from Institutional Advancement), although to date they have not resulted in private contributions for ISBER itself. Individual ISBER Centers, however, have engaged in such fund-raising, with some success. The Survey Research Center’s Benton Survey Research Laboratory has received an endowment of \$261,500 for the purchase of 20 state-of-the-art CATI (computer assisted telephone interview) stations, while the Center for Information Technology and Society, which has raised \$521,838 in endowments. ISBER would welcome additional support from Institutional Advancement, focusing ideally on specific Centers and projects.

2. *Include ISBER “as a target of opportunity in any overall university development plan.”*

Given that UCSB is currently completing a strategic planning processes, we would welcome being targeted for additional resources as part of UCSB’s efforts to develop the social sciences.

3. *Have ISBER partner with center directors “to approach private foundations engaged in funding major projects and centers,” with the center requests including*

“allocations for some core functions at ISBER that add to the value and productivity of the centers.”

Barbara Harthorn already works with center directors to seek funding from various sources, including private foundations. For example, her efforts on behalf of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies contributed to the Center’s successful funding as a National Resource Center (NRC) from the Department of Education; the Center’s overall funding, including the NRC award, Arabic Foreign Language & Area Studies (FLAS) graduate fellowships in Middle Eastern studies, and UCSB matching funds, is approximately \$750,000 for the three-year period from 2000 to 2003. Additionally, the Center is supported by a recent pledge by Saudi Prince Mohamad bin Fahd bin Abdul Aziz of an Annual Gift of \$100,000, to support Islamic and Middle Eastern studies at UCSB. Most extramural funding, including funding from private foundations, explicitly excludes allocations for “core funding” not directly related to the projects in question: all funding typically must be used on the project itself, and, apart from the percentage of any award allocated to overhead (which is typically small on foundation grants), awards cannot be directly used to support ORU overhead. (The formulas that are used at UCSB to determine overhead return for specific campus units, including ORUs, result in a very small percentage of the overhead generated by any particular project being returned to the administering unit.) ISBER is already mindful of the need for proposals to specifically budget for additional administrative costs, such as project directors, conference coordinators, etc. We will certainly be attentive to the possibility of requesting support for core ISBER functions that “add value” to the centers, but we are not optimistic that this will be a major source of funding for ISBER itself.

4. *Develop “a more intentional research program with the professional research personnel” (for example, in the area of health); this could lead to “development of a core research staff dedicated to ISBER work and to the development of new sources of extramural support.”*

Unlike many ORUs, ISBER does not have a large number of professional researchers. Moreover, ISBER professional researchers are independent scholars pursuing their own research projects; they do not comprise a “staff” ISBER can draw upon to respond to RFP’s or conduct “ISBER work.” Nonetheless, we have been pursuing future research projects in support of some of our centers. For example, we have held discussions with Ron Williams, Director of ISBER’s Health Data Research Facility, in anticipation of his retirement as Center Director within the next two years. At that time, the Center’s collection of vital statistics will be turned over to the state of California, and its data could provide a useful resource for health-related research. We are exploring possibilities in this area.

Finally, the Report called on ISBER and its Advisory Committee to seriously examine “moving to a next stage of development,” via a retreat or a specially-charged task force:

We recommend that concrete steps be taken with the involvement of ISBER’s advisory committee to examine the potential and feasibility of ISBER moving to a

next stage of development. It might be useful to hold a retreat or charge a task force with specifically addressing this issue and what would be needed by way of support (both financial and human) (p. 14).

ISBER's Advisory Committee discussed all of these recommendations at its May 15 meeting. It was the consensus of the committee that without first receiving a commitment of augmented resources adequate to meet our current needs, it would be counterproductive to consider bold (and costly) new initiatives. As the Report itself noted,

ISBER is enormously successful at generating and incubating research activity, and at facilitating fundraising and administering grants. These are extremely important services which must be continued; any additional innovations must be designed carefully so as not to interfere with this basic function of ISBER. It is such an important function that perhaps it is sufficient; ISBER will still be very successful if its future is merely a continuation of the present (p. 7).

If and when ISBER does secure the additional resources recommended by the external review, the Advisory Committee agreed that an incremental approach would be desirable. Small, manageable steps, rather than major changes in ISBER's mission and focus, will help to preserve what works well in ISBER, while developing an expanded role.

The Advisory Committee did agree that in the short run, ISBER could do a better job of getting public credit for the work it was already doing, thereby enhancing its visibility. Examples of this include better acknowledgement by all ISBER clients and centers of the institutional base for their research activities, institutional acknowledgement of ISBER's role in helping many faculty outside the social sciences, and better self promotion on all fronts. The Committee also assessed possible new activities that ISBER could engage in to enhance visibility both on campus and nationally. For example, with funding to do so, ISBER could sponsor or co-sponsor far more conferences, colloquia, and other campus events, and make certain it receives proper acknowledgment. Additionally, ISBER could develop a well-publicized "This Month at ISBER" series of monthly events, built around visiting scholars or talks by ISBER researchers.

This fall ISBER's Advisory Committee will meet to discuss next steps. That discussion will be heavily influenced by the University's response to the 15-year review, and particularly its willingness to provide the additional resources recommended by the external reviewers. The Advisory Committee reinforced the Review's conclusion that ISBER already exerts considerable force in instigating and supporting innovative social and behavioral science research on campus, and they are emphatic in their urging that the administration put ISBER's needs high on the campus priority lists.