

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

STANFORD MEDICAL CENTER  
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA 94304

DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

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Area Code 415  
321-1200

To: National Advisory Mental Health Council

From: Joshua Lederberg

I share with all of you, to a greater or lesser degree, a sense of exasperation about the strikingly uneven standards of rigor applied to projects in different disciplines and by different study sections. There are indeed arguments pro and con this heterogeneity of standards which I will not take time to summarize now. The Council has been understandably reluctant to interfere aggressively with the conclusions of individual study sections.

Rather than take up too much time during Council review to attempt to influence your approval of questionable items, I intend to rely on a more oblique approach which I explain here in order not to have to repeat it case after case. At the very least the discrepant approaches taken in different fields ought to be known to members of the more critical and rigorous study sections. I will therefore suggest that while accepting the recommendations made by the IRG for certain applications, that the further step be taken of distributing certain of these to the other IRGs for their information and possible criticism. This will, I believe, be an important channel of intercommunication between these IRGs and, I am confident, will add a certain weight of legitimate criticism in those cases that most urgently require it.

My shorthand for this recommendation will be approval with notice to other IRGs.