Letters

Congrats
Dear Editor:
A long overdue note of congratulations. The Monitor seems to get better with time. Interesting, organized, very readable—professional. The staff is to be commended.

Marvin Metsky
Irvington, New Jersey

Words, words, words!
Dear Editor:
I write to protest the format of the April Monitor. You must realize that much material crosses one’s desk in a constant flow: journals, papers, division information, book notices, seminar announcements, solicitations, etc. It is not possible to thoroughly read everything.
When I opened the Monitor, 10 of the first 12 pages consisted of a sea of unrelieved words, words, words. Generally, these articles are broken up with large-type quotes of special significance. These important quotes serve two purposes. First, they give the reader a cue as to what the article is concerned with, so that the reader may determine if further pursuit would be worthwhile and pertinent.

Secondly, if not of particular personal relevance, they at least leave the reader with some acquaintance with the author’s concern and, thus, enlarge the reader’s frame of reference to what is going on.”
In the April issue, the sea of words is relieved only by the head shots of 12 psychologists (plus a sketch). While these pictures may be flattering to the individuals concerned, they really do nothing to illuminate the subject matter. Please, in the future, part the sea of words with appropriate helping cues.

Melvin Mendelsohn
Chicago, Illinois

First things first
Dear Editor:
It is fair to assume that most psychologists share the concerns Jim Greene voiced in his April editorial over the current administration’s announced plans to reduce funds for research in the behavioral sciences, including education. It is also true, however, that some serious problems have developed in the administration and allocation of scarce research monies, especially in the past 5-10 years, which have greatly reduced the nation’s return on its investment of tax dollars.
A recent series of articles in the Educational Researcher deal with the problem. To wit: Agencies like the National Institute of Education would do well in the future to emphasize individual competence, achievement and promise in funding educational R&D and not institutional influence, subgroup politics or deplorable social goals.
NIE’s allocation of less than 4 percent of its money to foster open and fair competition in research is a national disgrace, even more so because this percentage is largely dictated by congressional mandate. Things have gotten to the point that very little empirical research is being done outside of preferentially funded R&D centers and laboratories. To make matters worse, personnel from such centers and their close associates frequently control publication and sit on the review panels that decide who their competition will be.
As a result, there has been a generalized and increasing tendency to ignore independent scientific contributions, regardless of their relevance. Individuals at some NIE-funded institutions have even proposed purportedly new problems which have already been solved—or have attempted, sometimes successfully, to falsely claim originality where prior work exists.

Admittedly, things are not quite this bad in many areas of behavioral research and at some other agencies. Still, the allocation of scarce research funds tends to be too much subject to the “wagon circle” phenomenon—as funds get tighter the circle of decisionmakers draws closer. Individuals and/or points of view that lie outside the prevailing scientific and/or philosophical circle have little chance of surviving the funding process.
It seems to me that the low esteem with which many hold behavioral research stems at least in part from problems we have brought upon ourselves. If we are to avoid the slow death of estrangement, it seems inevitable that we must first deal with these problems.

Joseph Scandura
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Curious tradition
Dear Editor:
Thank you for sharing my views on the future of research (Social science think tanks,” April Monitor). I thought Ian McNett’s article was good. One teeny-weeny improvement would have been to emphasize that these remarks were made long before the President’s budget was made public.
I also note that your files, memory or whatever still contain the curious spelling of my name (Schwartz) that you introduced in the story about AIR