

Next Generation Investigators NAS Initiative: NIH Perspectives

Michael S Lauer, MD

Deputy Director for Extramural Research, National Institutes of Health

Many thanks to Jon Lorsch (NIGMS) and to OD/OER/OPAC/DPEA/Statistical Analysis and Reporting Branch

First Committee Meeting on the NAS
Next Generation Investigators Initiative

Monday, January 9, 2017

NAS Room 120; 2101 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, D.C.



A History of New and Early Stage Investigator Policies and Data History of Commitment to New Investigators

“New investigators are the innovators of the future - they pioneer new areas of investigation. Entry of new investigators into the ranks of independent, NIH-funded researchers is essential to the health of our country's biomedical research enterprise.”

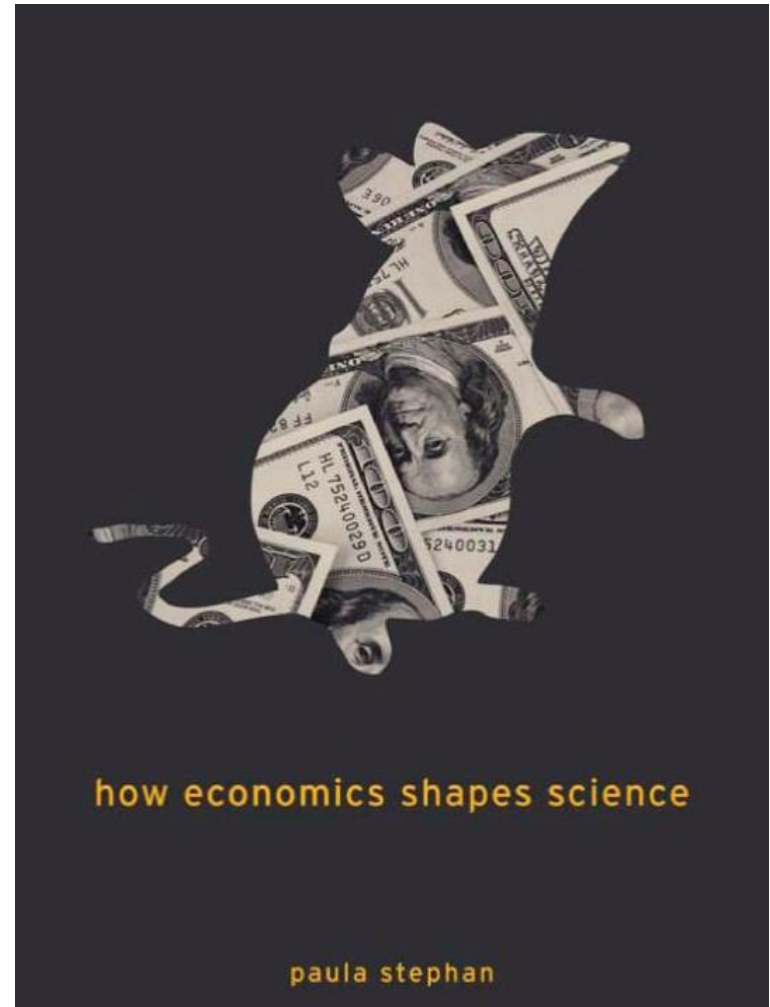
Sally Rockey, PhD

http://grants.nih.gov/policy/new_investigators/history.htm

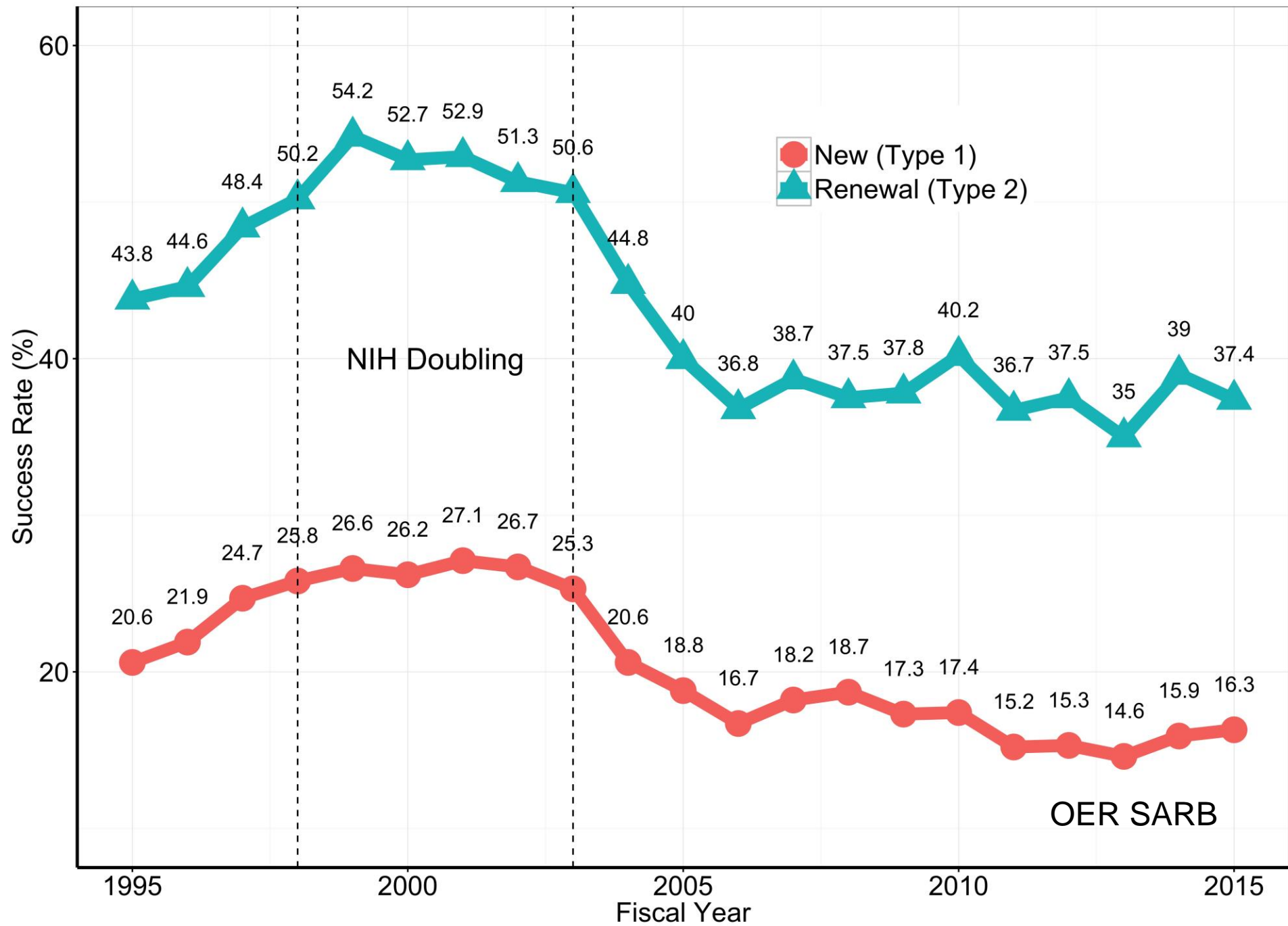
Not Just a Matter of Money

“It is tempting to assume that money is the answer... Additional funds should translate into higher success rates ... [and] should also mean more jobs and grants for young researchers.”

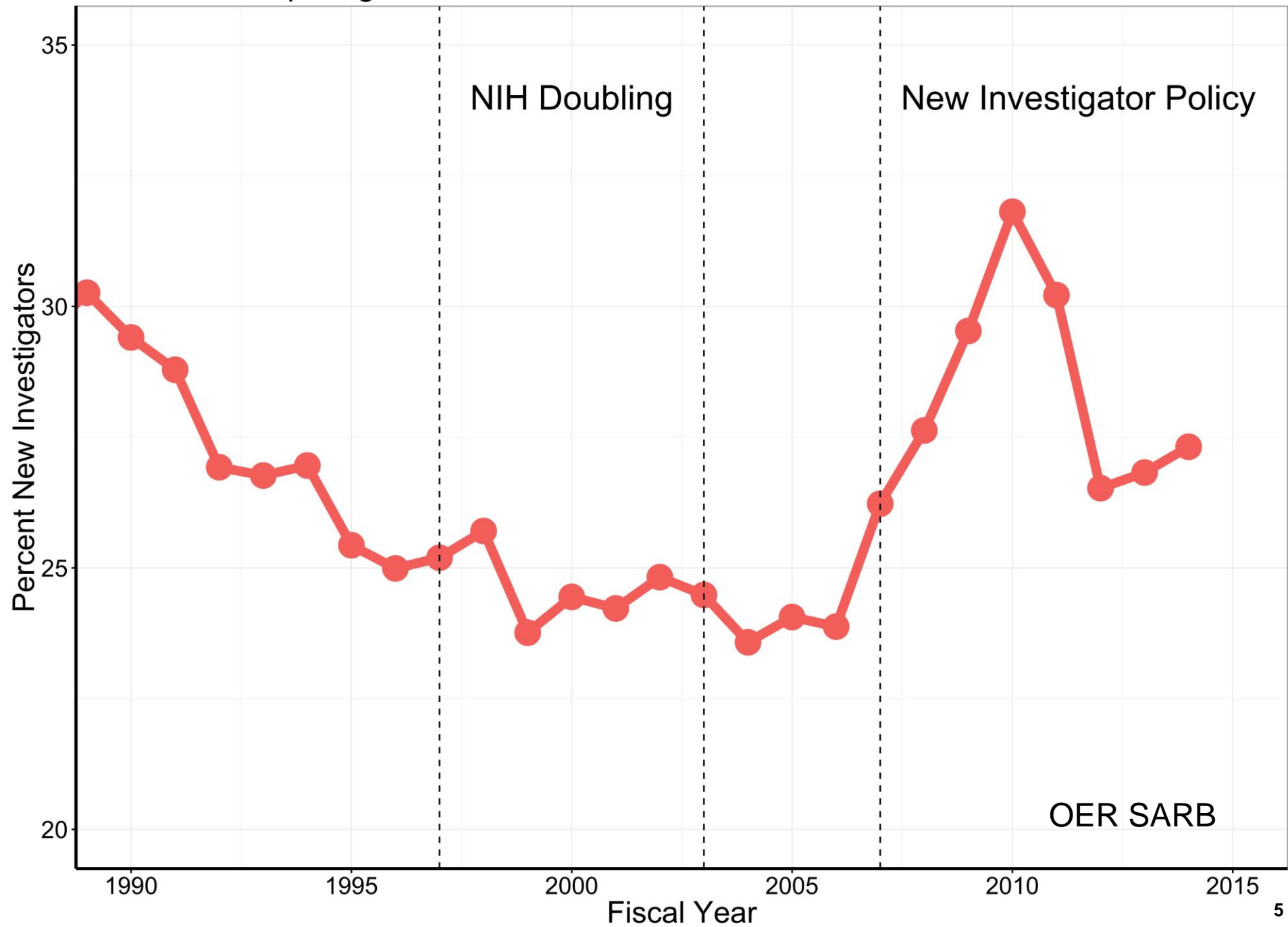
- Paula Stephan



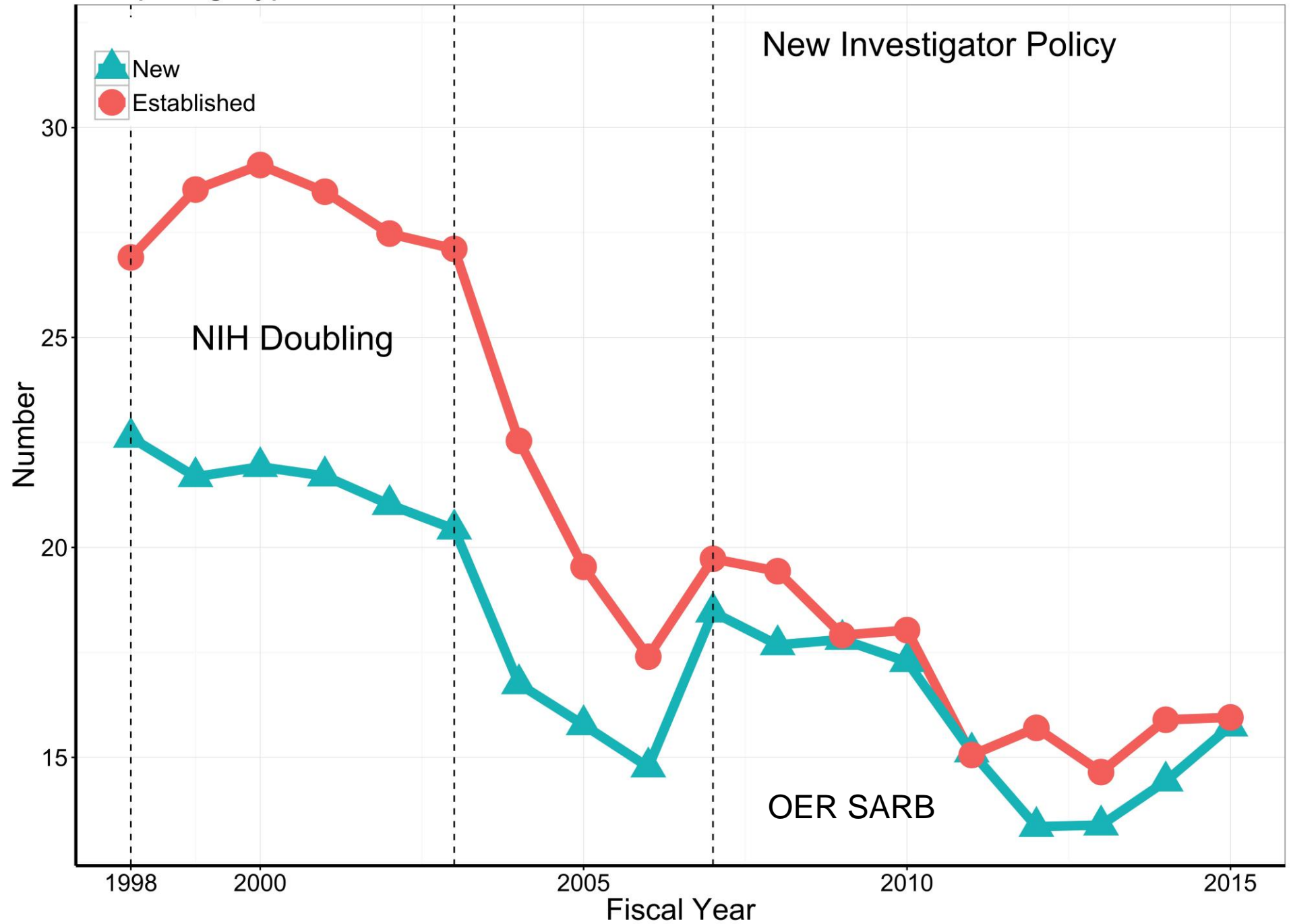
Success Rates over Time



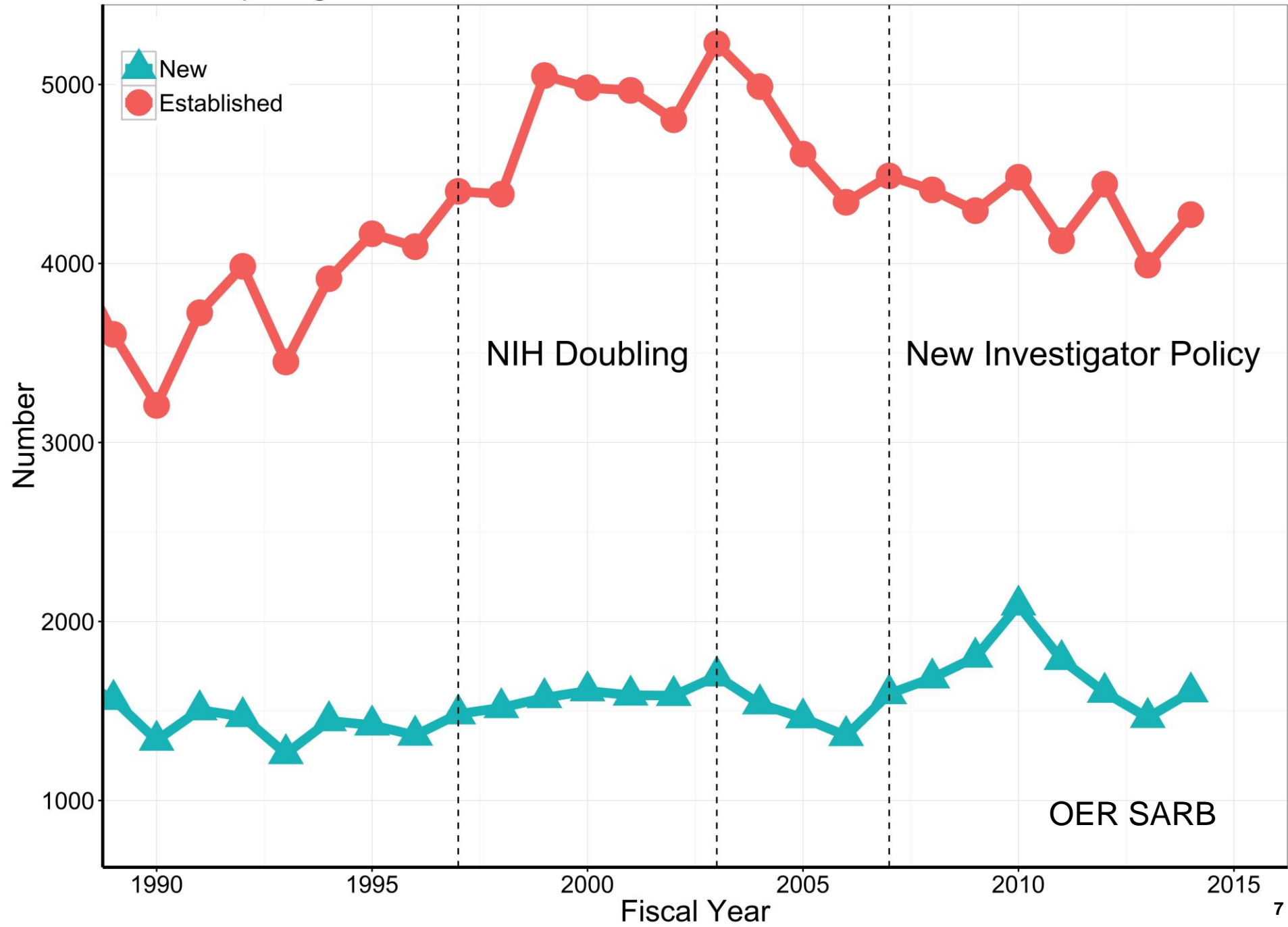
Competing R01 Awardees -- Percent New In First Year of Award



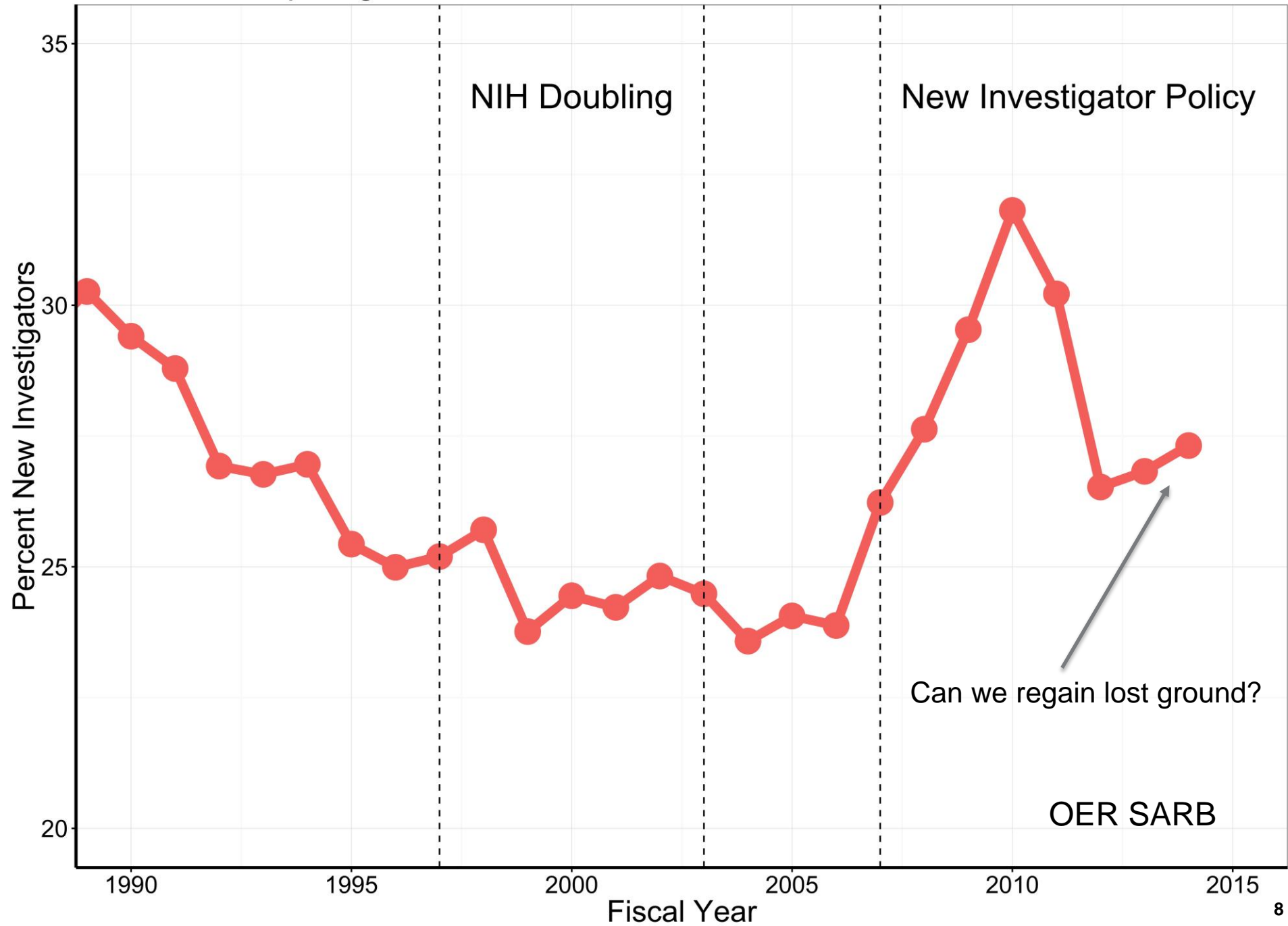
Competing Type 1 R01 Success Rates -- New and Established In First Year of Award



Competing R01 Awardees -- New and Established In First Year of Award



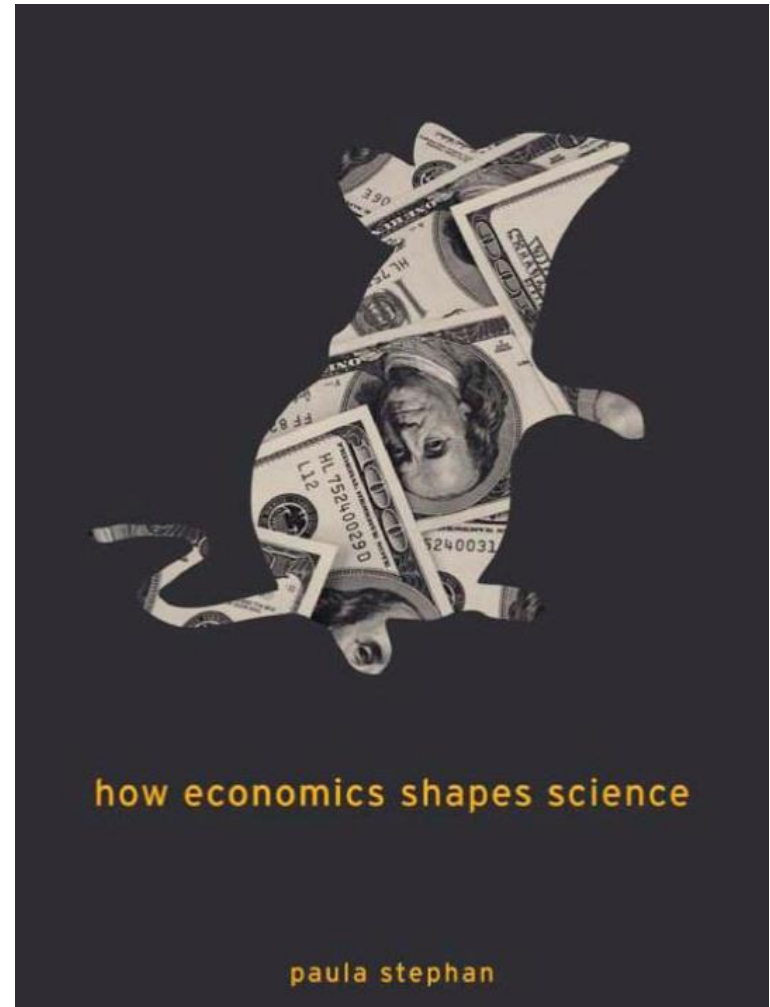
Competing R01 Awardees -- Percent New In First Year of Award



Not Just a Matter of Money

“More money should also mean grants for young researchers ... The end result was that the majority of research universities went on an unprecedented building binge ... [to recruit] senior faculty.”

- Paula Stephan



Root Problem: Era of Hypercompetition

 PERSPECTIVE

 CrossMark
← click for updates

PERSPECTIVE

Rescuing US biomedical research from its systemic flaws

Bruce Alberts^a, Marc W. Kirschner^b, Shirley Tilghman^{c,1}, and Harold Varmus^d

^aDepartment of Biophysics and Biochemistry, University of California, San Francisco, CA 94158; ^bDepartment of Systems Biology, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA 02115; ^cDepartment of Molecular Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08540; and ^dNational Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD 20892

Edited by Inder M. Verma, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA, and approved March 18, 2014 (received for review March 7, 2014)

The long-held but erroneous assumption of never-ending rapid growth in biomedical science has created an unsustainable hypercompetitive system that is discouraging even the most outstanding prospective students from entering our profession—and making it difficult for seasoned investigators to produce their best work. This is a recipe for long-term decline, and the problems cannot be solved with simplistic approaches. Instead, it is time to confront the dangers at hand and rethink some fundamental features of the US biomedical research ecosystem.

“The erroneous assumption of never-ending rapid growth has created an **unsustainable hypercompetitive system** that is discouraging even the most outstanding prospective students from entering our profession—and making it difficult for seasoned investigators to produce their best work. This is a recipe for long-term decline.”

Alberts B, Kirschner MW, Tilghman S, Varmus H. PNAS 2014;111:5773-7

Core Problems Underlying an Unstable System



FEATURE ARTICLE



POINT OF VIEW

Strategies from UW-Madison for rescuing biomedical research in the US

Abstract A cross-campus, cross-career stage and cross-disciplinary series of discussions at a large public university has produced a series of recommendations for addressing the problems confronting the biomedical research community in the US.

DOI: [10.7554/eLife.09305.001](https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.09305.001)

“We identified two **core problems**:

- Too many researchers vying for too few dollars.
- Too many postdocs competing for too few positions.

Most other issues can be viewed as symptoms.”

eLife 2015;4:e09305

Growing Recognition of the Problem



“In the United States, for example, **funding success rates for all age brackets are less than half what they were in 1980**, so researchers have to spend more time seeking funds. That **burden falls most heavily on new faculty members ... makes them conservative rather than ambitious.**”

Nature 2016;538:427

The “Fight for Funding” Is The Biggest Concern

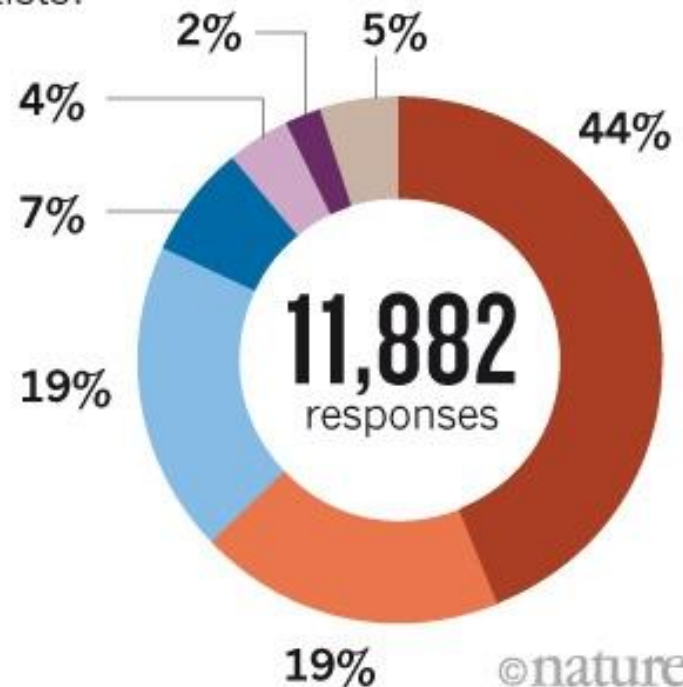
FIGHT FOR FUNDING

The biggest challenge facing early-career scientists is the struggle to get grants, *Nature's* readers say.

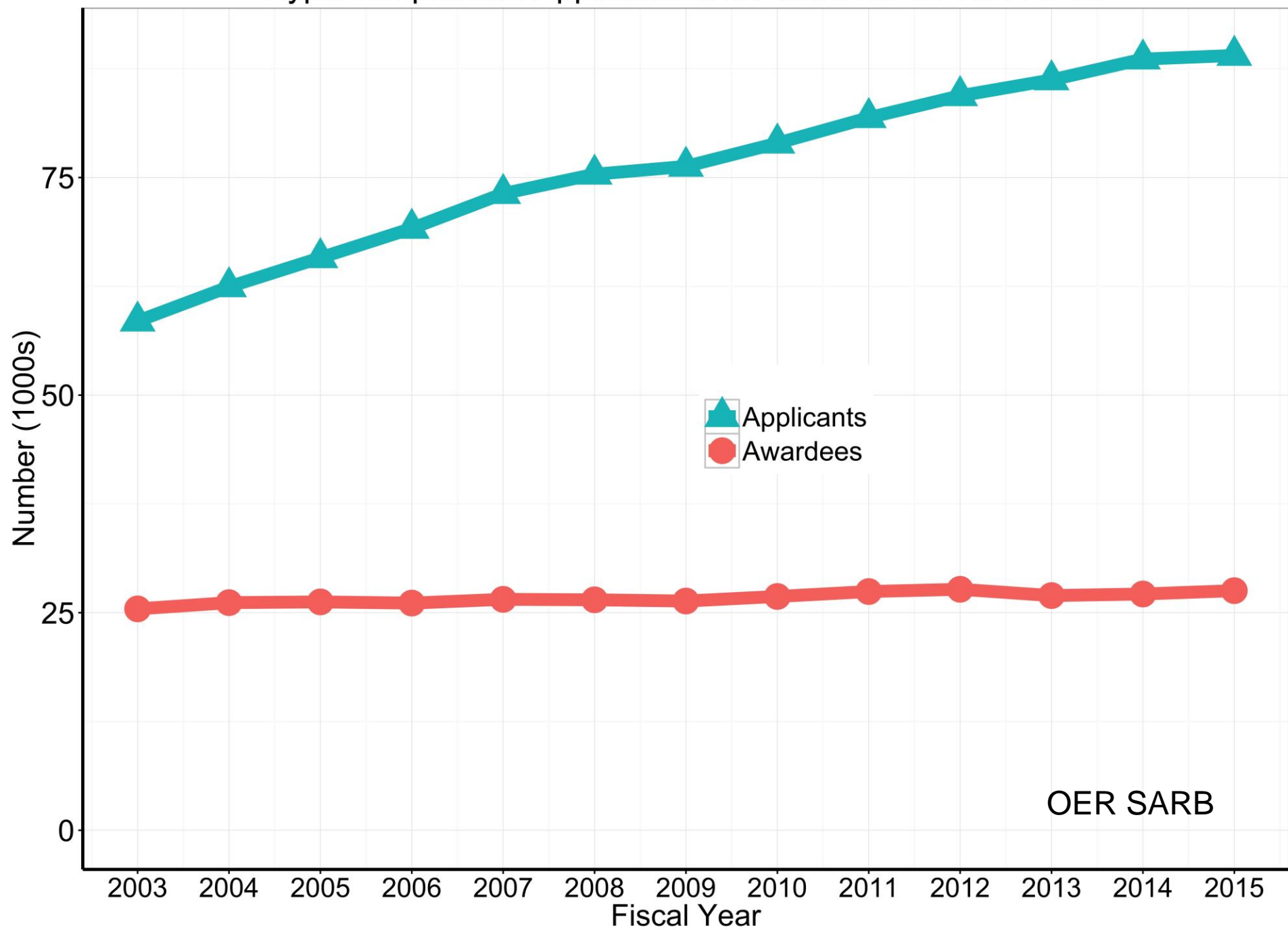
Poll question:

What do you think is the biggest challenge facing early-career scientists?

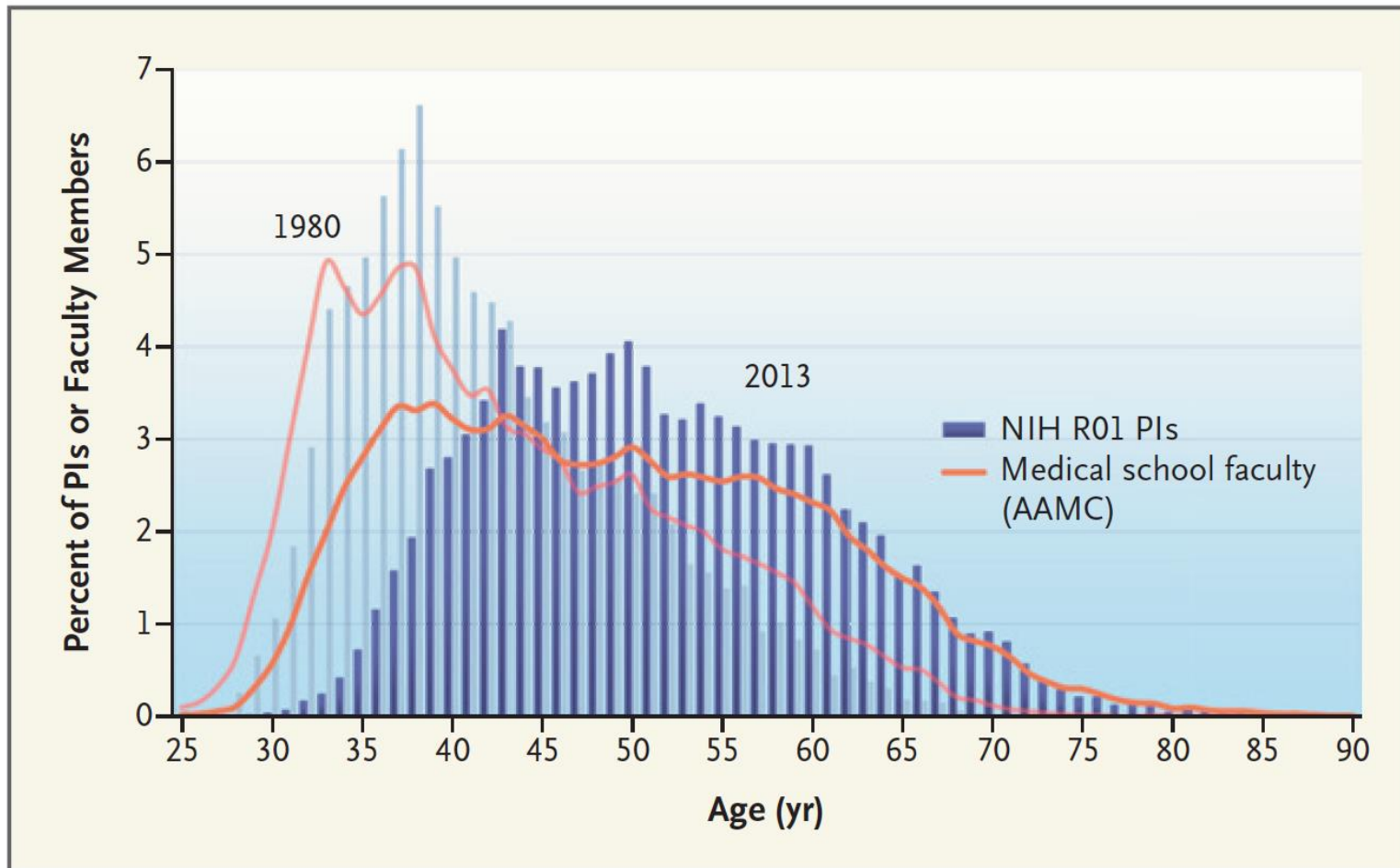
- The fight for funding
- Lack of work–life balance
- Progression judged too heavily on publication record
- Admin and bureaucracy
- Lack of clear targets
- Discrimination
- Other



Hypercompetition: Applicants and Awardees for NIH RPGs



We Also Know That ...

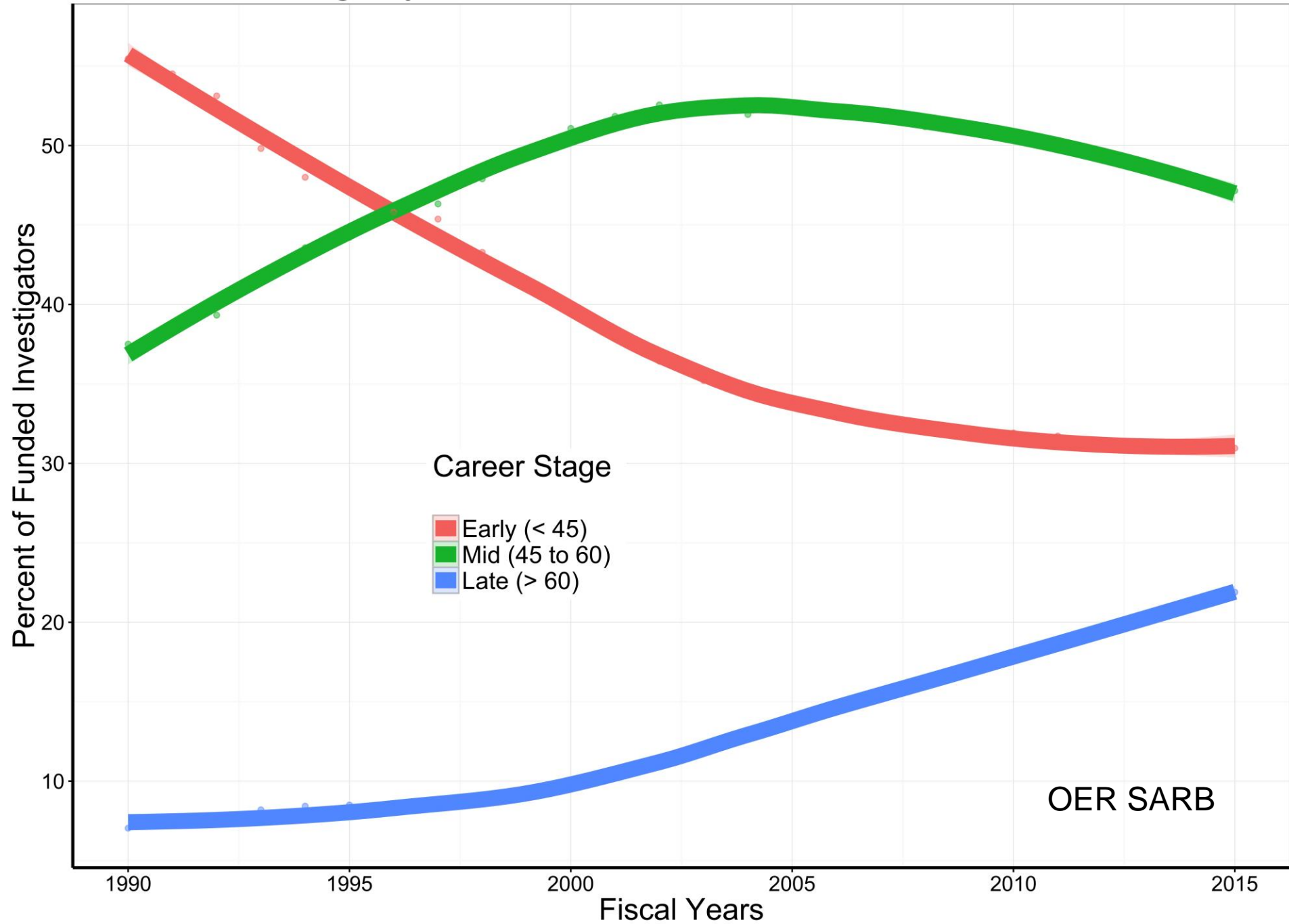


Age Distribution of NIH Principal Investigators (PIs) and Medical School Faculty, 1980–2010.

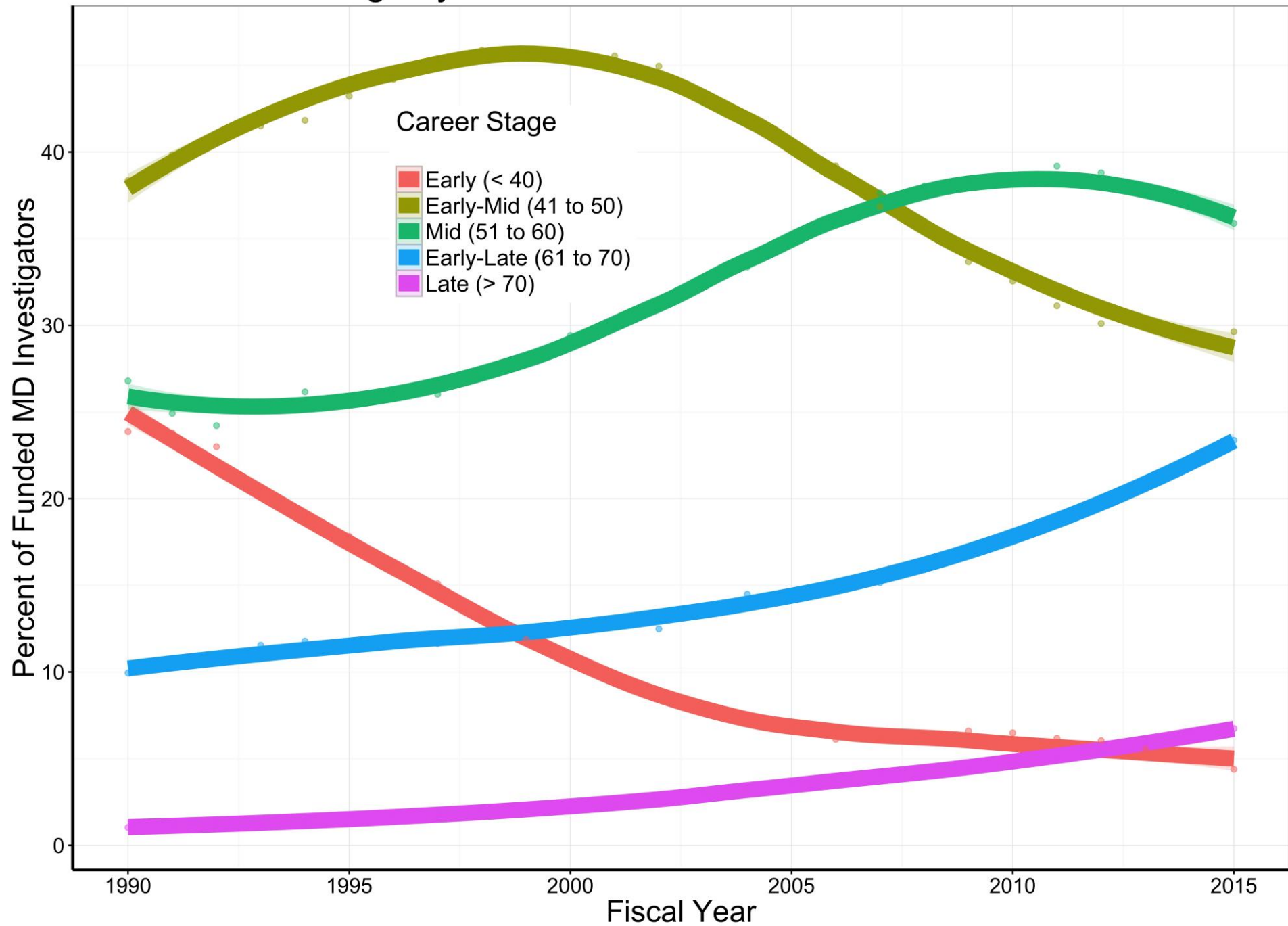
Orwoll E. N Engl J Med 2016;374:2514-7



Career Stage by Fiscal Year for RPGs and Other Select Activities



MD Career Stage by Fiscal Year for RPGs and Other Select Activities



New Investigators Includes Mid-Career



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shifting Demographics among Research Project Grant Awardees at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

Marc F. Charette^{1*}, Young S. Oh¹, Christine Maric-Bilkan¹, Lindsey L. Scott², Charles C. Wu², Matthew Eblen³, Katrina Pearson², H. Eser Tolunay¹, Zorina S. Galis¹

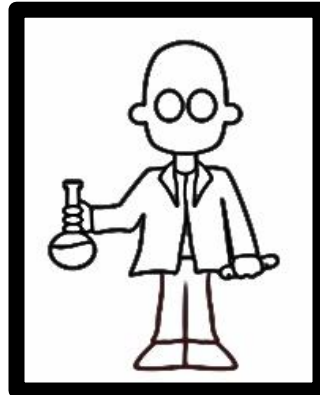
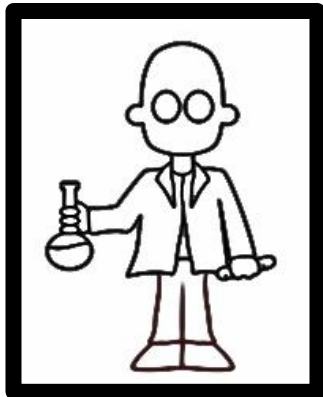
¹ Vascular Biology and Hypertension Branch, Division of Cardiovascular Sciences, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, Bethesda, Maryland, United States of America, ² Statistical Analysis and Reporting Branch, Office of Planning, Analysis and Communication, Office of Extramural Research, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, United States of America, ³ Office of Public Health Scientific Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America

* marc.charette@nih.gov

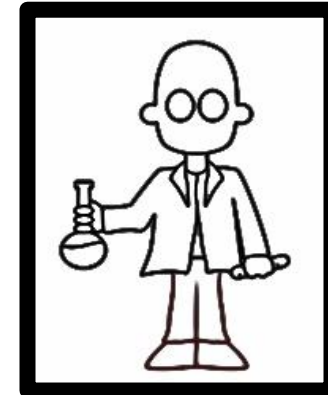


“[There are] properties within the RPG award system that promote more established awardee[s]. [There is] a reduction in the number of RPG awards received by mid-career investigators and [fewer] independent laboratories.”

There are Three Types of Players



RPG
Grant
Award



RPG
Grant
Award

RPG
Grant
Award

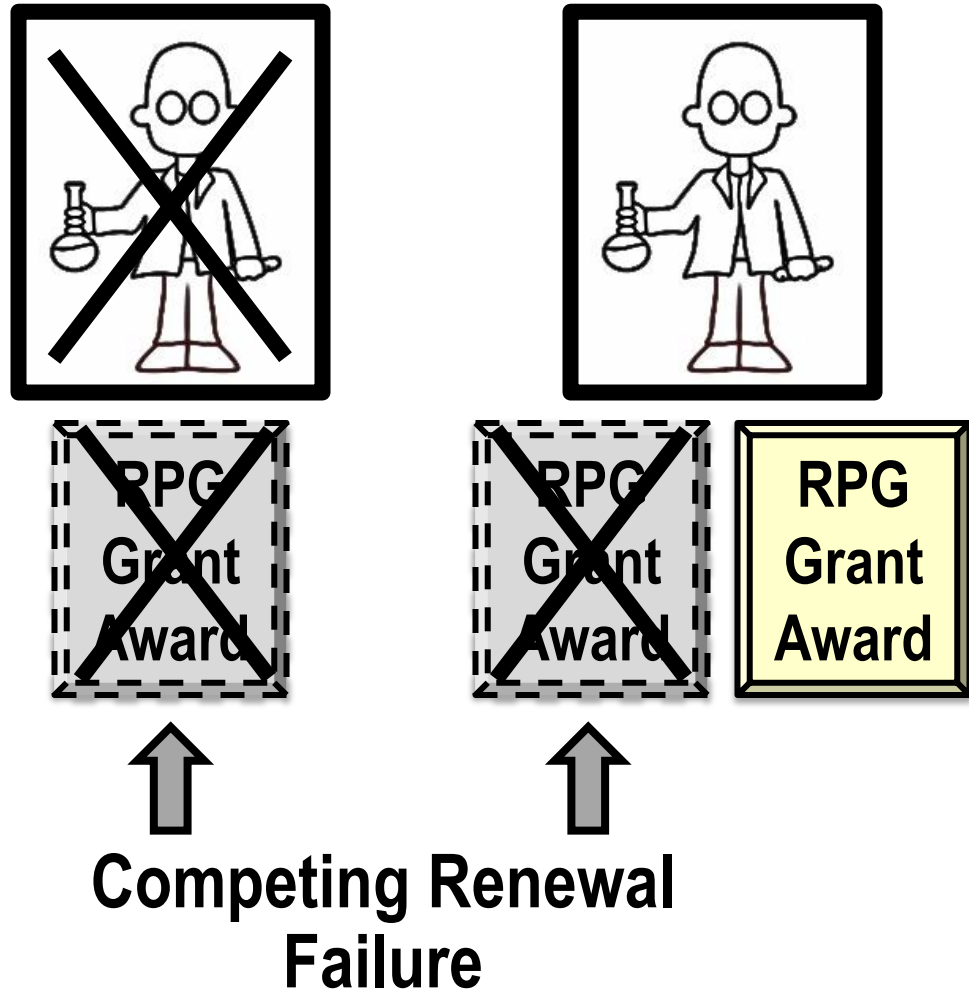
Those with no grants, those with only one grant,
and those with more than one grant

Thanks to Marc Charette



Consequences of Failing to Renew

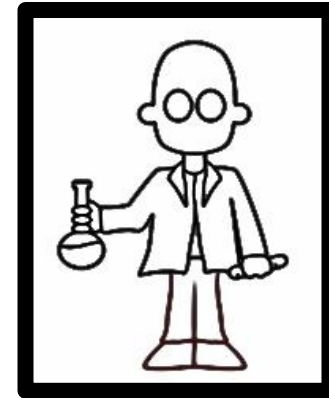
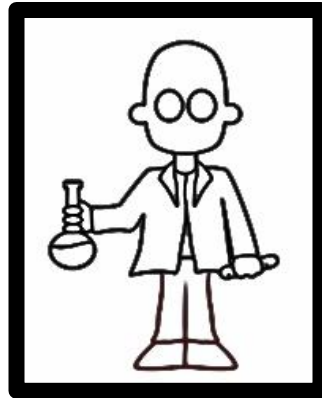
Players, who have only one award and fail to renew their award, may be forced from the game



Thanks to Marc Charette

Multiple Grants confer Survival Enhancement

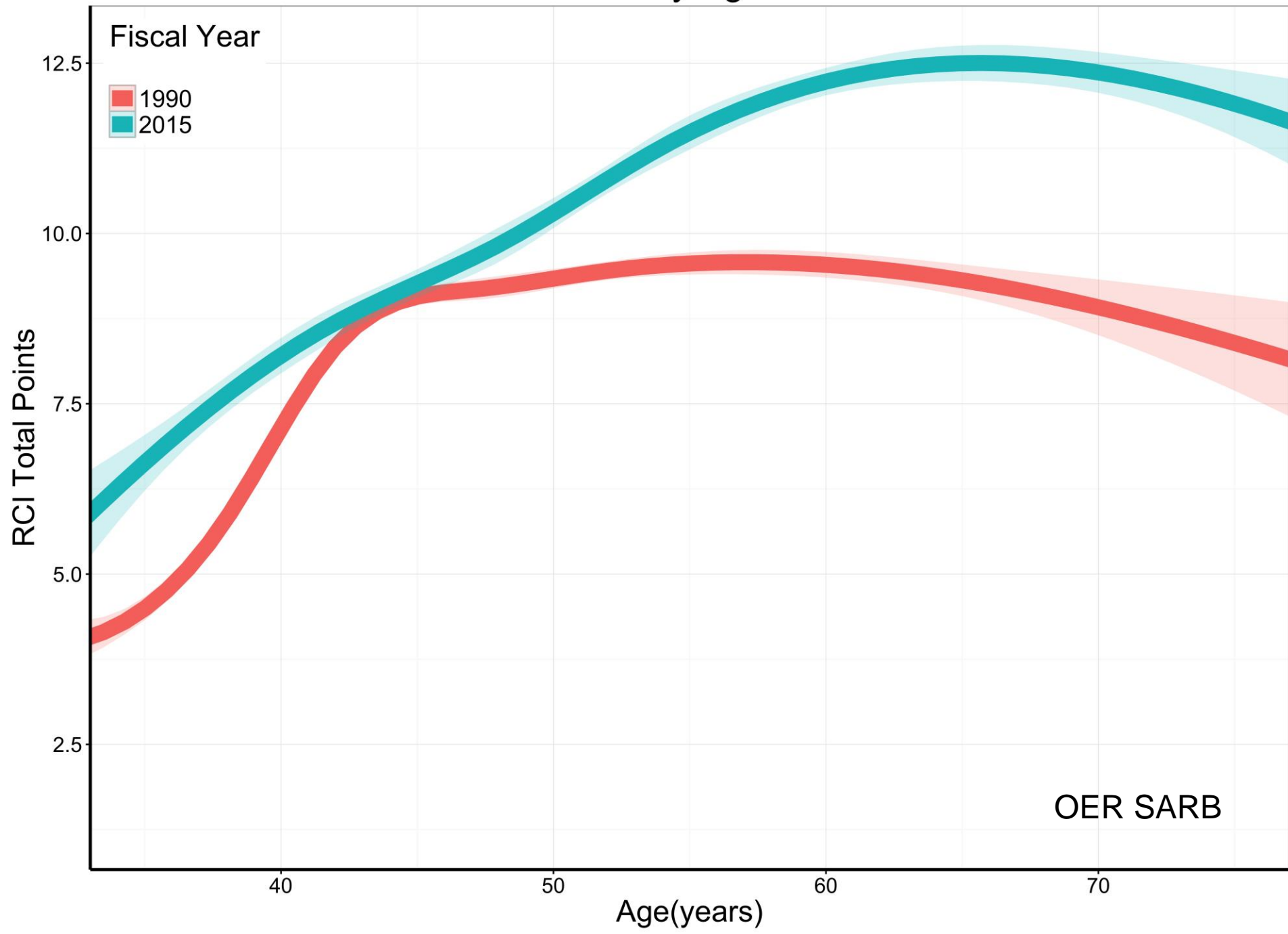
Player with
selective
disadvantage →



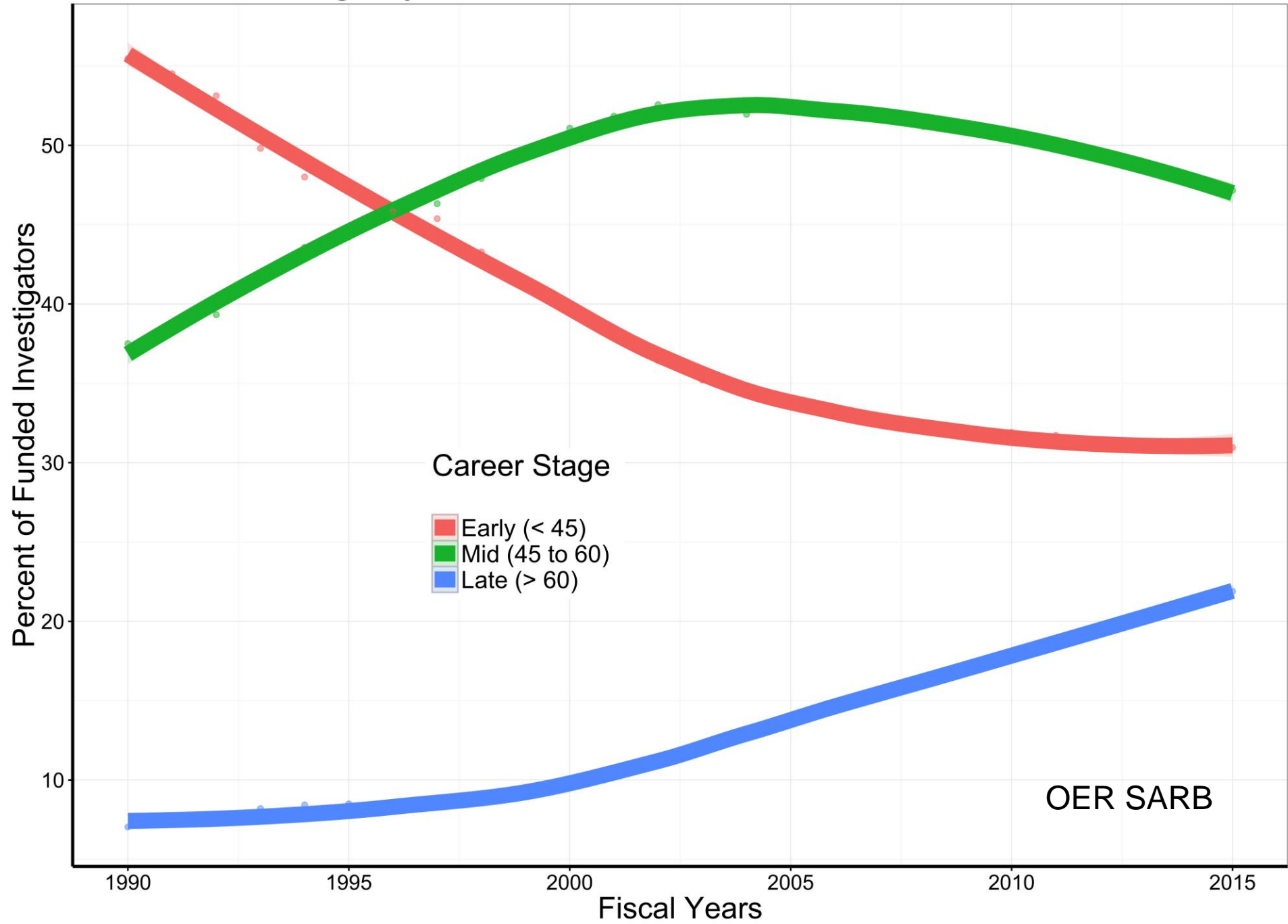
Repeated cycles of the RPG Award Renewal game will gradually diminish the population of players who have only one grant

Thanks to Marc Charette

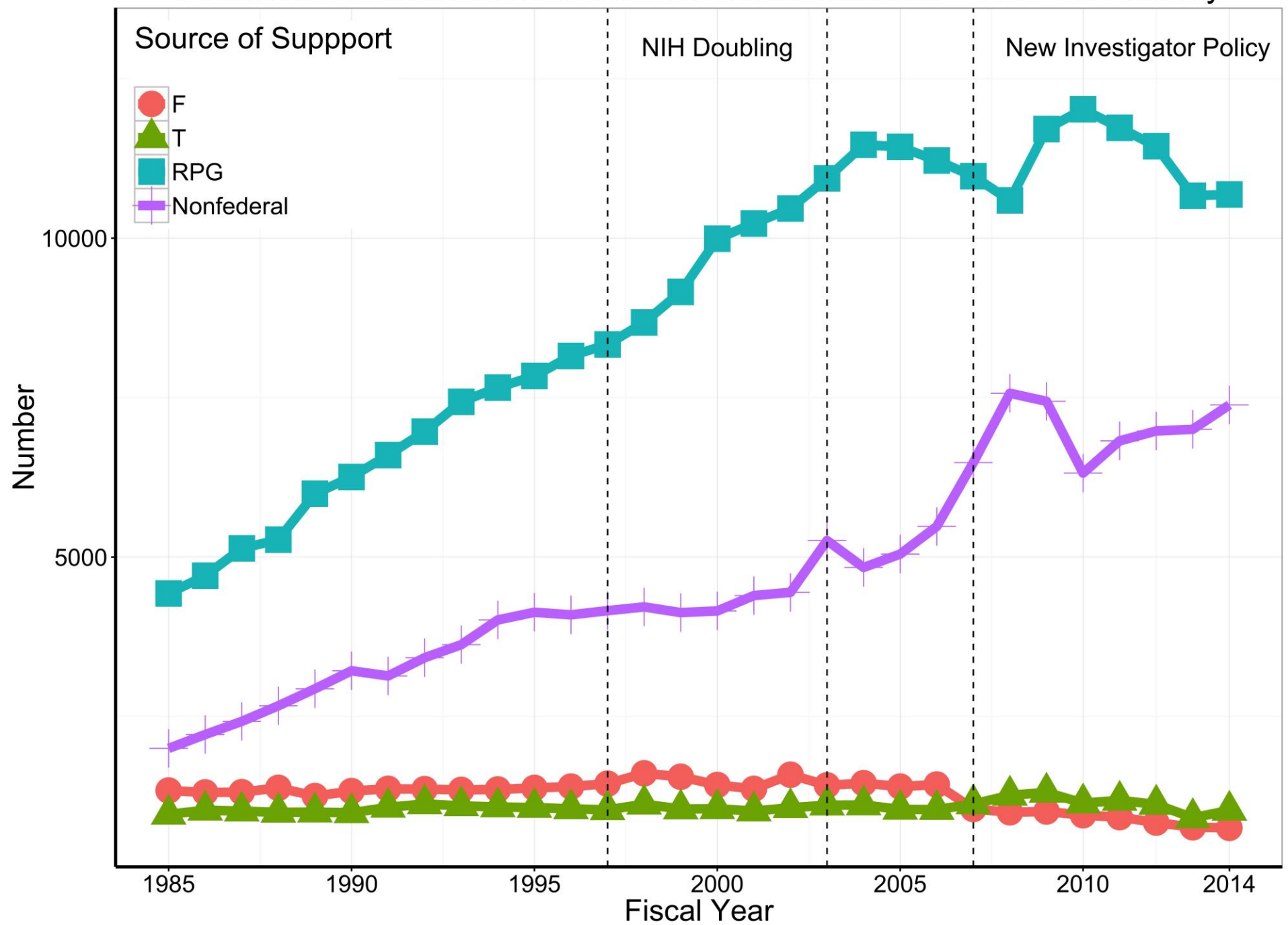
RCI Points Per PI By Age and Fiscal Year



Career Stage by Fiscal Year for RPGs and Other Select Activities

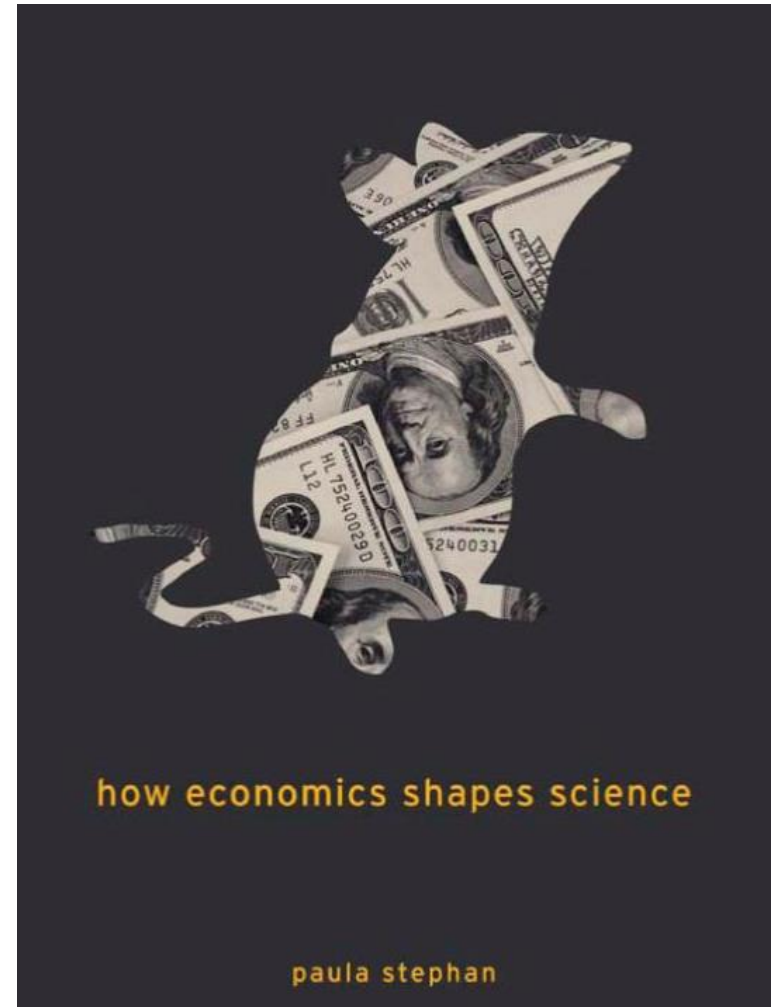


Postdoctoral Researchers in the Biomedical Sciences -- NSF-NIH Survey



“There is almost unanimous agreement that there is not a shortage of postdoctoral fellows. Growth ... increased availability of research funds ... Cost advantage from staffing labs with postdocs ...”

- Paula Stephan

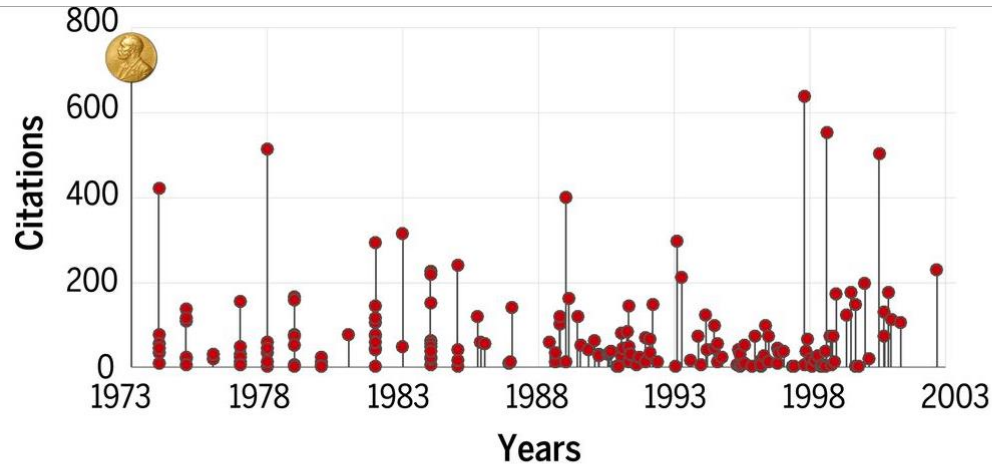


<https://www.amazon.com/Economics-Shapes-Science-Paula-Stephan/dp/0674088166>

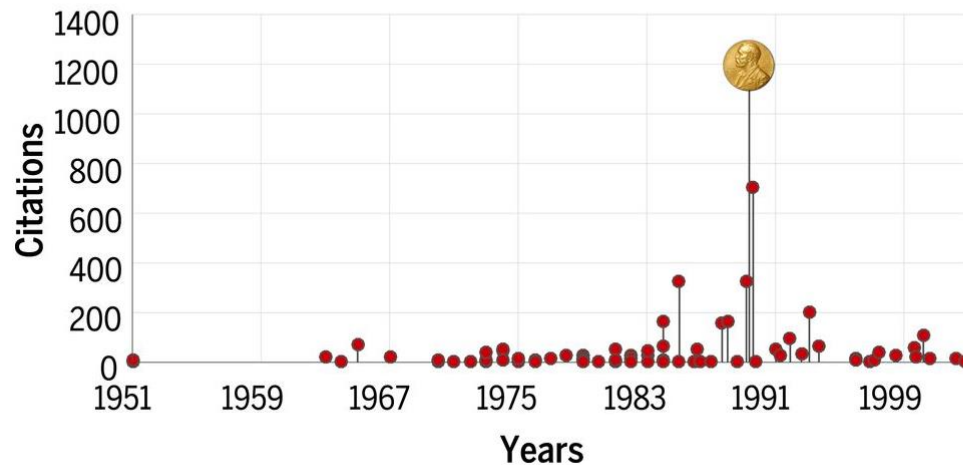
Quantifying the evolution of individual scientific impact

Roberta Sinatra, Dashun Wang, Pierre Deville,
Chaoming Song, Albert-László Barabási*

Efficiency: Maybe It Makes Sense?



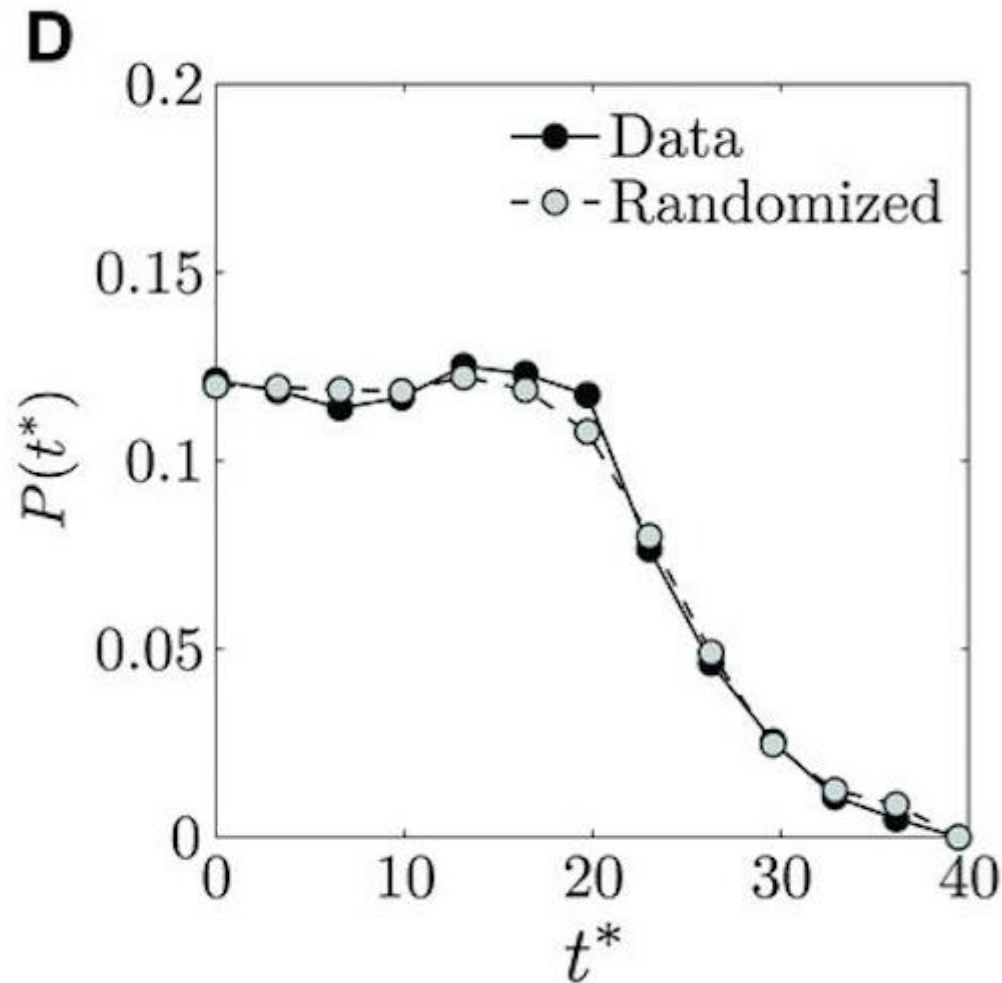
Frank A. Wilczek
Physics Nobel,
2004



John B. Fenn
Chemistry Nobel,
2002

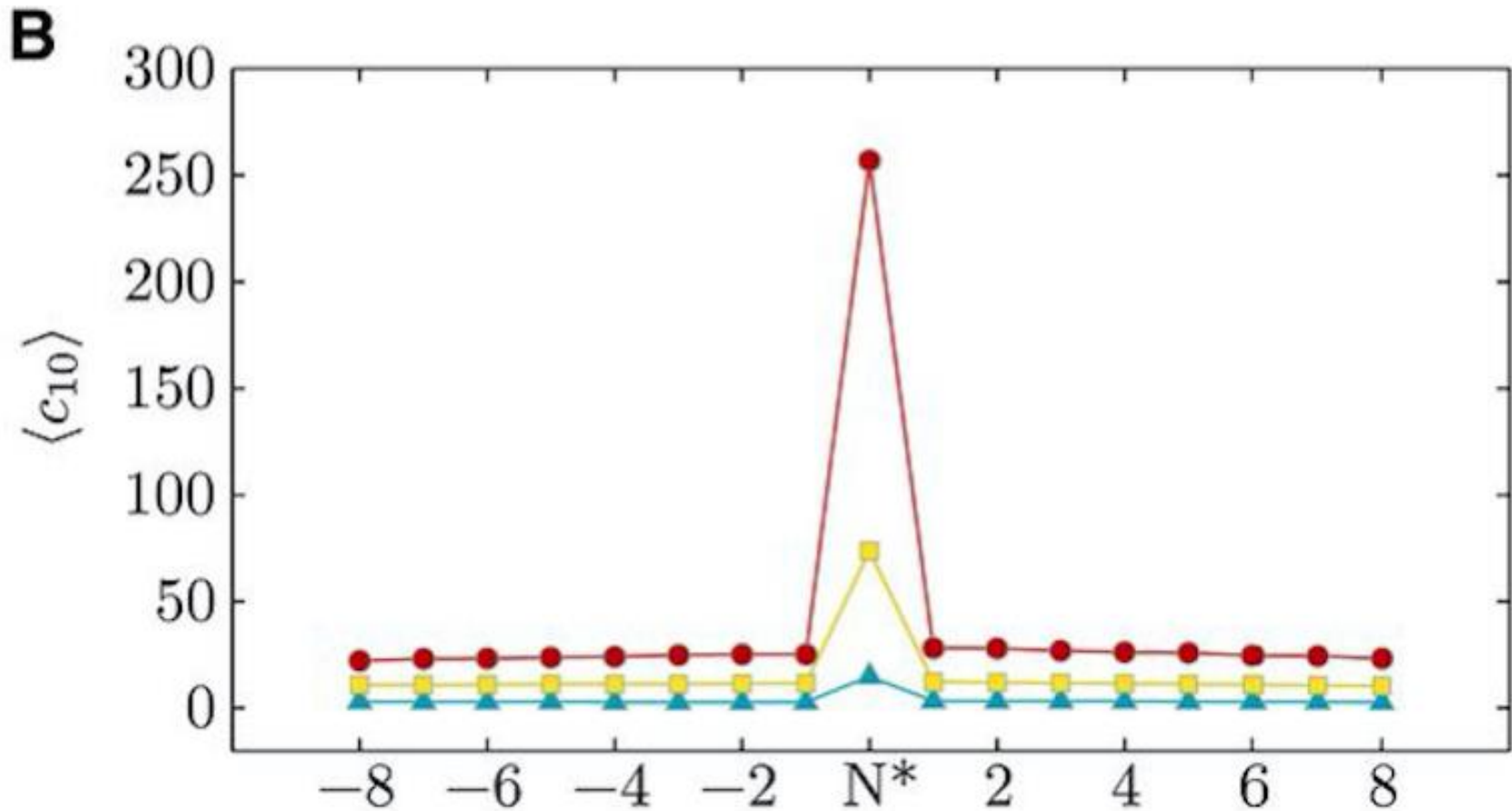
Sinatra R et al. Science 2016;354:596

“Random-Impact Rule”



“Impact is random within a scientist’s sequence of publication.”

“Random-Impact Rule”



“There are no discernible changes in impact before or after a scientist’s highest-impact work.”

Diversity

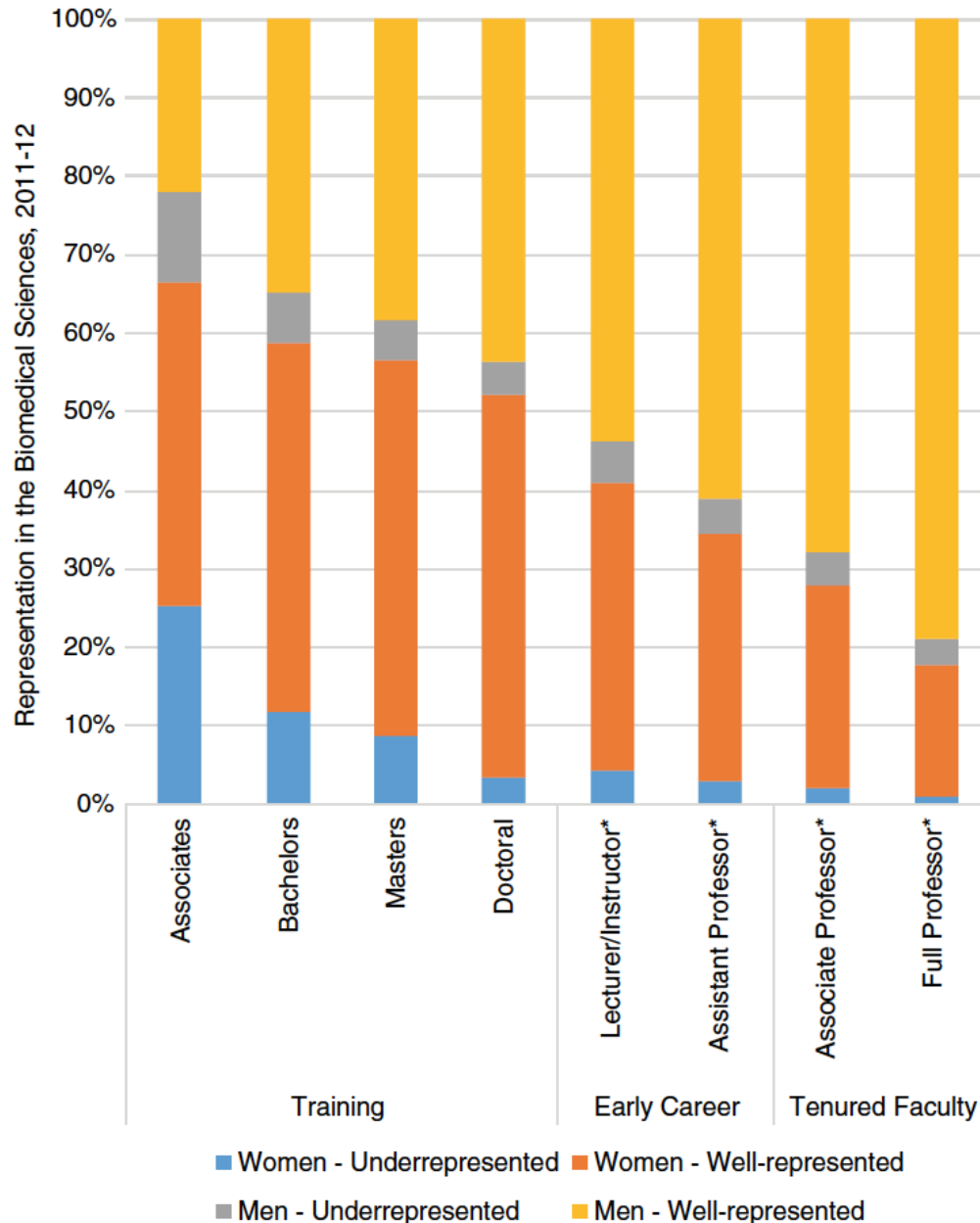
From the NIH: A Systems Approach to Increasing the Diversity of the Biomedical Research Workforce

Hannah A. Valentine,^{1*} P. Kay Lund,² and Alison E. Gammie¹

¹Office of the Director and ²National Institute of General Medical Sciences, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892

“We can build through more focus on the nodes where attrition is most common. [Focus] on retention, continuity, flexibility, and innovation across the career pathway.”

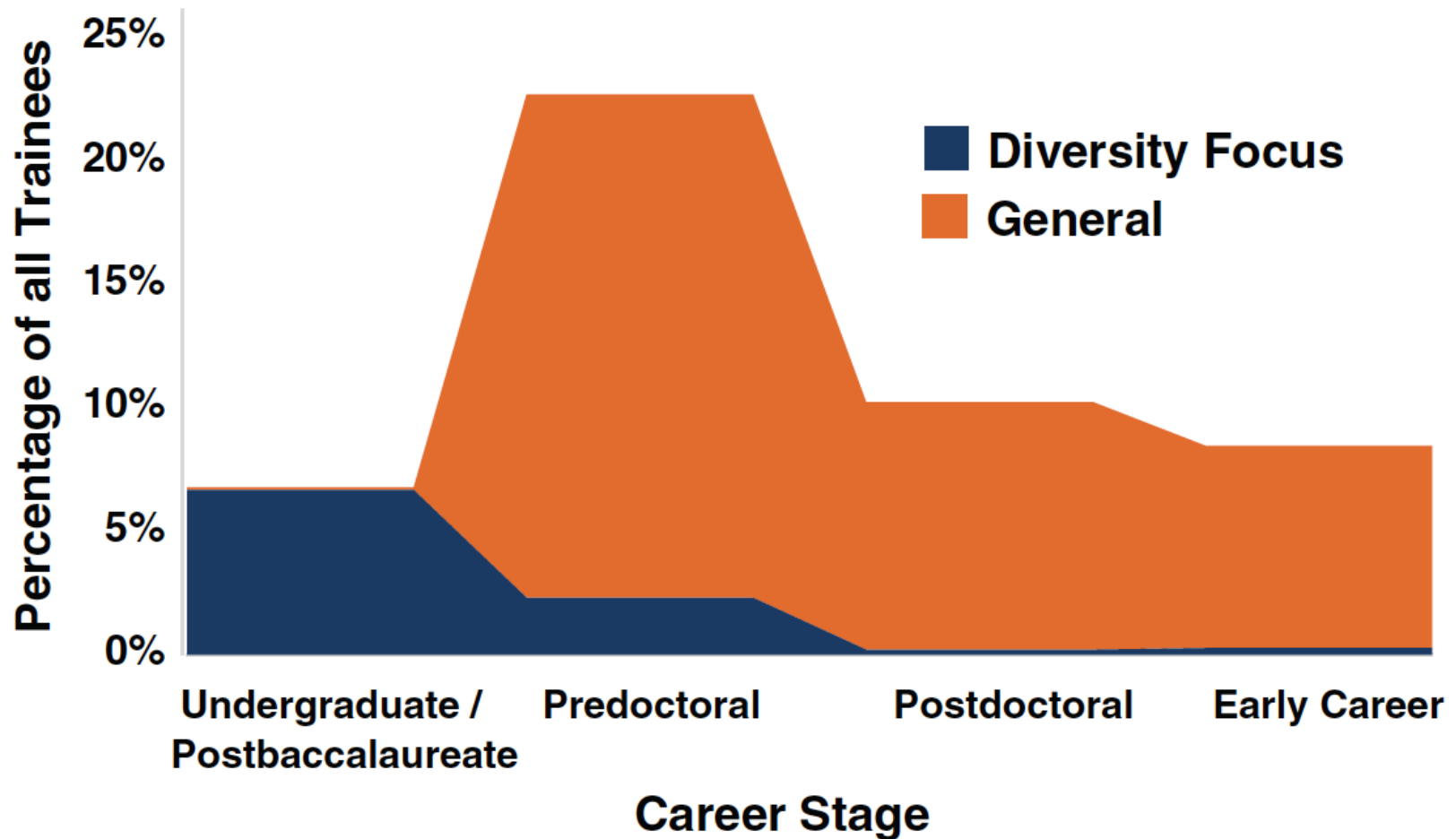
Hannah Valentine, Kay Lund, and Alison Gammie



http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2013menu_tables.asp

CBE—Life Sciences Education • 15:fe4, 1–5, Fall 2016

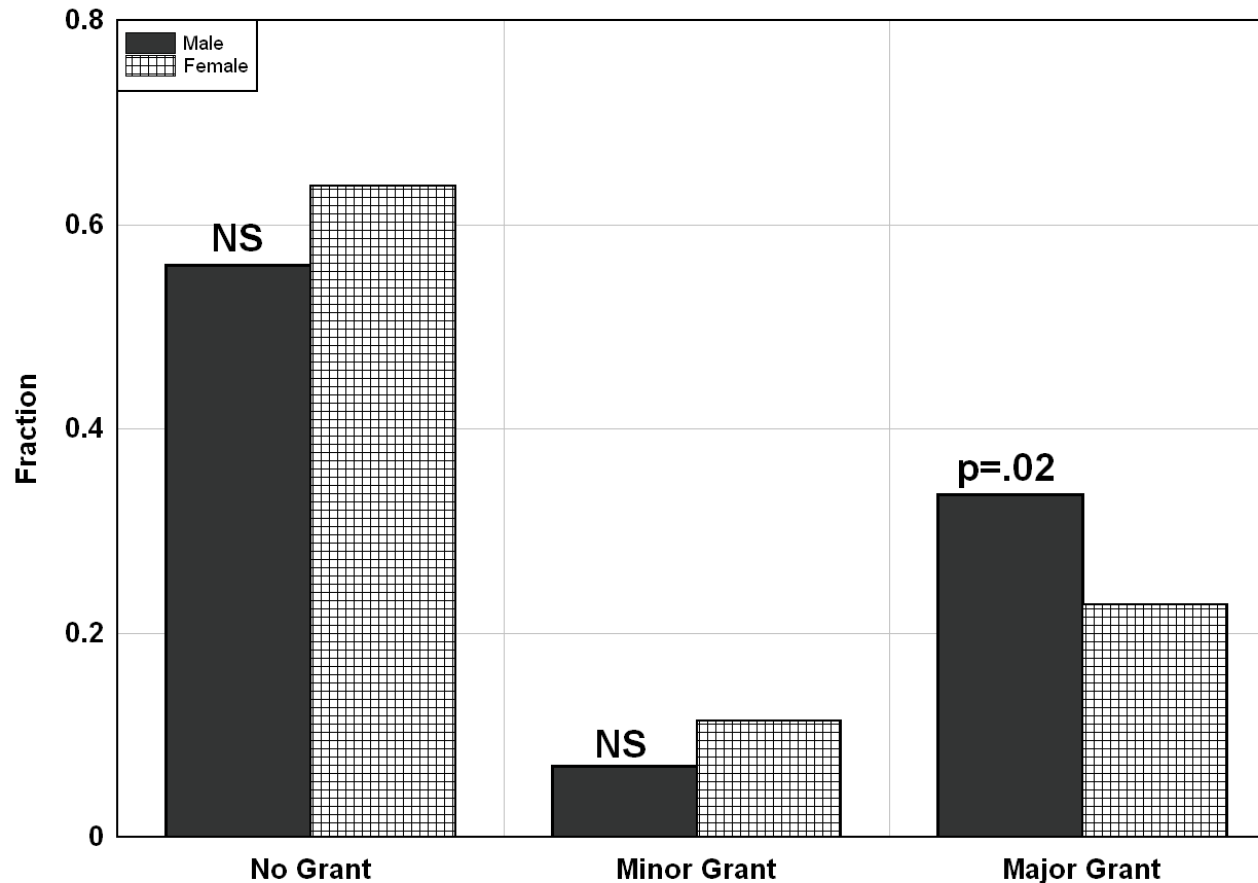
Training and Diversity Focus



Careers of an elite cohort of U.S. basic life science postdoctoral fellows and the influence of their mentor's citation record

David G Levitt

Grant Success



 PERSPECTIVE



PERSPECTIVE

Rescuing US biomedical research from its systemic flaws

Bruce Alberts^a, Marc W. Kirschner^b, Shirley Tilghman^{c,1}, and Harold Varmus^d

^aDepartment of Biophysics and Biochemistry, University of California, San Francisco, CA 94158; ^bDepartment of Systems Biology, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA 02115; ^cDepartment of Molecular Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08540; and ^dNational Cancer Institute, Bethesda, MD 20892

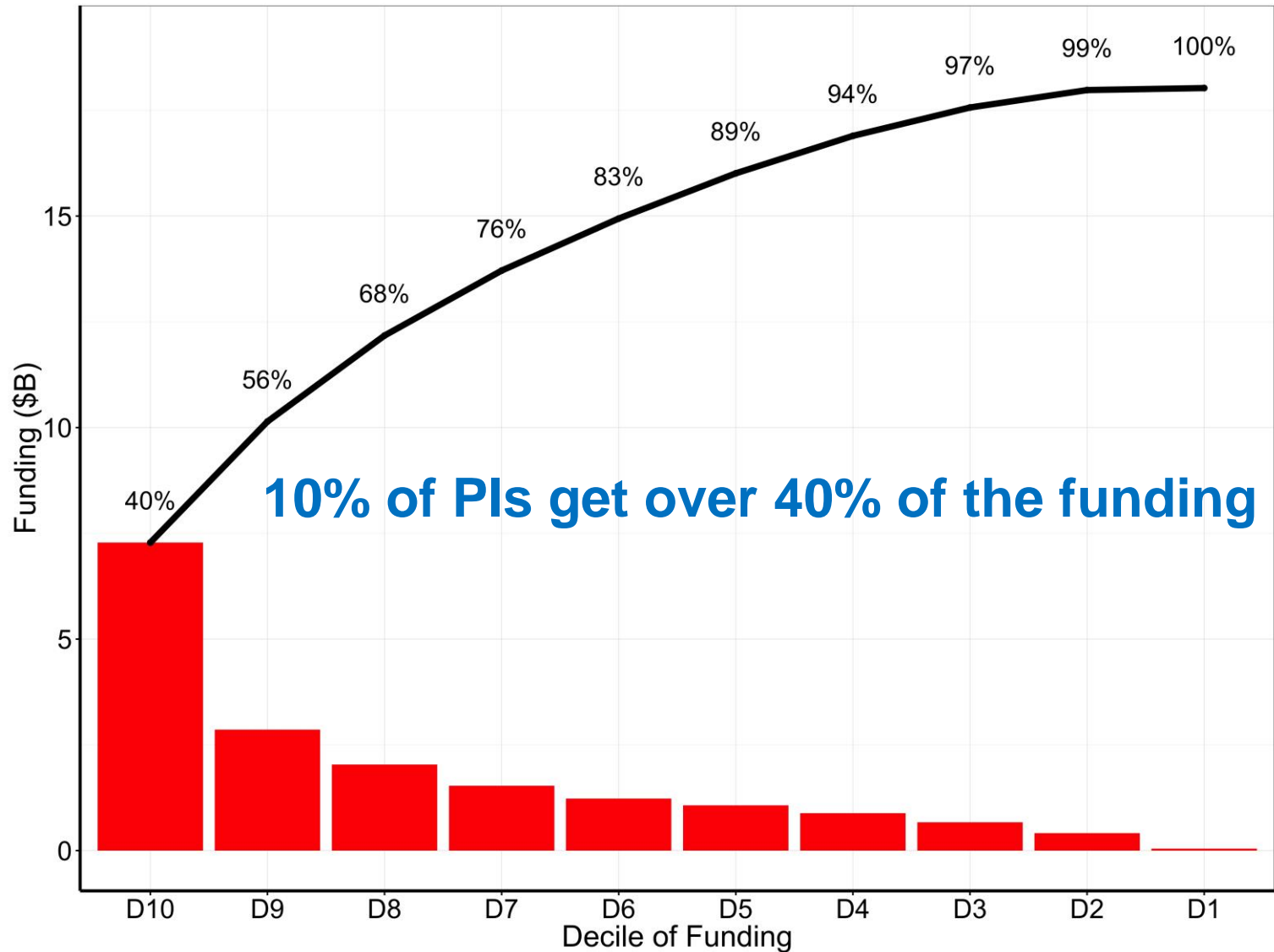
Edited by Inder M. Verma, The Salk Institute for Biological Studies, La Jolla, CA, and approved March 18, 2014 (received for review March 7, 2014)

The long-held but erroneous assumption of never-ending rapid growth in biomedical science has created an unsustainable hypercompetitive system that is discouraging even the most outstanding prospective students from entering our profession—and making it difficult for seasoned investigators to produce their best work. This is a recipe for long-term decline, and the problems cannot be solved with simplistic approaches. Instead, it is time to confront the dangers at hand and rethink some fundamental features of the US biomedical research ecosystem.

“Agencies **should be sensitive to the total numbers of dollars** granted to individual laboratories...—although **different research activities have different costs**—at some point, **returns per dollar diminish**. We applaud the recent decision by the NIH to examine grant portfolios carefully before increasing direct research support for a laboratory beyond \$1M per year.”

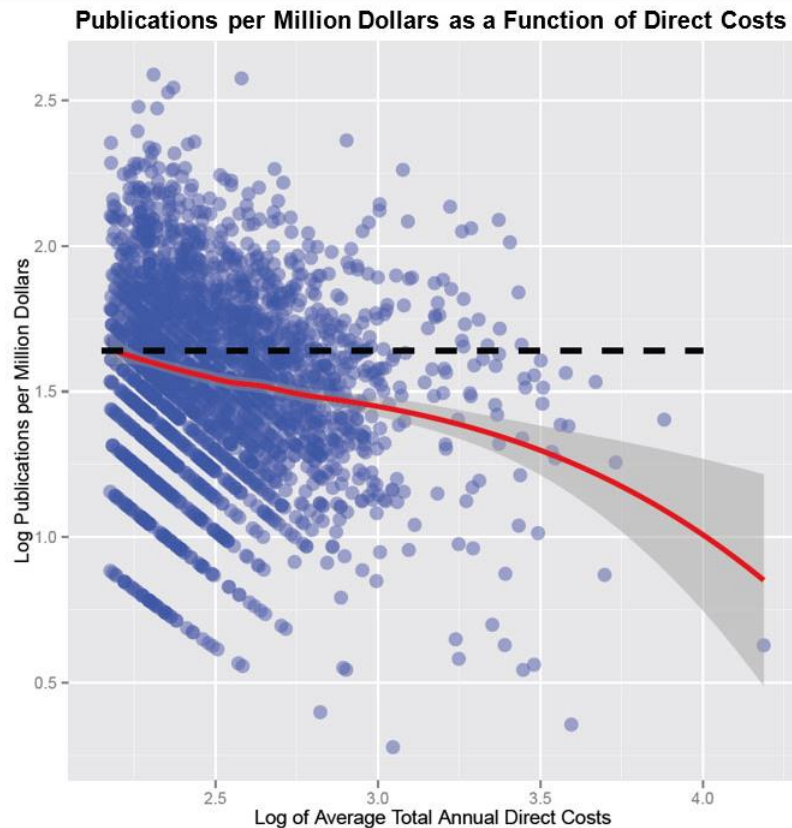
Alberts B et al. PNAS. 2014;111:5773-7

Sensitive to Dollars: Skewed Distribution



10% of PIs get over 40% of the funding

Signs of Inefficiency: Diminishing Returns



NIMH: Mol Psychiatry. 2015 Sep;20(9):1030-6

NHLBI: Circ Res. 2015 Jul 17;117(3):239-43.

Canada: PLoS One. 2013 Jun 19;8(6):e65263.

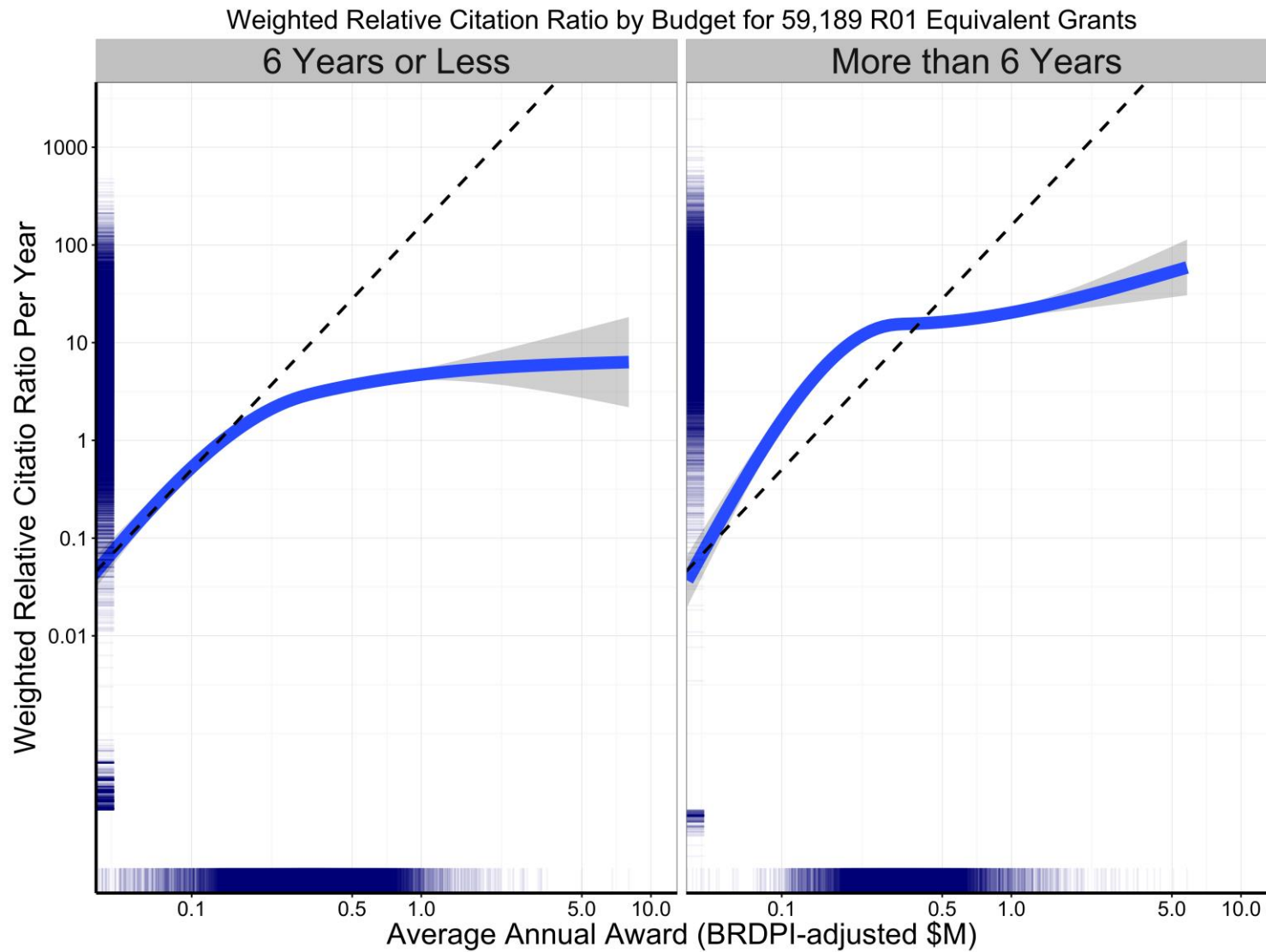
UK: PeerJ. 2015 Jun 9;3:e989

New drugs: Nat Rev Drug Disc. 2012;11:191-200

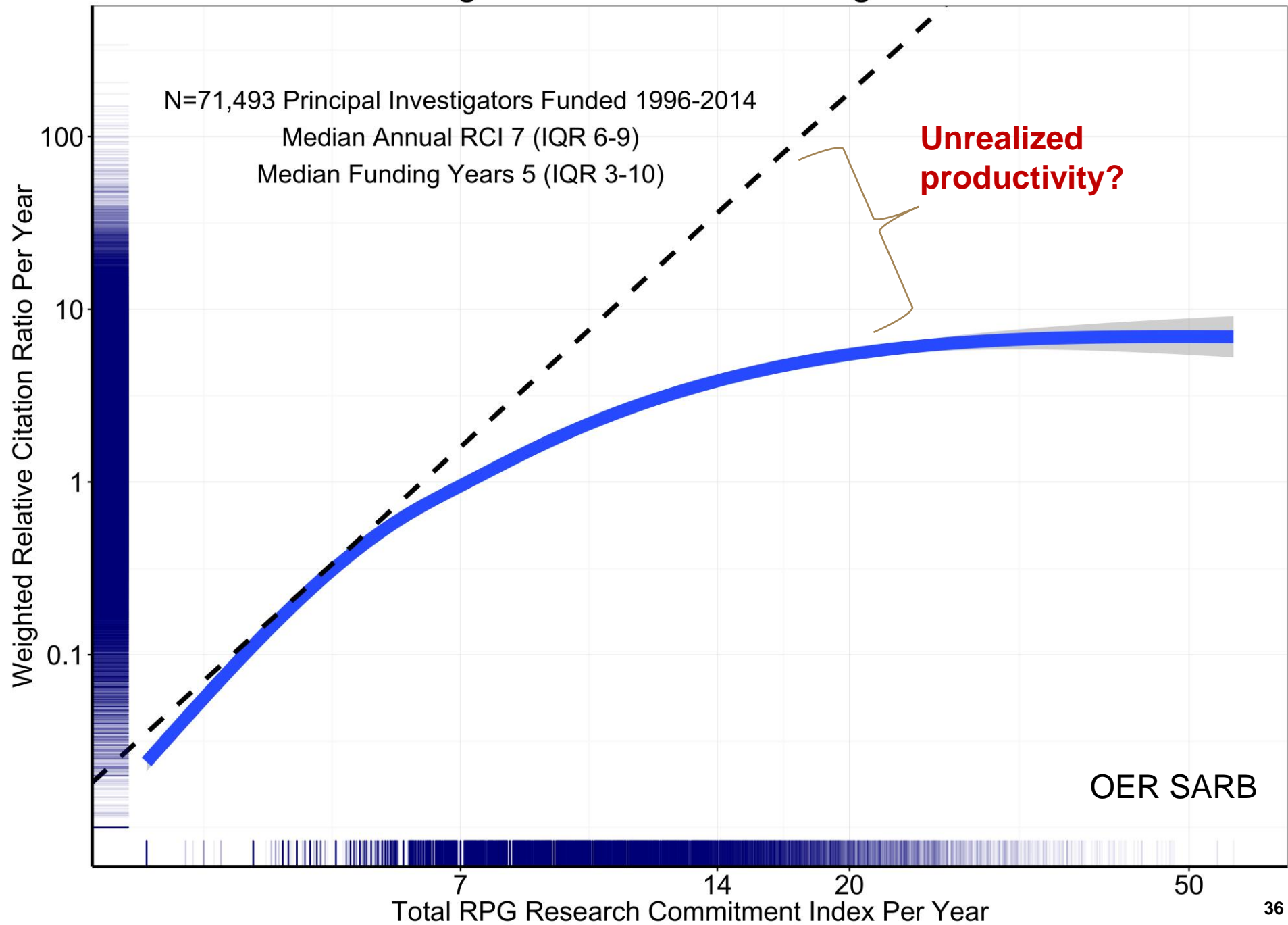
Alberts: Cell. 1985;41:337-8

Physics: Comp Sys. 2012;21:183-192

Diminishing Returns Across NIH



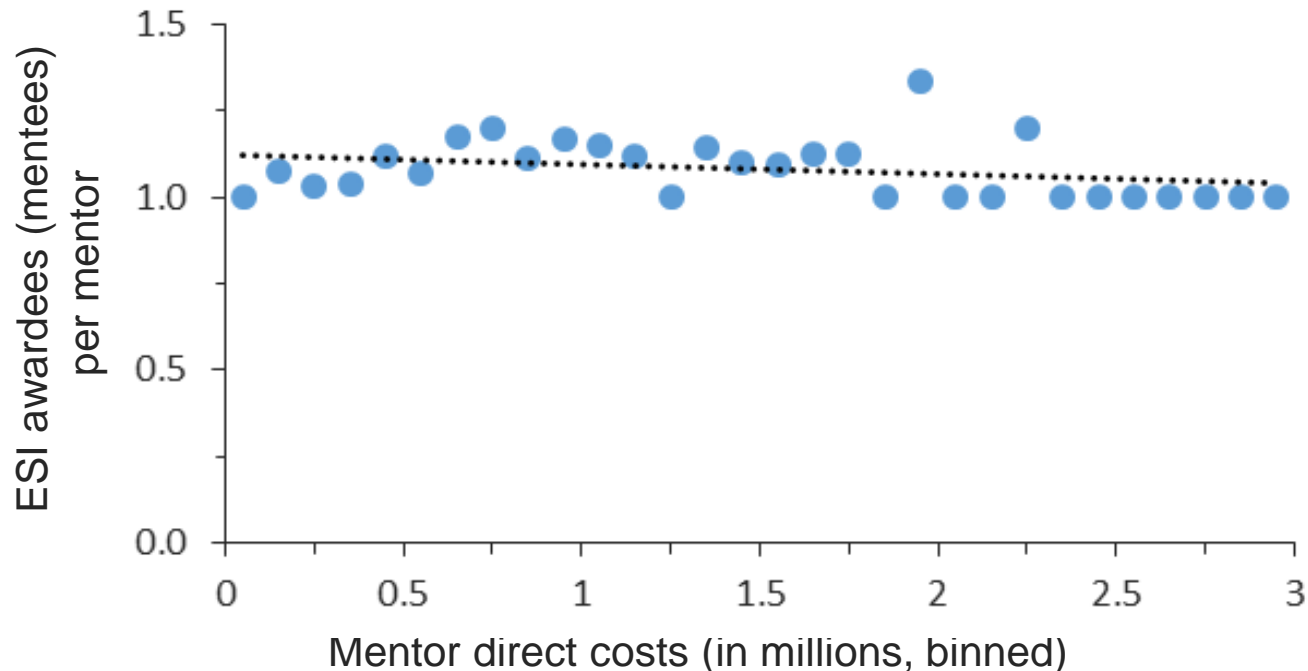
Strong Evidence of Diminishing Returns



Funding Not Correlated with Mentorship

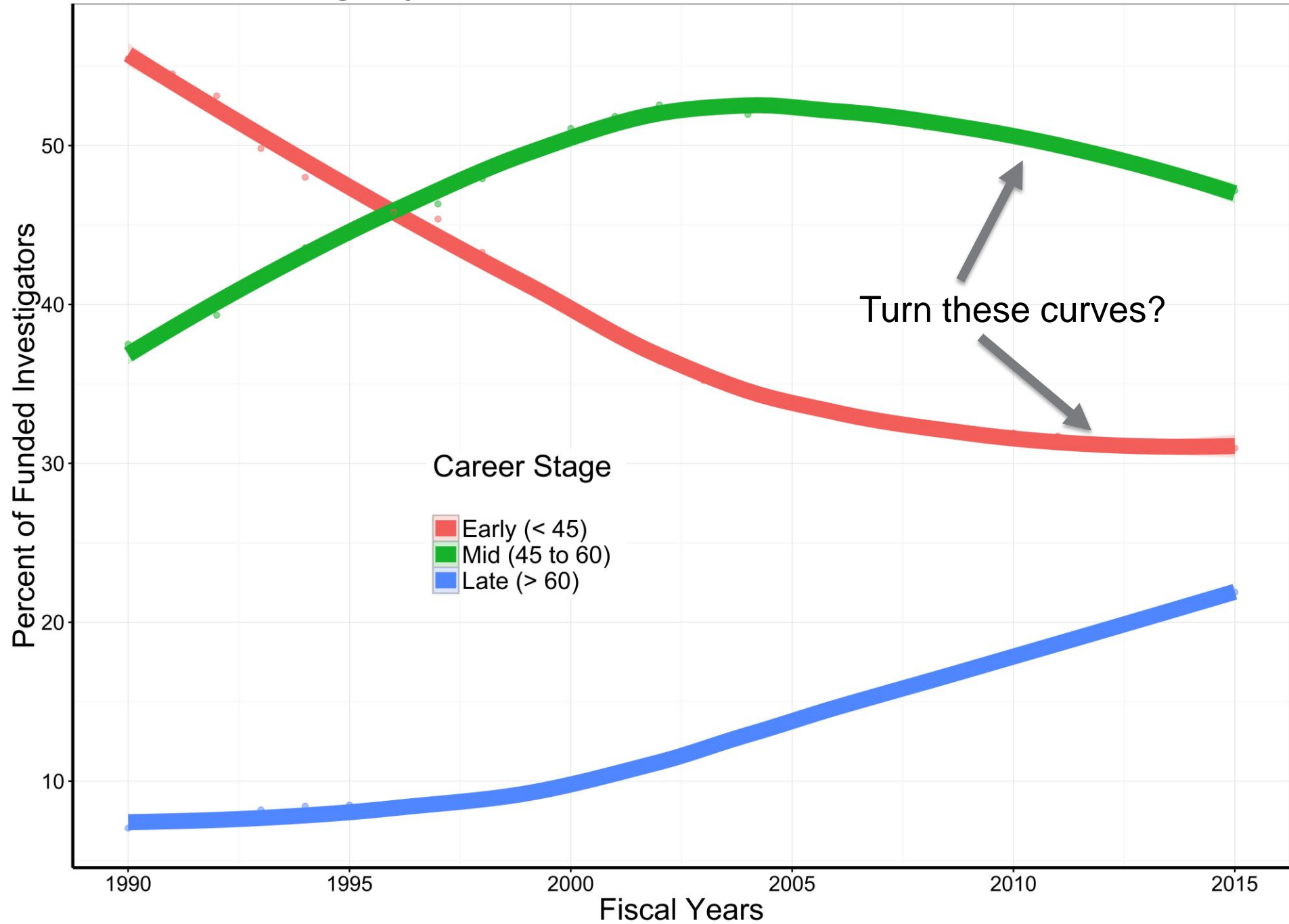
No relationship between funding level of mentors and the number of ESI awardees that they train

ESI RPG awardees per mentor versus the FY16 direct costs of their RPG-funded mentors



Thanks to George Santangelo and OPA

Career Stage by Fiscal Year for RPGs and Other Select Activities



New, Mid-, & Established Investigators: Right Path?

Science AAAS



The National Institutes of Health is worried that middle-aged investigators are being crowded out of the research workforce.

Cultura Creative (RF)/Alamy Stock Photo

NIH discusses curbing lab size to fund more midcareer scientists

By **Jocelyn Kaiser** | Dec. 15, 2016, 4:00 PM

“[NIH Director Francis Collins] worries that the current system may delay the desired progression of early-career scientists. ‘If the model is that the senior investigator continues to be the principal investigator, and the junior scientist is not quite independent, then what are we propagating?’ he asked.”

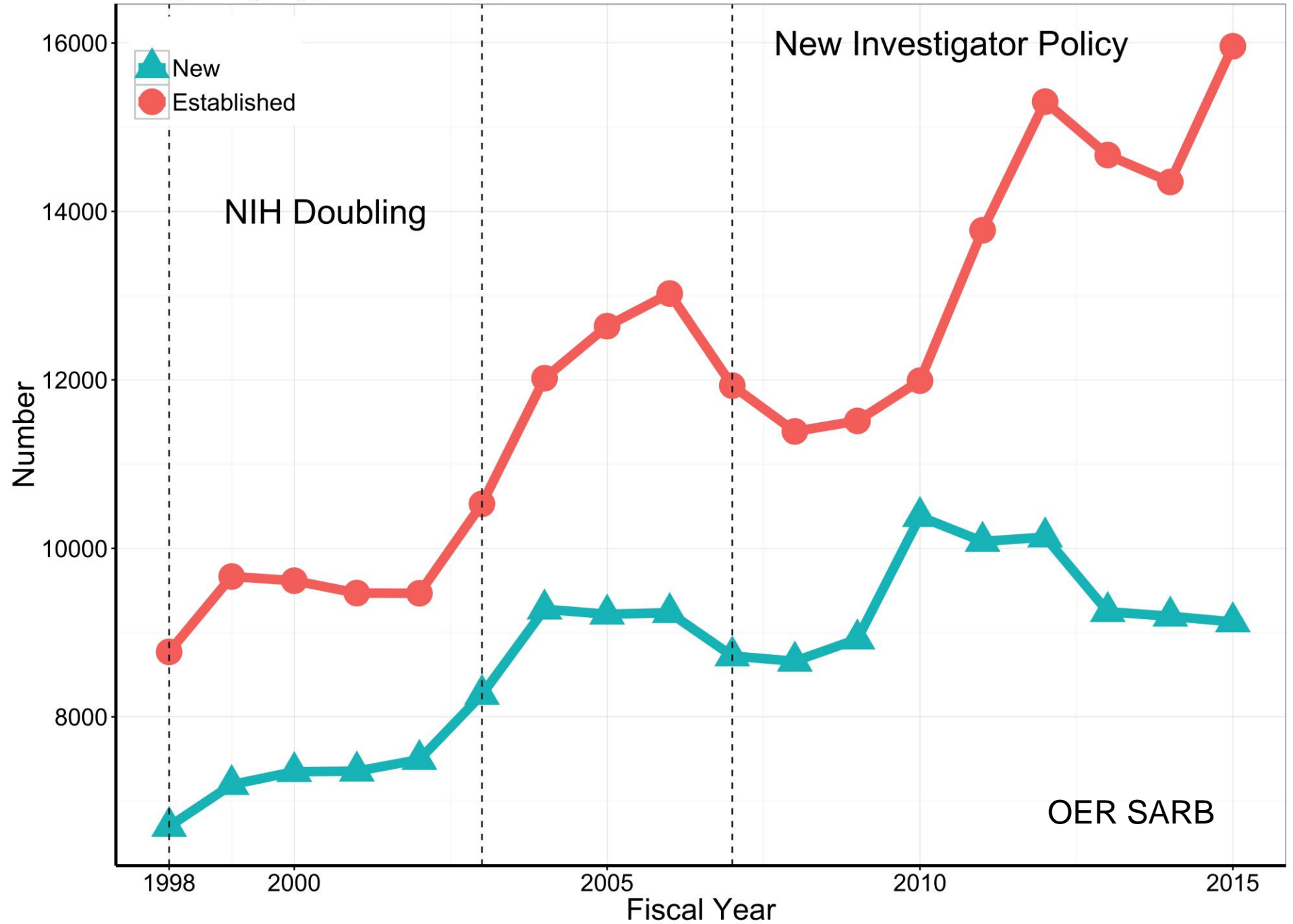
- Enhanced ESI advantage
- Focused select pay for mid-career
- Measures of grant support as tool
- Systems-approach to enhancing diversity
- R35 for younger PI's (NIGMS, NHLBI)

- Unstable system with hyper-competition
- Hurting early- & mid-career faculty most
- Inefficient with diminishing returns
- Policy levers to fund more investigators
 - Especially early- and **mid-career**
 - Systems-based approach, focus on attrition

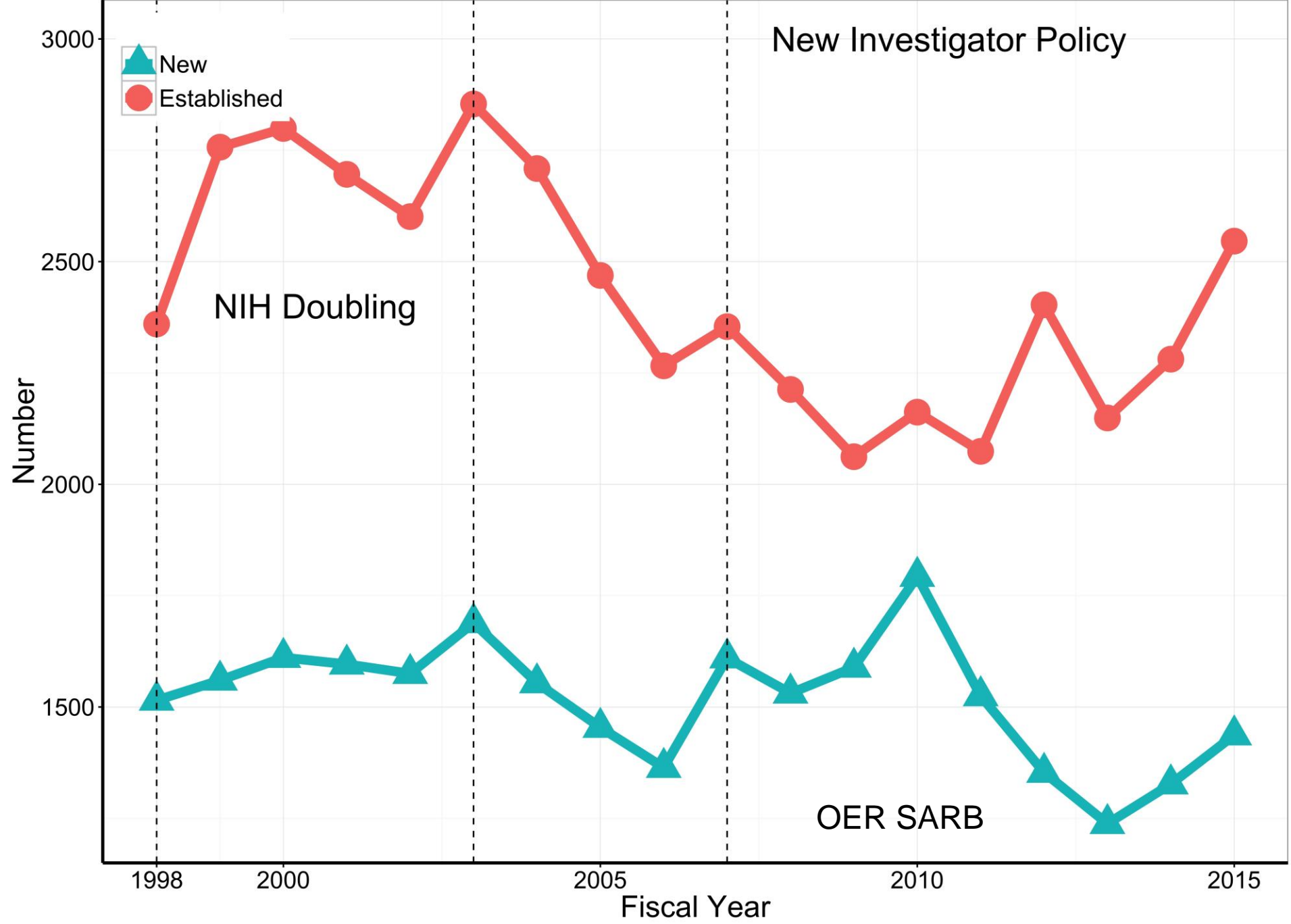
Appendix Material



Competing Type 1 R01 Applications -- New and Established In First Year of Award



Competing Type 1 R01 Awards -- New and Established In First Year of Award

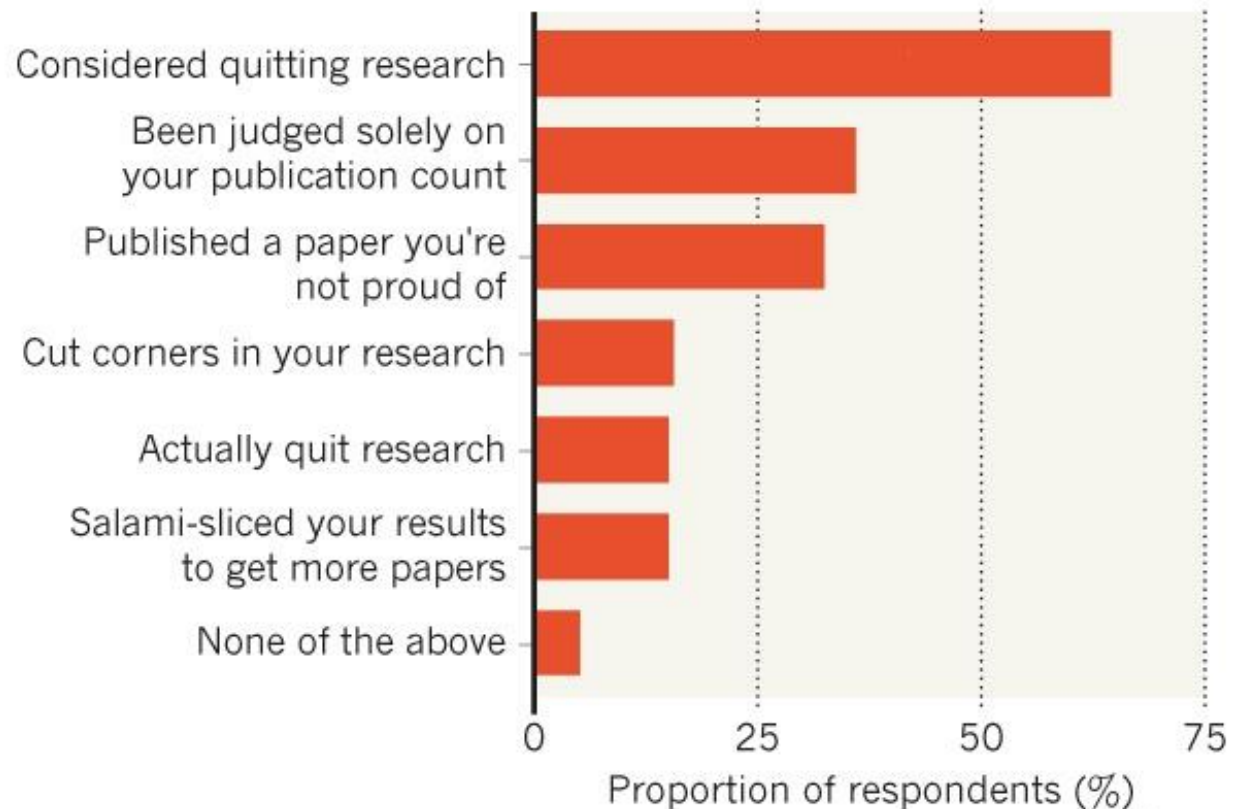


SHOULD I QUIT?

Almost two-thirds of *Nature's* readers say they have considered quitting research; 15% have actually quit.

Poll question:

Have the challenges of research ever meant that you have ... (8,820 responses)



Numbers of Researchers: A Different Metric

Maximizing the return on taxpayers' investments in fundamental biomedical research

Jon R. Lorsch

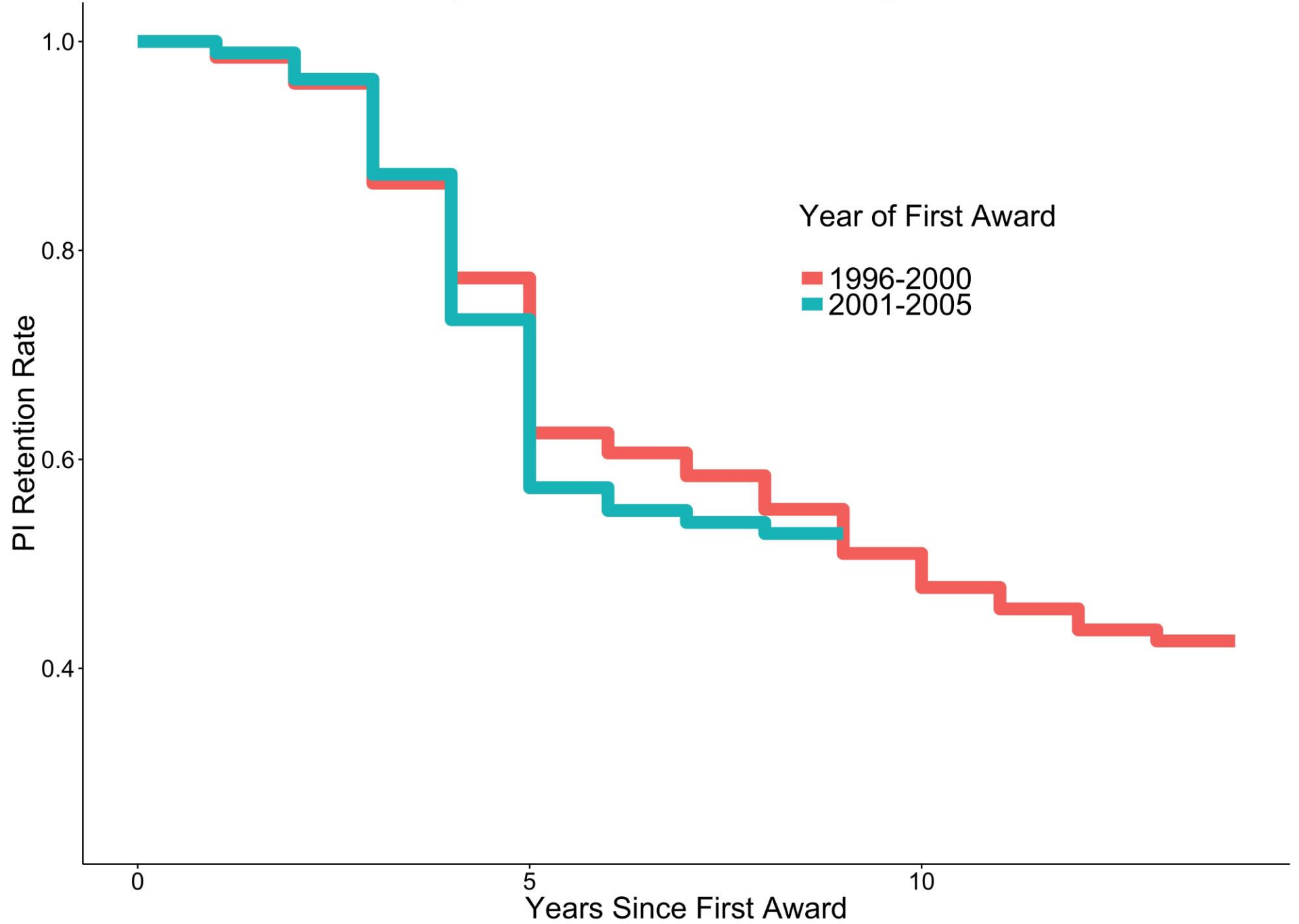
National Institute of General Medical Sciences, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892

Changing our funding metric

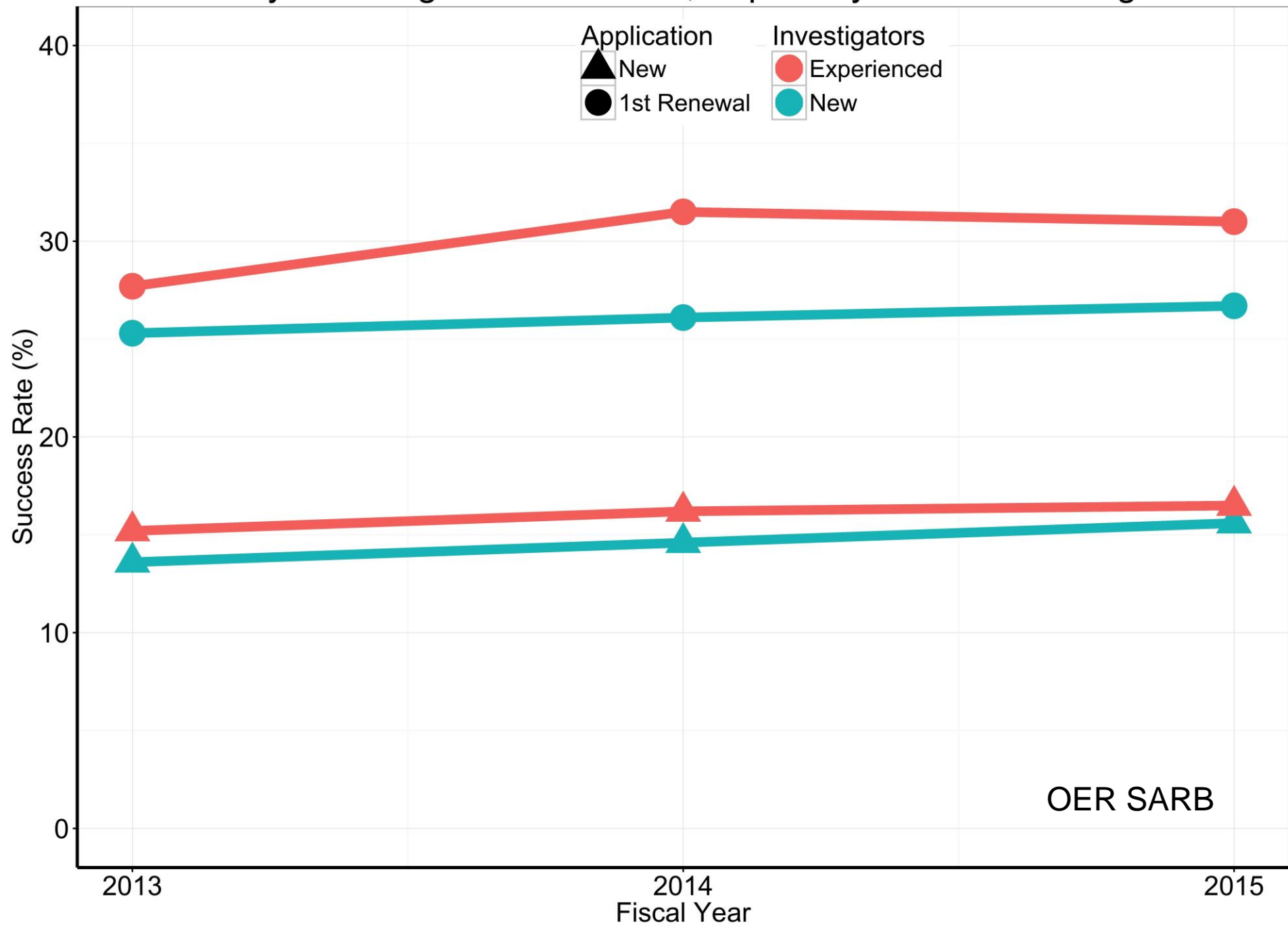
“A question that at first glance may seem trivial but is, I believe, a significant one is whether our key metric for how... we invest in ... research should be the number of grants we award or ***the number of investigators we support.***”

Lorsch JR. Mol Biol Cell 2015;26:1578-82

Dropout of Funded NIH Investigators



Difficulty Securing First Renewals, Especially for New Investigators



Tools to Measure Input and Output

- Input
 - **Dollars, effort & grant count – problematic**
 - New tool: “Research Commitment Index”
- Output
 - Relative Citation Ratio
 - Others: mentorship, patents, guidelines
 - “Cure Networks”

Input: What About Number of Grants?

- Couldn't we simply count grants?
- Problems:
 - R01 \neq R03 \neq R21
 - R01 \neq P01
 - R01 \neq U10
 - Etc...



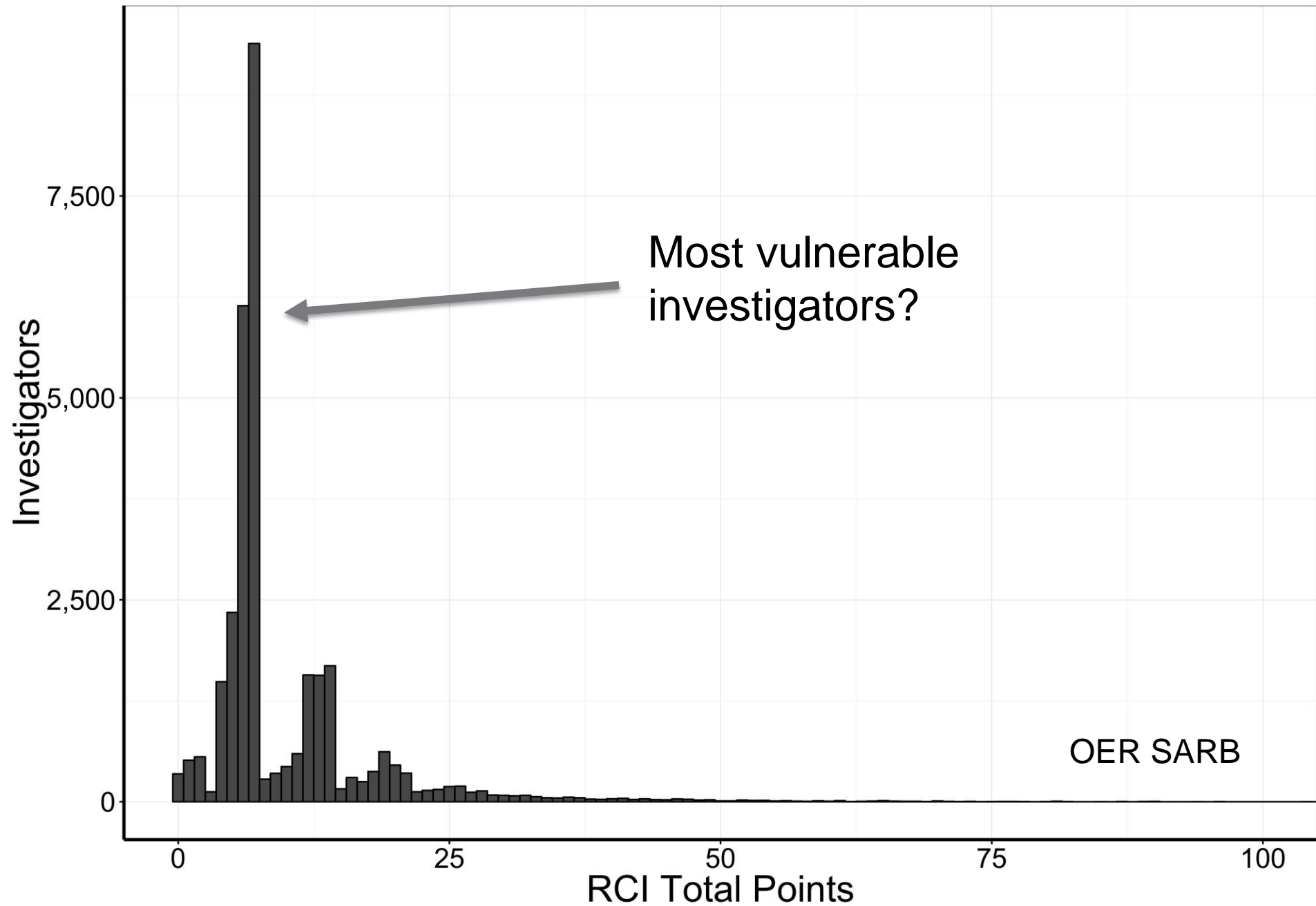
Tools to Measure Input and Output

- Input
 - Dollars, effort & grant count – problematic
 - **New tool: “Research Commitment Index”**
- Output
 - Relative Citation Ratio
 - Others: mentorship, patents, guidelines
 - “Cure Networks”

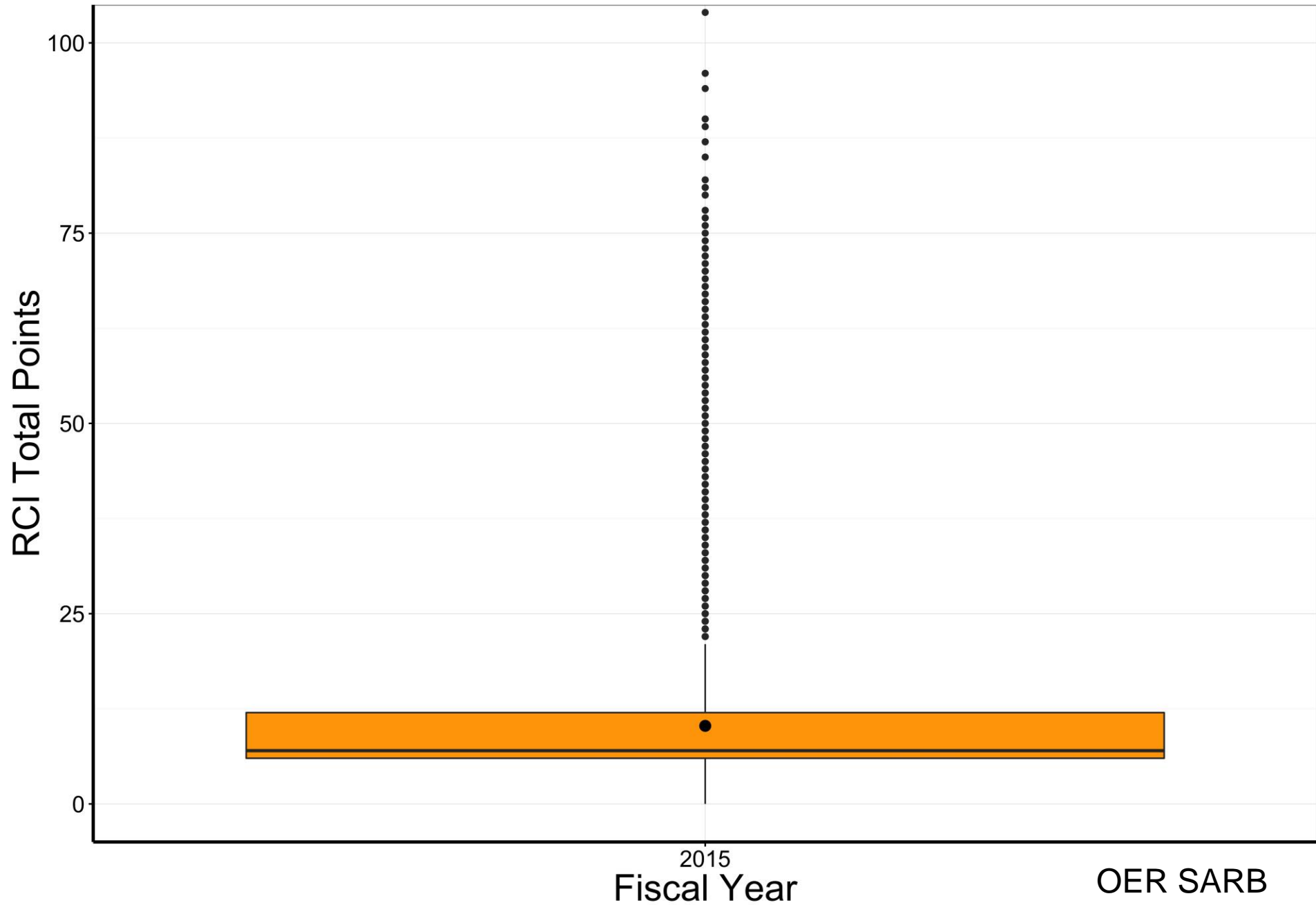
Research Commitment Index (RCI)

- Measure of PI's committed bandwidth
- Not simply measure of dollars
- Benchmarked to R01 (7 points)
 - R03, R21 less
 - P50, U54 (PI) more
- Effectively, a modified grant count

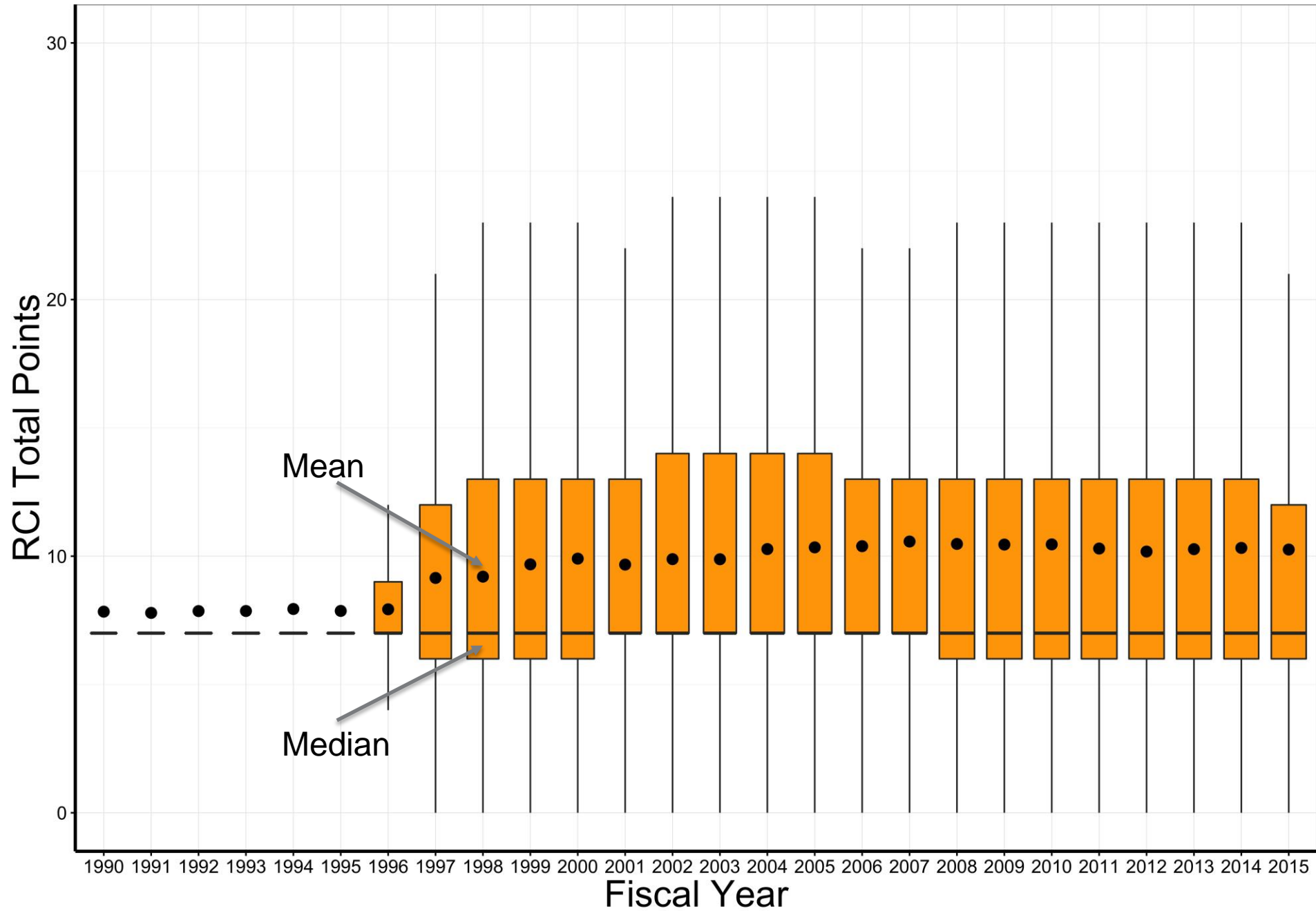
RCI Total Point Distribution in Fiscal Year 2015 for RPG and Select Other Activities



RCI Total Point Distribution in FY2015 for RPG and Select Other Activities

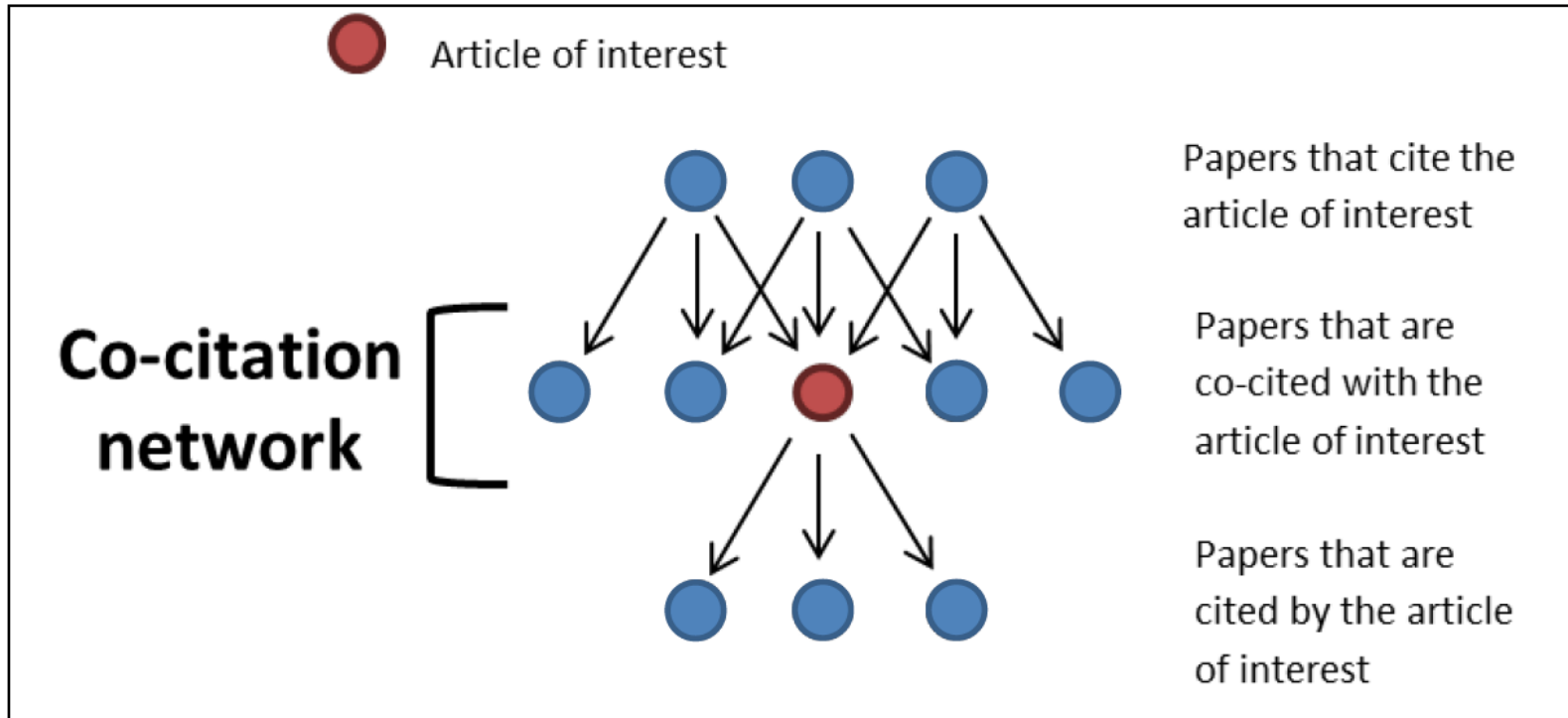


RCI Total Point Distribution by Fiscal Year for RPG and Select Other Activities



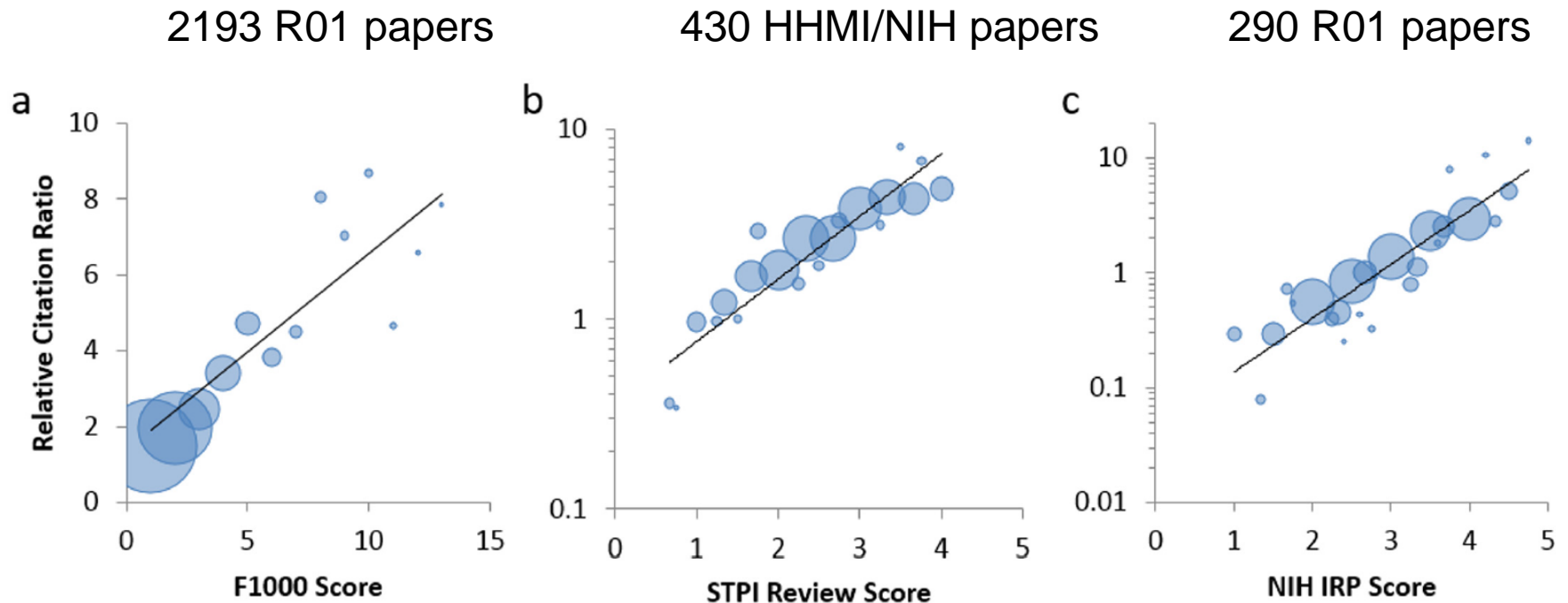
Tools to Measure Input and Output

- Input
 - Dollars, effort & grant count – problematic
 - New tool: “Research Commitment Index”
- Output
 - **Relative Citation Ratio**
 - Others: mentorship, patents, guidelines
 - “Cure Networks”



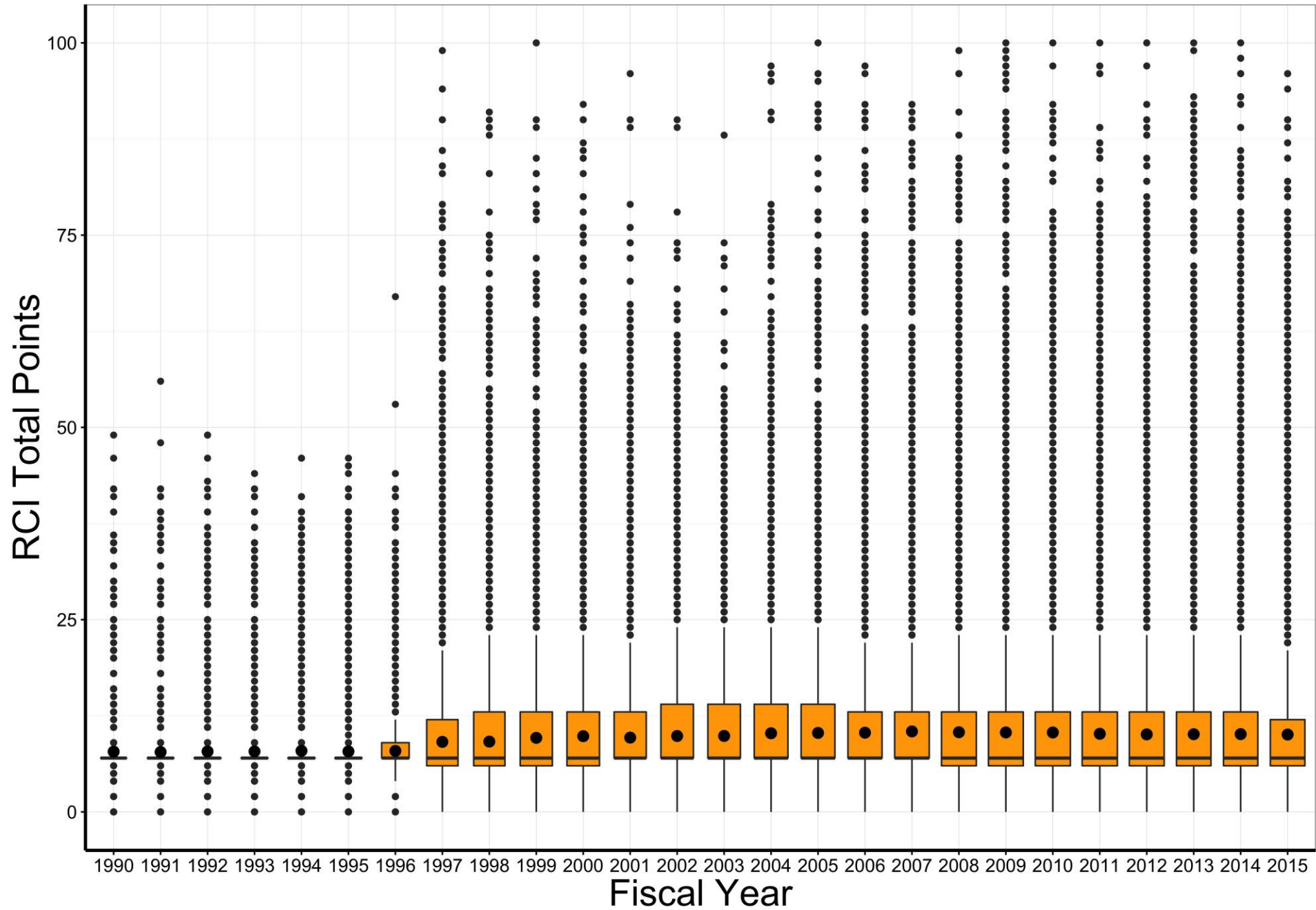
- 0 = never cited
- 1 = average
- 2 = twice the average
- >20 = exceptionally highly cited

How Do We Know Whether It Means Anything?

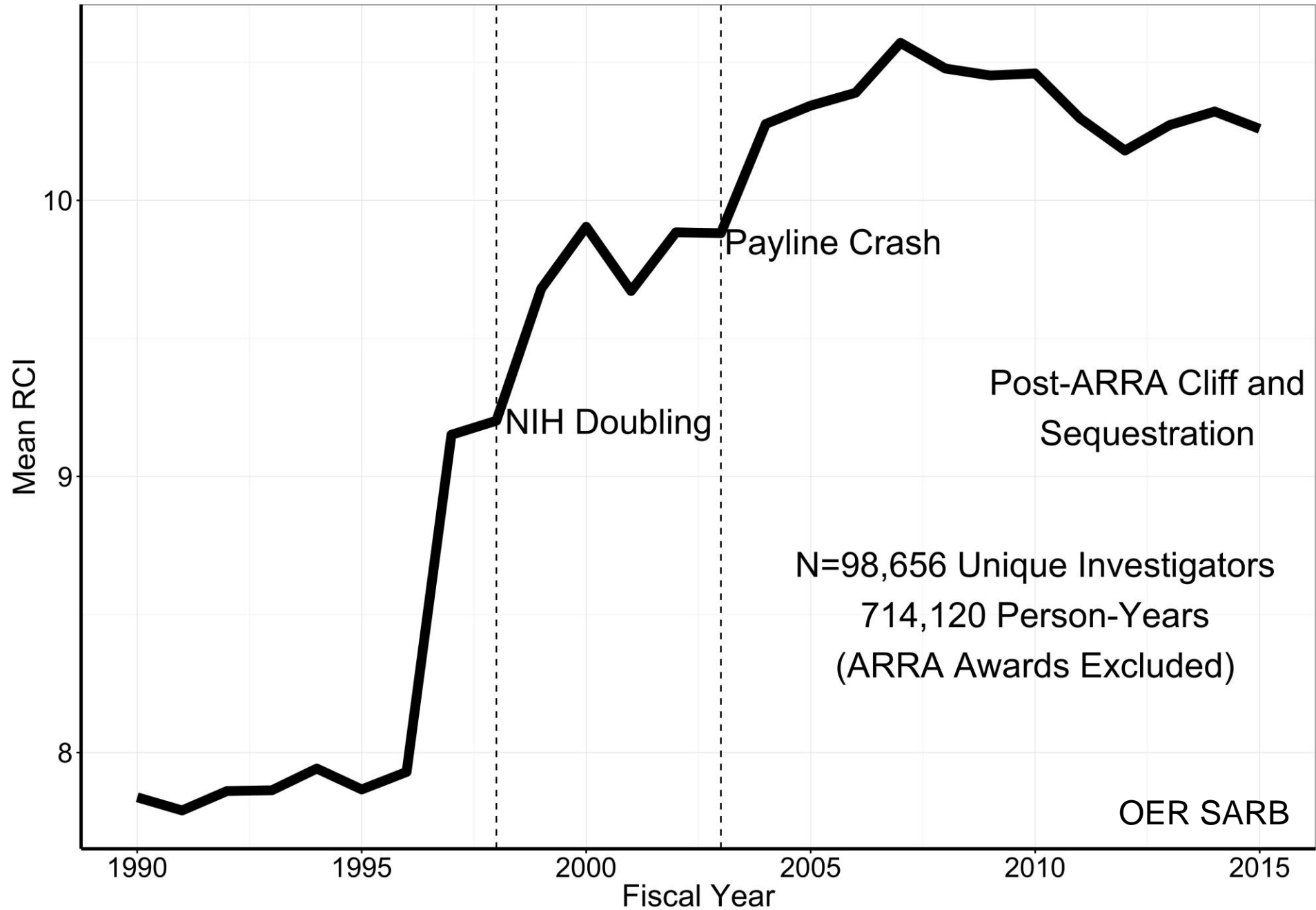


NIH Office of Portfolio Analysis
PLoS Biology (September 6, 2016)

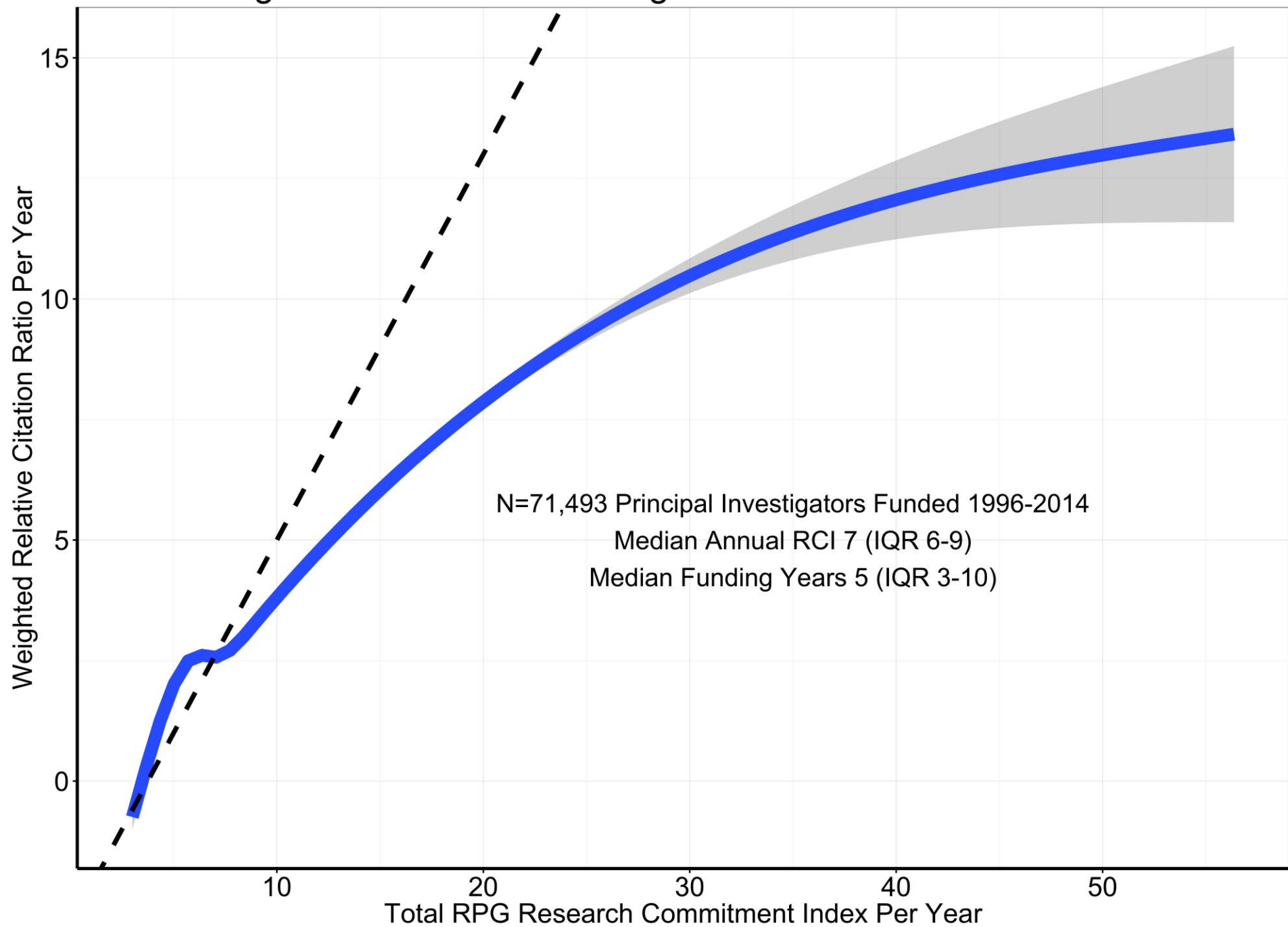
RCI Total Point Distribution by Fiscal Year
for RPG and Select Other Activities



Mean RCI Total Points by Fiscal Year for RPG and Select Other Activities



Strong Evidence of Diminishing Returns -- Nontransformed Axes



Funding and Mentorship: OPA Analyses

Early Stage Investigator (ESI) data

- Definitions
 - ESI applicant: PI submitting at least one competing RPG ESI application in FY2015-FY2016
 - ESI awardee: PI submitting at least one RPG ESI application that was funded in FY2015-FY2016
- All publications in each ESI biosketch were computationally extracted and matched to a PubMed ID
- For each successfully matched PubMed ID, disambiguation analysis and manual curation was used to confirm the link between each ESI name and author name

Linking ESI mentees to mentor PIs

- For each confirmed ESI PubMed ID, matches between the last author and an FY2016 RPG PI were identified
- A PI was considered a mentor of an ESI if both scientists were co-authors on at least two papers that had the mentor as last author; as above, disambiguation analysis and manual curation were used to confirm matches
- If an ESI had multiple applications, the corresponding ESI-mentor links were de-duplicated

Determining mentor funding

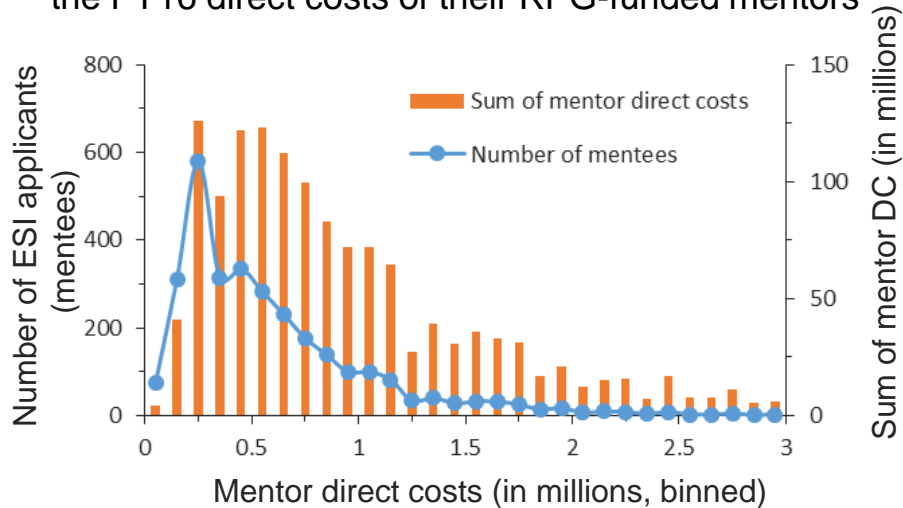
- A mentor's total dollar amount is the sum of FY2016 direct costs for all RPGs linked to the mentor's PI ID
- For projects with subprojects, dollar amounts are apportioned to each subproject PI
- For multi-PI grants, dollar amounts are split evenly between PIs

Thanks to George Santangelo and OPA

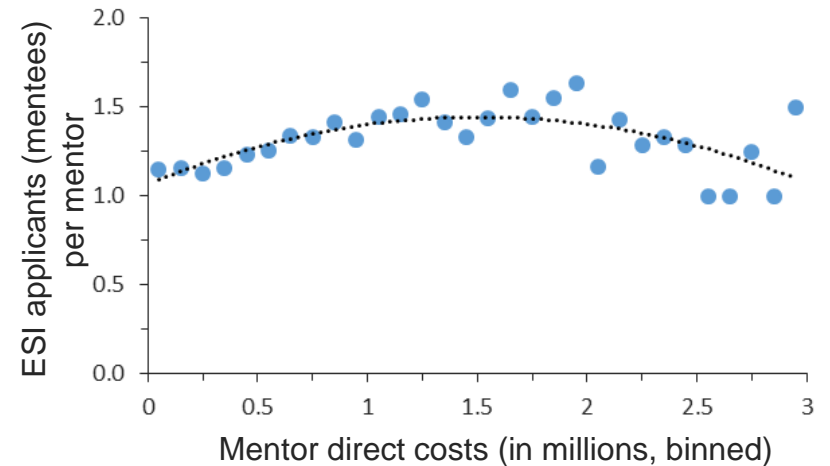


No linear relationship between funding level of mentors and the number of ESI applicants that they train

Number of ESI RPG applicants versus the FY16 direct costs of their RPG-funded mentors

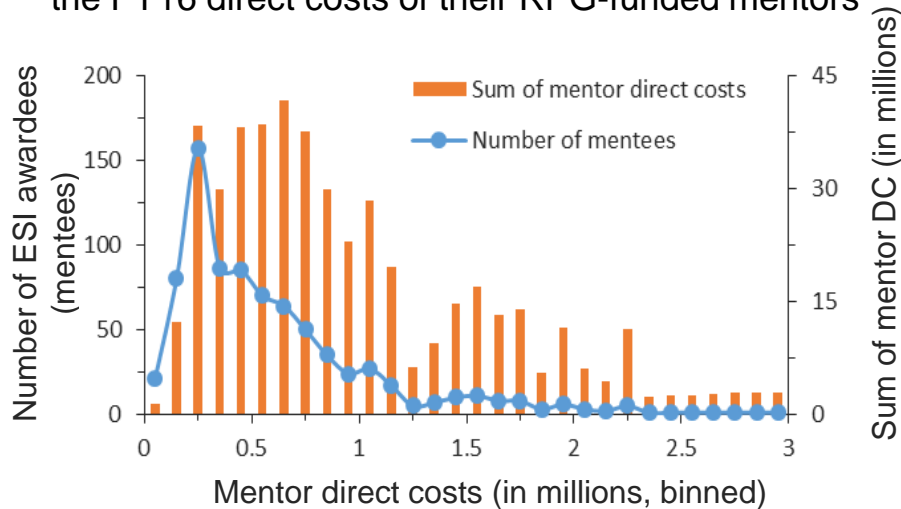


ESI RPG applicants per mentor versus the FY16 direct costs of their RPG-funded mentors

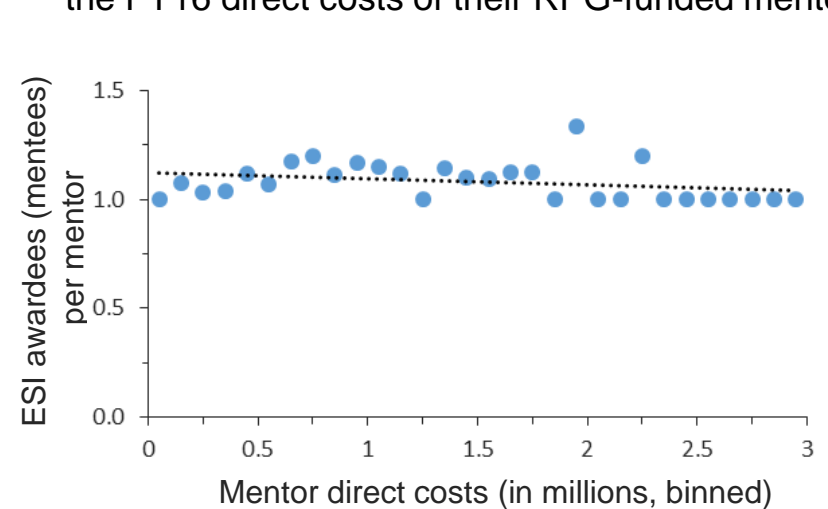


No relationship between funding level of mentors and the number of ESI awardees that they train

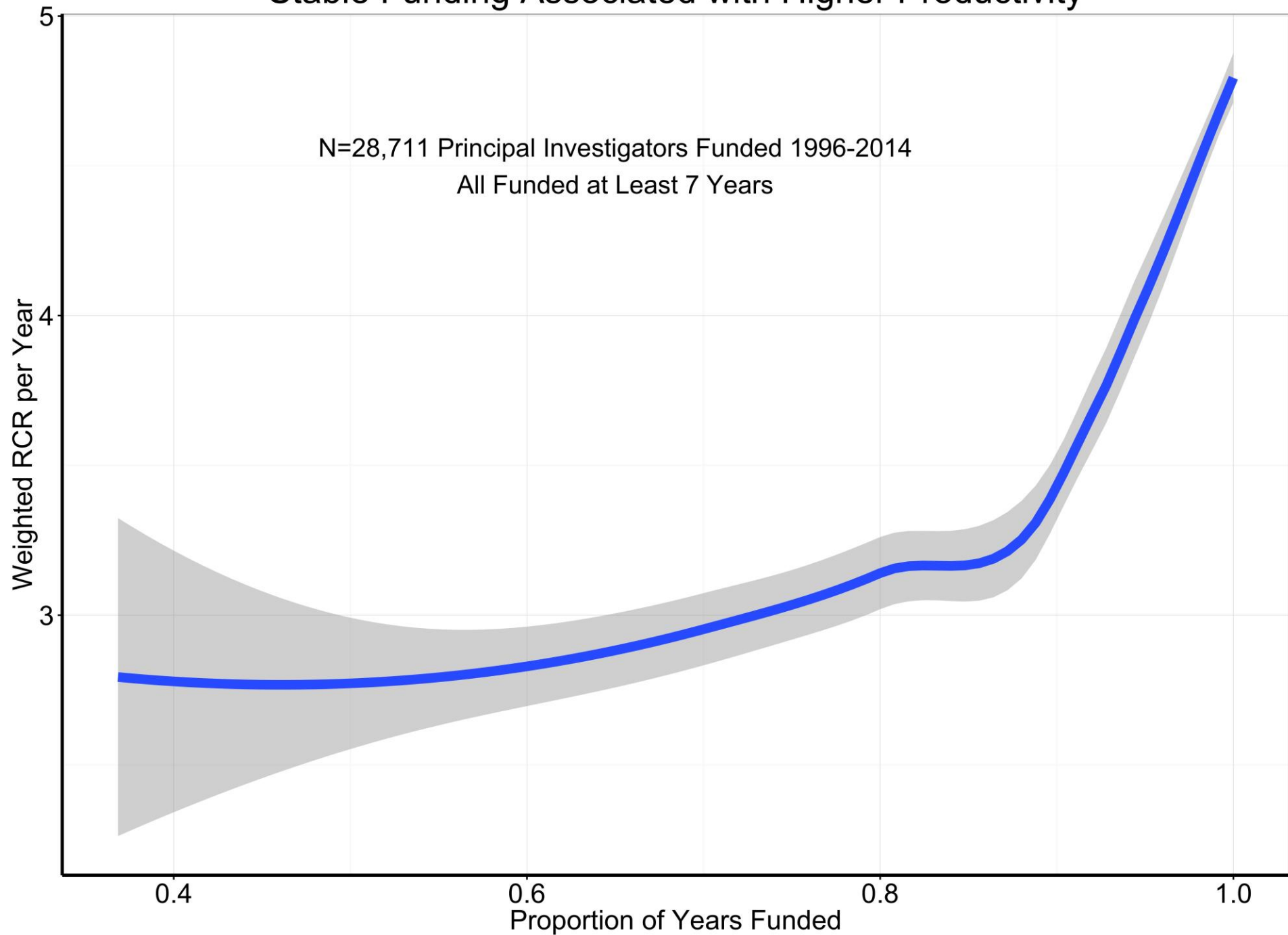
Number of ESI RPG awardees versus the FY16 direct costs of their RPG-funded mentors



ESI RPG awardees per mentor versus the FY16 direct costs of their RPG-funded mentors



Stable Funding Associated with Higher Productivity





YOUNG SCIENTISTS
 A *Nature* special issue
nature.com/youngscientists

YOUNG, TALENTED AND **FED-UP**

BY KENDALL POWELL

Martin Tingley was coming undone. It was late autumn 2014, just over a year into his assistant-professor job at Pennsylvania State University in State College, and he was on an eight-hour drive home after visiting his wife in Boston. He was stressed, exhausted and close to tears. As the traffic zipped past in the dark hours of the early morning, the headlights gave him the surreal feeling that he was inside a video game.

Usually, Tingley thought of himself as a “pretty stoic guy” — and on paper, his career

Scientists starting labs say that they are under historically high pressure to publish, secure funding and

Young scientists and senior scientists alike feel an acute pressure to publish and are weighed down by a growing bureaucratic burden, with little administrative support. They are largely judged on their record of publishing and of winning grants — but without clear targets, they find themselves endlessly churning out paper after paper. The crucial question is whether this is harming science and scientists. Bruce Alberts, a prominent biochemist at the University of California, San Francisco, and former president of the US National Academy of Sciences, says that



The RCI Point Schedule

Activity Code	Single PI point assignment	Multiple PI point assignment
P50, P41, U54, UM1, UM2*	11	10
Subprojects under multi-component awards	6	6
R01, R33, R35, R37, R56, RC4, RF1, RL1, P01, P42, RM1, UC4, UF1, UH3, U01, U19, DP1, DP2, DP3, DP4	7	6
R00, R21, R34, R55, RC1, RC2, RL2, RL9, UG3, UH2, U34, DP5	5	4
R03, R24, P30, UC7	4	3
R25, T32, T35, T15	2	1



NIH Biomedical Research Training Programs

