For Immediate Release

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Faculty members at ASU's Center for Nanotechnology in Society receive half-million dollar grant from National Science Foundation

The Socio-Technical Integration Research Project (STIR) has global reach

April 1, 2009 (Tempe, AZ) – Two Arizona State University faculty members – Erik Fisher, Ph.D., assistant research professor, Center for Nanotechnology in Society (CNS-ASU), and David H. Guston, Ph.D., director of CNS-ASU – have been awarded a three-year, $540,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. The grant will support the Socio-Technical Integration Research Project (STIR), which will study the extent to which collaborations between social and natural scientists working alongside one another in research laboratories may advance responsible innovation. The STIR project coordinates 20 such studies in laboratories in North America, Western Europe and East Asia.

While policies in many nations are placing new pressures on laboratories to address broader ethical, legal and social dimensions of their work, neither the capacity of laboratories to respond to such pressures nor the role that interdisciplinary collaborations may play in enhancing responsiveness is well understood or empirically supported. "The STIR project takes to heart longstanding calls for collaboration between social and natural scientists," said Fisher. "By conducting and assessing a coordinated set of international laboratory engagement studies, the project ultimately will seek to inform the design and implementation of effective forms of responsible innovation."

STIR will train ten doctoral students from a number of social science and humanities perspectives to each carry out paired laboratory studies based on a research method developed by Fisher, the project's principal investigator, in his doctoral research at the University of Colorado at Boulder. These students – half in the United States and half in other countries – will spend approximately four months working intimately with scientists and engineers in two laboratories, one in their home countries and one abroad. The paired international studies will allow them to gain comparative understanding of the capacity of laboratories to respond to policies for responsible innovation.

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”The project is an immensely ambitious one, but one with a profound potential payoff,” said Guston, the project’s co-principal investigator. “Training a global cohort of students and gaining a detailed understanding of how interdisciplinary collaborations can assist in stimulating laboratories’ responsiveness to public values will be a significant move forward.”

In August, Fisher will become a tenure-track assistant professor in ASU’s Department of Political Science and will retain a research appointment at the Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes (CSPO), which houses CNS-ASU. Guston, in addition to directing CNS-ASU, also is a professor of political science and co-director of CSPO.

The STIR project is co-funded through the NSF programs in Science, Technology & Society; Biology and Society; Mathematical and Physical Sciences and Society; Science of Science and Innovation Policy; and Office of International Science and Engineering. The project will be administered through CNS-ASU, which is one of two NSF-funded Nano-scale Science and Engineering Centers dedicated to studying the societal implications of nano-scale science and engineering research, and improving the societal outcomes of nanotechnologies through enhancing the societal capacity to understand and make informed choices.

For more information about STIR, visit online at http://cns.asu.edu/stir. For more information about CNS-ASU, visit online at http://cns.asu.edu. For more information about CSPO, visit online at http://www.cspo.org. For more information about ASU, visit online at http://asu.edu.

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