Review of *Protecting Participants and Facilitating Social and Behavioral Sciences Research*. Constance F Citro, Daniel R. Iglen and Cora B. Marrett (Eds.).

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*Protecting Participants* represents the findings of the Panel on Institutional Review Boards, Surveys, and Social Science Research, which was established in 2001 by the National Academies' National Research Council. The Panel was charged with examining the structure, function, and performance of the Institutional Review Board system as it relates to social, behavioral, and economic sciences (SBES). Researchers have long complained about problems in obtaining "human subjects approval" for their projects in the SBES. This work highlights the inadequacies of the various systems and makes specific recommendations for improvement.

After reviewing the history and research literature of SBES-related human subjects protection, examining IRB guidelines of major research universities and federal agencies, and hearing from witnesses from various SBES professional organizations, the Panel produced fifteen recommendations. After an Executive Summary, an explanation of the context for the Panel, and a discussion of basic concepts in protecting human subjects, the book presents a history of regulatory activity spanning 1945 to the present. The Panel's recommendations are organized within four areas: (1) enhancing Informed Consent; (2) enhancing confidentiality protection; (3) enhancing the effectiveness of IRBs in handling "minimal risk" research; (4) and general system improvement issues. Helpful appendices include comparisons of changes in legislative language over the years, information about selected relevant organizations, a literature review of research related to IRB operations, and a commissioned chapter on data confidentiality issues.

Among the major points made by the Panel is that IRBs are not being as flexible as allowed by federal regulations in approving human subjects applications. The Panel found that IRBs, even
though overworked, spend too much time revising wording of In-
formed Consent forms without understanding the full context of
Informed Consent processes for the types of populations typically
studied by SBES research (e.g. ethnic and language minorities and
vulnerable populations). The Panel also maintains that IRBs apply
higher than necessary protection standards for research that poses
little or no risks to participants.

The Panel recommends that the federal Office for Human
Rights Protection (OHRP) develop procedures and guidelines for
Informed Consent that are suitable for alternative populations
(including ethnic and language minorities). OHRP should also
provide more specific direction about the conditions under which
Informed Consent can and should be waived. To better protect
confidentiality, OHRP and IRBs should develop and implement
“best practice” techniques to protect privacy and confidentiality.
Flexibility should be allowed when researchers use microdata
that already incorporate such techniques. Both OHRP and IRBs
should better tailor waived and expedited reviews according to
minimal risk involved with SBES research participants.

The book’s strength is in its systematic and clear presentation
of the findings and recommendations, and the comprehensiveness
of scope. One issue that should concern social work re-
searchers is the lack of social work involvement in any of the
committees, hearings, and Panel membership. In order to repre-
sent the unique perspective of social work research, social work
leadership and research organizations must find ways to become
actively involved in future development of policies regarding the
protection of research participants in SBES research.

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Milton Schwebel, Remaking America’s School Systems: Now Sepa-
hardcover, $29.95 papercover.

It is widely agreed upon that the public school system in
the United States is not meeting the educational needs of its
students. Urban schools in particular are known to have a hard
time employing and retaining qualified teachers and often lack
basic supplies and adequate facilities. Milton Schwebel agrees,
but takes a different view than that of most proponents of educa-