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February 2009 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Jennifer Brown Urban, Ph.D.

2008-2009 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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What an exciting time to be in Washington, DC! We have a new President, a new Congress, and with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, an unprecedented opportunity to advance science. I am in my first year as an SRCD Fellow and am working at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research (OBSSR) which is located in the Office of the Director (OD).

Since OBSSR is not situated within any particular Institute or Center, I have had an opportunity to learn about and become involved in many trans-NIH initiatives. This perspective has afforded me the opportunity to learn about NIH as a whole and has provided a crash course in the similarities and differences across the various Institutes and Centers at NIH. Since my office is relatively small, I was able to quickly become involved in a variety of projects that harness my developmental science and program evaluation and planning skill sets. My expertise in developmental science has been applied to several core elements of OBSSR's vision. In particular, I have been working on the initiative related to systems science approaches to

health. While the overall goal is to encourage the application of systems science methods to public health issues, I have helped to focus this specifically on the application of systems science methods in developmental science. I am currently leading an effort to encourage collaborations between systems scientists and developmental scientists through networking opportunities at professional conferences. I am also lead author on a paper that is a "call to the field" to encourage developmental scientists to consider the potential of systems science methodologies for addressing developmental science questions.

My expertise in evaluation and program planning has been called upon repeatedly. I have taken on a leadership role in the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR) evaluation working group which is a collaboration between NIH, CDC, and RWJ. I have been asked to assist the contractors with developing a logic model and pathway model for NCCOR and am also working on developing the long-term evaluation plan. My evaluation expertise has also been crucial for work that I am doing with the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) and the national evaluation of the consortium of Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) initiative. I have also been asked to help NCRR develop capacity building mechanisms in evaluation for staff at NCRR and NIH. In addition, I have assisted with the management of contracts for the evaluations of the National Director's Pioneer Awards and the Mind-Body Interactions and Health Program.

Not all of my projects have been directly related to my prior training, and these have provided me with opportunities to learn more about the role of science policy administrators. Assisting with the OBSSR quarterly report to the Deputy Director of NIH and assisting with writing the Congressional Appropriations Committee Report on Basic Behavioral and Social Sciences at the NIH taught me a lot about the relationship between science and policy making. I have also had the opportunity to assist with planning and coordinating the review of proposals for the 2nd Annual NIH conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation. Together with colleagues at the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) I am coordinating the review of applications and assisting with planning for the Summer Research Institute in Applied Child and Adolescent Development.

Even though I am in the Executive Branch, I have had incredible opportunities to learn about the Legislative Branch by participating in events on the Hill, talking with my SRCD and AAAS colleagues who are working in Congress, and by serving on the planning committee of an OBSSR led effort to educate members of Congress about behavioral and social science at NIH. This will take the form of a trans-NIH Capitol Hill poster session on behavioral and social sciences research.

This is just a sampling of the exciting projects that I have in my portfolio. It is hard to believe that I have already had so many opportunities in such a short period of time. I am looking forward to what the rest of the year has to bring and I am confident that all of these experiences will make me a better teacher and scholar when I return to academe next year.