

**Main points of the presentation by Dr William A. Blanpied,
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(at the 3rd Meeting of NISTEP External Evaluation Committee, June 21, 2002)

**< Point #1: The recent situation of NISTEP's cooperation and exchange with NSF,
as well as other US organizations >**

- NSF has enjoyed close working relations with NISTEP since its establishment in 1988, such as mutual researchers exchange, continuous information and data exchange, and frequent visits of Directors of the NSF Tokyo Office to NISTEP.
- NSF is quite different from NISTEP, in terms of its primary mission. When NSF needs a substantial policy study it normally contracts with an external organization, such as the National Academy of Sciences. There are individuals scattered around NSF who engage in policy-relevant work.

**< Point #2: The level of achievements and the relevance of NISTEP's major
research outputs for science and technology policy in the
international context, in comparison with those of the world's other
leading institutions including NSF >**

- The only periodic publication produced by NISTEP that can be compared directly with NSF's would be its *S&T Indicators* series. It can be said without hesitation that NISTEP's *Indicators* series are highly regarded not only by NSF, but by S&T policy specialists throughout the world.
- Another periodic publications of NISTEP that are justifiably regarded as being first rate are the results of its *Technology Foresight* studies. These have come to be so highly regarded that Japan is reputed to be the leader in this type of studies. For example, in Vietnam's National Institute for S&T Policy and Strategy Studies (NISTPASS), the group conducting technology foresight studies looks to Japan – particularly NISTEP – for guidance. (NISTEP already hosted two NISTPASS staffs, and is offering to host additional qualified staff.)
- Other than the *Indicators* and *Foresight* studies, it is difficult to comment on the quality of NISTEP's research simply because few of its publications are translated into English. It is far better for NISTEP to devote its limited resources to research to serve the interests of Japan, than to provide translations of all its publications. On the other hand, NISTEP might want to consider providing English versions of a few more of its major reports, which would allow experts engaged in similar research in other countries become more familiar with NISTEP.
- Comparing the quality of NISTEP's research with that of comparable foreign institutions is so difficult, since in the field of policy research there is no universal character that transcends national boundaries, except for methodologies and

measurement. Thus the quality of NISTEP's research needs to be assessed according to two criteria: first, the extent to which the problems address are regarded as significant by Japanese policy and decision makers; and, second, the quality of the research carried out on those particular problems (which can be assessed by international standards). It is appropriate for NISTEP to aspire to being a first rate research organization by international standards. However, it cannot be a world class organization if it is not first and foremost an organization that is relevant to the needs of Japan.

- NISTEP's research should not be assessed in terms appropriate to policy research carried out in academic institutions. NISTEP's researchers cannot select their research problems without regard to their national significance. But in exchange, they have a much great opportunity to conduct research that can make a real difference to Japan.

< Point #3: The appropriateness and relevance of the main directions of NISTEP's Medium-term Research Plan from a global viewpoint >

- The objectives of NISTEP's Medium-term Plan are to define research directions to: 1) help the Council of S&T Policy assess progress on various aspects of its policies, and 2) provide a foundation for formulating the Third S&T Basic Plan. These objectives satisfy the criterion of being significant to Japanese policy and decision makers.
- The Plan classifies NISTEP's research activities into three independent areas, and a fourth common or comprehensive area. These broad areas would be considered pertinent in most developed countries. But there are extensive lists of specific sub-topics for research under each area. Each individual sub-topic may well meet the essential criterion of being significant in the national context, but the Plan seems to make no attempt to assign priorities to these many sub-topics. Thus it is wondered whether NISTEP's researchers may be attempting to conduct research in too many different directions, and which came first: the three major areas, or the sub-topics themselves.
- Will the attempt to cover so many divergent sub-topics result in research of less than first rate quality? In doing so, NISTEP may be also in danger of judging itself according to criteria appropriate to a university but may not be appropriate for an organization which should serve the needs of Japanese policy makers.
- Seeking answers to these questions will be important in determining the quality and relevance of NISTEP's research not only from a global but from a national perspective.