

Prominence achieved

Sociology Department wins grant

By Ken Thiemann

The WSU sociology department recently achieved national prominence when it received a grant for \$500,000 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in September.

The grant was won in a nationwide competition with approximately 40 other colleges and universities competing.

This was the second grant received by WSU from the NSF in the past two years. The first was given to the chemistry and physics departments for the establishment of a chemical-physics program in the amount of \$550,000.

With regard to the NSF, it is a relatively new organization founded in 1950 which maintains as its purpose the principle of choosing various departments of universities which are already strong and of national academic prominence. It then provides them with financial assistance so as to make these particular departments that much better.

Melvin DeFleur, chairman of

the Sociology Department, said that the members of the department were very pleased about receiving the grant, but most importantly it was won in a competition with just science and engineering departments.

"Furthermore," he continued, "at the time the department applied for the grant, we were the only Sociology Department in the country to have ever applied for aid from the NSF."

The dream, which eventually turned out to be a reality for the department, had its beginning in the fall of 1968.

At this time several science departments, which had already developed to a point where financial assistance could be used to the best possible means, were asked to submit proposals to the administration so that one department could be selected to prepare a detailed proposal which would be sent to the NSF for evaluation and consideration.

From these tentative proposals the administration received, the university determined that the Department of Sociology was in

the type of position they were looking for, and with additional support could achieve the type of national status the NSF considered when awarding grants.

Up until the time when the grant was received, the department had concentrated the extent of its efforts on building three principle areas of specialization in depth.

These were: deviant behavior, which is the study of such matters as drug addiction, juvenile delinquency and homosexuality; social psychology, which tries to determine the different ways groups have a psychological impact on an individual; and the sociology of the family, which studies the different means by which families form and how an individual relates himself to the family setting with regard to the success or failure of the family.

In the proposal sent to the NSF, the department told of a plan in depth for departmental development which included:

1. Building directly on the existing strengths which had already been developed within the department and are mentioned above.

2. Improving and providing for the student a better means of achieving a more accurate correlation between the programs presently being undertaken by the department.

3. Providing further teaching and research tools with which to advance the program as a whole to a more sophisticated level.

Another purpose for the grant request outlined in the proposal submitted to the NSF was the creation of an Urban Research Center to be located in downtown Seattle.

In the proposal, it explicitly pointed out that the study of sociology at WSU in the past has been severely handicapped by Pullman's rural location.

It went on to say, "If sociology is to develop to a more sophisticated level here it must have a headquarters in the very environment which sociologists need most to study--the urban area."

The explanation provided as to why Spokane, which is closest to Pullman, was not chosen for the location of the center was: Spokane is a relatively small city and has few representatives of certain types of populations which exhibit high deviance rates and furthermore, "it is an exceedingly conservative area which might make access to certain types of data difficult."

The details of the Urban Research Center and its functions include the following:

--The field station in Seattle will be under the direction of a field supervisor, which for the

developmental stage of the center will be DeFleur.

--Office space within the center will be provided for certain types of in-depth interviews.

--Laboratories within the center will be provided for controlled observations of subjects.

--Complete files of official statistics, all local newspapers, city maps and an up-to-date ecological and demographic profile of Seattle will be maintained in the station to facilitate sampling and to increase the sensitivity of researchers to the various social contexts available.

--One of the major difficulties sociology researchers have to face in their work is that of developing contacts with leaders and informants in the organization or neighborhoods being studied and building and maintaining familiarity with these people. The department feels that this problem can and will be corrected when the center is finally completed and researchers are dispersed into the Seattle area.

--Along with the research center, there will be a live-in center where students and faculty will be housed while doing research through the center.

The proposal ended by asserting the department's position by saying, "The sociology of today is the sociology of the metropolis. Unless students receive substantial exposure to field research in an urban setting, graduates in sociology from WSU will be at a serious disadvantage in competing for the professional positions as well as unprepared for the type of research which will be most in demand by society."

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