

NSF appropriations bill update

Although some part of the FY98 budget are in limbo, Congress has made key decisions about one area of interest to higher education—the National Science Foundation funding, which includes funding for Next Generation Internet activities.

House and Senate conferees agreed on an NSF funding package, which was included in the Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development FY98 Appropriations bill (H.R. 2158), signed into law October 27 as P. L. 105-65. Some of the details of that agreement are beginning to become clearer—and in some cases foggier—and several affect the Computer and Information Science and Engineering directorate.

As usual in conference, the overall NSF mark split the difference between the generous House mark and a positive, but smaller, increase from the Senate. But, because of some reshuffling among categories, the research line item was actually larger than either chamber had given originally. The final numbers are given in the chart below.

National Science Foundation Appropriations FY98

Line Item	Request	House	Senate	Final
	<i>(in millions of dollars)</i>			
Research and Related Activities	\$2,515	\$2,538	\$2,524	\$2,545
Major Research				
Equipment	85	175	85	109
Educ. and Human Resources	625	632	625	632
Salaries, Expenses, and IG	142	142	142	142
Total	\$3,367	\$3,487	\$3,377	\$3,428

Appropriations bills, even NSF's, are typically filled with specific allocations and critiques of particular programs, and this one is no ex-

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ception. Many relate to computing and information programs such as:

Next Generation Internet (NGI). Perhaps the most confusing and complicated action was with regard to NGI. The House had increased NSF's NGI budget from \$10 million to \$23 million; the Senate left it at \$10 million. The conference report established the House mark, good news, but appropriated no money for it.

Rather, they directed NSF to take \$23 million from a fund held by Network Solutions, Inc. (NSI), which came from user fees charged for domain name registration.

NSI was operating under an NSF contract, which specified that excess income be held aside and put in a fund to be used for improving the Internet. That fund is reportedly now in excess of \$50 million. Now the whole issue of domain name registration has blown up into a major fight, with the fund caught in the middle. Lawsuits have already been filed over NSI control of domain name registration and fee collection, and, should NSF actually try to get their hands on that money for NGI purposes, more suits will probably be initiated. Many think it is highly unlikely that NSF will have a clear and timely chance to spend that money this fiscal year. The net effect could well be a zero appropriation for NSF's NGI activities.

The conference report also expressed the Senate's concern that NGI participation be equitably dispersed among the states, and directed NSF to produce a report on that issue for the committees by next March.

Knowledge and Distributed Intelligence (KDI). The KDI program is a cross-cutting initiative involving several NSF directorates, including Education.

The House report was positive, but the Senate had a negative reaction to the KDI and withheld funding. The Senate report found the program descriptions provided by NSF to be

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even lists of specific chemical pollutants permitted for discharge by these facilities (with CAS Registry Numbers included) along with links to chemical fact sheets and material safety data sheets for each chemical.

There are links to pages providing historical and recent data from wetlands losses to environmental Web sites, to state and regional environmental organizations to relevant state and Federal agencies and to the full text of government and private sector technical reports. The EPA Index of Watershed Indicators is highly recommended to a wide range of students and faculty, including those in the sciences, in geography and land use planning, in environmental policy, and in education.—*John Creech, Central Washington University; jcreech@www.lib.cwu.edu*

Encyclopaedia of the Orient

Access: <http://i-cias.com/e.o/index.htm>

Audience: General; college students, particularly those beginning study of North African culture, history, or language.

Author: Tore Kjeilen, Centre d'Information Arabe Scandinave. Kjeilen is a Norwegian citizen who, following postgraduate studies in North Africa, lived and traveled in the region, worked on the foreign news desk at TV2 Norway, and now manages CIAS and its Web site full-time. The site is active and sample entries, checked for accuracy against print sources, contained valid information.

Idiosyncrasies: The site uses frames but works well within them. The interface is appealing and intuitive, and graphical help is available. Clicking certain pages launches another browser session. Applets serve a surprisingly useful function, providing commercials for the site itself, demonstrating help instructions, or supporting the content of the articles. A few broken links exist, and some entries are under construction. An audio feature on some of the articles launches a player that pronounces the defined term in Arabic.

General review: Most users are likely to misinterpret the name of this resource, which deals with North Africa and its culture. This resource is particularly useful for its definitions of religious terms, which are likely to be unfamiliar to the college student learning about North African culture or religions. Besides the solid coverage of Muslim and Zoroastrian terms, there are entries dealing with Babism and even with the Mandeian religion. A sizable number of en-

tries cover geographic features, and many are enlivened with pictures and other technology.



The applet under the entry for Andalucia, for example, which demonstrates the Moorish conquest of Spain, is not to be missed. Many of the remaining entries deal with recent history, current events, and famous figures.

Perhaps because of its non-American origin or the author's interest in the region, issues are presented in a light more sympathetic to Arab interests than the average American expects. *The Encyclopaedia of the Orient* is useful on its own but is intended by the author to be used in conjunction with another resource available on the site: *Miftah Shamali*, a graphically presented geographical overview or "virtual tour" of North Africa.—*Clare B. Dunkle, Trinity University; cdunkle@trinity.edu.* ■

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fuzzy and lacking in sufficient detail. Conference report language expresses the committee's expectations that NSF provide more detailed milestones and guideposts before KDI money is spent, but did not hold the money out of the budget.

Partnerships for Advanced Computational Infrastructure (PACI).

The House raised concerns about the transition funding for the two losing National Supercomputer Centers (the Pittsburgh and Cornell Centers) who were bidders in the PACI competition. They added \$5 million to the transition funds that will be made available to those centers. The conference report removed the \$5 million but retained language expressing concern. It directed NSF to monitor the transition carefully and submit a report with its FY 1999 budget request, which particularly analyzes the fate of "high-end" users of the IBM SP (the system currently in operation at Cornell).

For further information, contact Rick Weingarten, at the ALA Washington Office at 1-(800) 941-8478, who follows NGI as well as Internet II issues for ALA. ■