Journalism School Presents ‘Let’s Do It Better!’ Awards for Coverage of Race

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Legislative Update

Budgets Debated at the State and Federal Level, as Students Lobby in D.C.

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The Placebo Effect: New Study on Pain Management Suggests That It’s Real

BY ELLEN S. SMITH

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Columbia professor has uncovered new evidence of the existence of the often-debated placebo effect. Even the professor himself, Tor D. Wager, of the Department of Psychology, was surprised by his team’s findings, which were published in the Feb. 20 issue of Science.

The study showed that the human brain processes pain differently when people believe that they have been given a pain-relieving skin cream. Wager, lead author of the study, defines “placebo” as a treatment that has no direct pharmacological effect and that may influence one’s experience and physiology through one’s beliefs.

"Initially, I didn’t believe that people would show the placebo effect, but people really do seem to feel less pain because they do," said Wager, who conducted this research while he was a graduate student at the University of Michigan.

For the study, 48 individuals were treated with either electrical shocks in 1-second intervals, or heated patches for 20-second periods. About 70 percent of the subjects said they felt less pain when a placebo skin cream was applied, as compared with an identical cream that they believed had no pain-alleviating effects. FMRI brain imaging (functional magnetic resonance imaging) showed that when the placebo-cream was applied, the subjects’ brains had increased activation in areas that are typically activated by pain.

At the federal level, budget committees in the House and Senate were working on their nonbinding budget resolutions for the first half of March. Federal budget committees are faced with many tough decisions as they aim to control federal spending, extend tax breaks and craft a resolution that will be passed until after the presidential election in November. Nevertheless, Columbia students traveled to Washington, D.C., on March 3 to advocate for student aid. They joined students from Cornell and New York University to ask for full funding for grants and loans. Students and university staff met with more than 50 key legislators and staff. At day’s end, Tim Bishop (R-NY) met students on the steps of the Capitol to thank them for visiting Washington and advocating for student aid. Bishop expressed on the House committee that will reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

Also at the federal level, hearings on visa procedures for foreign students and scholars are lengthy, unnecessary and could become a barrier for international students and scholars. At the same time, an association survey shows that many institutions are experiencing declines in applications from prospective foreign students.

The South Florida Sun-Sentinel in Ft. Lauderdale earned a special leadership citation in its portfolio of work, including its coverage of the impact of Somali immigration on our multicultural topics. This year’s winners boldly confront the multicultural topics inherent in our society,” said Morgan. In the broadcast category, WMTW, an ABC television affiliate in Auburn, Maine, won the top broadcast Leadership Award for an exhaustive series on the impact of Somali immigration on the community.

The Winston-Salem Journal won the Paul Toebken Award for outstanding achievement for newspaper reporting about race with an eight-part investigation on the wrongful conviction of Darryl Hunt for a 20-year-old murder. The award cites reporter Phoebe Zerwick and the paper for upholding the spirit of Paul Toebken, a reporter for the old New York Herald Tribune who died in 1959.