

SSSP news

News from the uOttawa Science, Society and Policy Network

July 2012

Policy as Values

Opinion

Patrick Fafard

Long ago and far away I took a course in philosophy of the social sciences. Surprisingly, this philosophy course involved a field trip and a very peculiar one indeed. On campus there was a small office in a bit of commercial space that housed, if memory serves, [Technocracy Inc.](#) The organisation was committed to advancing the cause of a rational and scientific approach to life in general and government in particular.

I have repeatedly encountered variations on this desire for a scientific approach to government, most recently in the blog post by my University of Ottawa colleague Scott Findlay provocatively entitled (at least for me) ["Policy as Science"](#). To summarize and oversimplify, he advocates a rational policy process that selects among candidate policies in a rational manner, using the scientific method. My first inclination was to discount if not dismiss the argument by simply asserting that in real life things are not so simple and grumble about the hubris of



scientists.

But the very fact that the desire for a rational approach to policy making is always present and, at first glance, quite seductive, demands a more fulsome response.

Read the rest of the article [here](#).

Rees Kassen Elected Co-Chair of the Global Young Academy

Congratulations to ISSP Core Member Rees Kassen, who was recently elected Co-Chair of the Global Young Academy (GYA) at the organization's recent General Assembly meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa.

He joins fellow Co-Chair Prof. Bernard Slippers (University of Pretoria) and an international Executive Committee of promising young scientists in leading the Global Young Academy.



Upon his election to the position, Rees explained that he is "honoured and thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside so many excellent young researchers from all over the world committed to advancing science, science education, science outreach, and capacity building in developing countries".

Launched in February 2010 and headquartered at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences in Berlin, the Global Young Academy is an internationally recognized body with membership stemming from 54 countries. The GYA provides a voice to young scientists, promotes science as a career choice, helps to narrow the gap between science in developed and developing countries, and encourages the development of novel approaches to problems of international significance.

There are currently National Young Academies in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Scotland, Sudan, Sweden and Thailand, with initiatives underway to establish other national bodies in various countries around the globe, including in North America.

For more information about the Global Young Academy and the recent General Assembly meeting, visit the GYA's website at www.globalyoungacademy.net.

Science Controversies

We are used to frequent public controversy on the ethics and risks of modern technologies (such as bio-, nano-, neuro- or robot technologies). Increasingly,

however, the underlying science itself - its financing, production and use - are in public focus.

The recent debate over the [exhibition on human sexuality at the Canadian Museum of Science and Technology](#) and last week's rally over the "[Death of Evidence](#)" are just two examples of science entering the national dialogue. The associated controversies such as the muzzling of scientists, the shaping of the scientific advisory system in Canada, the distribution of subsidies and the use of scientific evidence also involve questions of ethics, risk and governance.

We at the ISSP are always interested in hearing your views and advice on how to incorporate these issues into our activities and emerging graduate education program. Please feel free to contact us at issp@uottawa.ca.

Publications

ISSP Fellow **Paul Dufour** describes the history of science societies in Canada in his most recent publication, "Advancing Knowledge at the Frontier: The AAAS Saga of Science Societies in Canada".

Dufour, P. (2012). [Advancing Knowledge at the Frontier: The AAAS and the Saga of Science Societies in Canada](#). *Institute for Science, Society and Policy*.

Other News

External Consultation on the Emerging ISSP Program

The ISSP held a workshop at the University of Ottawa that took place on June 19, 2012. The purpose of the workshop was to consult on skills, knowledge, capacities and attitudes that should be fostered and developed through the ISSP program.

There was significant interest on the part of external stakeholders, who at this stage were represented predominantly by members of the federal public service.

The workshop was the first of three planned consultative events that in concert will allow the Institute to develop a graduate program that is tailored to the needs of both students and potential employers.

Comings and Goings

We congratulate our Research Consultant, Carin Christou, on her new position at the Science Policy Division of Environment Canada (as of August 13). Carin did a series of projects for the ISSP that greatly enhanced the capacity and performance of our team. We wish her the very best in her new endeavour and look forward to working with her again in her new position.

Two alumni of Marc Saner's graduate course, "Integration of Science and Policy in Decision-Making", have started work as research assistants at the ISSP. Sasha

Kebo is pursuing a PhD in Geography and Matt Gaudreau is completing his Master's thesis. Both will help the ISSP deliver on a SSHRC Public Outreach grant on the topic of the science/policy interface.

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