

NSF -- WASHINGTON NEWS

NSF Plan to Alter Division of Materials Research Withdrawn

A plan to dismember the NSF Division of Materials Research (DMR) by returning its several programs to their disciplinary divisions was considered last winter by NSF senior management but put aside because of resistance from various sources familiar with the Division and its goals.

A less drastic plan--to move most of DMR and the Division of Engineering to the Directorate for Applied Science and Research Applications (ASRA)--was also proposed and justified on the ground that such a move would both strengthen the Foundation's support of applied research and give greater visibility and funding opportunity to the fields of engineering and materials. However, strong opposition to the move from the materials research community persuaded the Foundation management to conduct hearings on the issue. Two afternoons of such hearings were held in early January, involving approximately two dozen invited members of the scientific and managerial materials research community from both university and industry. Overwhelming, though not unanimous, support for retaining the present administrative location and structure of DMR was expressed.

The essence of the argument favoring the status quo was that DMR was created to promote the interaction of several disciplines in the study of materials, that the Division is succeeding in its purpose, and that changing it now would undermine that purpose. Moving DMR intact to an applied directorate would necessarily bias the Division away from the basic character of most of its supported research.

As a result of the expressions of disagreement with the reorganization plan advanced in the testimony and through many letters and phone calls, NSF

decided to withdraw the proposals and keep DMR as it is. (However, the Division of Engineering was later moved to the former Directorate for Applied Science and Research Applications.)

The present structure of DMR allows for parallel management of programs supporting the condensed matter sciences (Solid State Physics, Solid State Chemistry, Low Temperature Physics and Condensed Matter Theory), the materials sciences (Metallurgy, Ceramics and Polymers), and the NSF Materials Research Laboratories. Special projects Synchrotron Radiation, the National Magnet Lab and the Small Angle Neutron Scattering Facility at Oak Ridge) are also supported by this division and were recently added to the MRL section.

Personnel Changes Announced in NSF Metallurgy and Materials Section, DMR

NSF has announced the appointment of a new program director for Ceramics. He is Barry Koepke, of Honeywell, Inc., who will serve on a one-year rotating basis.

The previous Ceramics program director, Ben Wilcox, has been promoted to Section Head, Metallurgy and Materials Section, a post that includes supervision of programs supporting research in metallurgy, ceramics and polymers. Previous section heads were Charles Wert, John Shyne and Wendell Williams. All were university "rotators."