SCIENCE AND GOVERNMENT: Are they still the odd couple?

As is well known, the G.W. Bush administration engaged in widespread interference with science, and much of it made headline news.

Underlying the headline stories was a pattern of suppression of scientific information based on the intimidation of scientists by federal agencies. A recent Union of Concerned Scientists survey revealed that 42 percent of federal scientists feared retribution if they revealed information that their agencies disapproved of. Scientists, unfortunately, have little incentive to speak out regarding their work, and no real recourse if they are punished for doing so. Agencies have many ways to prevent scientists from publicly disclosing their work, from forbidding publication to removing phones from offices.

The UCS has recently completed an analysis of Federal Agency policies and procedures that pinpoints ways in which interference with scientific integrity can be minimized. The UCS's recommendations for the Obama administration and a review of its record in its first few months can be found on the UCS website: www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity/.

Dr. Michael Halpern, Program Manager for the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), discussed the prospects for improved relations between government scientists and the federal administration in an address to the Friends Of Oboler Library meeting on Sept. 22. President Obama, according to Halpern, has said that he wishes to “restore science to its rightful place” as a resource for governmental policy development, and has promised to announce a plan to assure “scientific integrity.” The scientific community is waiting to see what that plan will propose.

There is, Halpern says, an intrinsic source of friction between scientists and politicians. Scientists are cautious and qualify their conclusions; policy makers want definitive answers that are directly relevant to their constituencies, and they want solutions that are consistent with their political principles.

Coming Events: miniature golf in the library and a reception for ISU authors

Shortly after the beginning of spring semester 2010, Friends Of Oboler Library will host mini-golf in the stacks. A miniature golf course, with 9 to 18 holes, will be set up throughout the library from the third floor down the back stairwell to the second and first floors. Students, faculty, and staff, along with members of the community will be invited to try their luck at the lowest scores and enjoy the fun of golfing around the book shelves. This event is intended to be a fundraiser for the library and there will be many opportunities to share in the fun.

In April, FOOL will host their annual reception for ISU authors. All ISU authors of books and works of art, music, and drama published or completed in 2009 will be honored in 2010.
SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE ENLIGHTENMENT

by Leonard Hitchcock
Professor Emeritus

People associate the Enlightenment with the eighteenth century and writers like Voltaire and the French Encyclopédistes. However, the groundwork for the Enlightenment was actually laid in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Three recent Library acquisitions help illustrate the rise of what was then called “toleration,” precursor to intellectual freedom.

Pierre Bayle, though largely unknown to all except historians of philosophy, was one of the most learned and radical of the innovative thinkers living in Holland in the late seventeenth-century. His exhaustive critique of the arguments used by both Calvinist and Catholic orthodoxies to justify denying freedom of worship to practitioners of non-conformist religions was one of the earliest attempts to establish a rationale for complete intellectual freedom. Bayle’s magnum opus was the multi-volume Historical and Critical Dictionary, published in its final form in 1702. The Library has recently obtained a copy of that work, in the original French, with extensive commentaries and notes, published in Paris in 1820.

Another resident of Holland, at roughly the same time, was Philip van Limborch, a minister of a non-conformist Calvinist sect. Limborch represents a more moderate position regarding freedom of thought and religious practice. His own sect, the Remonstrants, had split with orthodox Calvinism on the matter of its doctrine of predestination. For more than 10 years, the Remonstrants were suppressed by the Dutch government and forced to hold their religious services secretly in members’ homes. Not surprisingly, Limborch was one of those who wrote against such intolerance. His arguments, however, dealt only with the desirability of toleration between Christians.

Unlike Bayle, he thought it quite appropriate to outlaw atheism.

One of Limborch’s major works was his History of the Inquisition, published in 1692. The Inquisition, it should be noted, still existed in the 17th century, but it was already being written about as the definitive historical lesson on what goes wrong when religious intolerance is allowed to have its way. Limborch’s historical study thus allowed him to draw all the appropriate conclusions regarding the dangers of defending orthodoxy by coercion. The History, originally written in Latin, was translated into English by an English minister in 1731, and his substantial introduction gives us an opportunity to study a slightly later version of the argument for toleration. The Library’s copy of this translation of Limborch’s work was acquired thanks to funding from FOOL.

The Inquisition did continue, side by side with the toleration movement, well into the 18th century. The Library’s final acquisition is a reproduction of one of the many manuals that were published, in various languages, from the 13th century on, as guides for inquisitors. The original edition of this Italian-language manual appeared in 1687. Our copy is from a later edition, published in 1730.

Leonard Hitchcock, Russell Wahl, and Pamela Park discuss the FOOL’s most recent donation to Oboler Library.