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U-M's annual survey of drug use among American young people has received an \$18 million grant to continue to "Monitor the Future."

ANN ARBOR---"Monitoring the Future," the annual national survey of America's secondary students conducted by The University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (ISR), has received an \$18 million federal grant to continue and expand its work over the next five years. The grant is one of the largest in the history of the U-M or of the agency funding the study, the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

The survey has had a major impact on national policies on public health and education, especially regarding use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and is widely acknowledged as the most accurate measure of substance use among American young people.

At a news conference at the White House in January, Louis W. Sullivan, secretary of health and human services, credited the U-M researchers for their work measuring the changing levels and nature of drug use among American young people---an issue which has been at the top of the national agenda for a decade. "We should not forget that our ability to monitor and understand this change is because prevention researchers and epidemiologists had the foresight nearly 20 years ago to realize that the extent of this crisis had to be measured---researchers like Dr. Lloyd Johnston," Sullivan said.

The U-M survey was launched in 1975 at ISR by psychologists Lloyd D. Johnston and Jerald G. Bachman, who were subsequently joined by Patrick M. O'Malley. The grant will fund the study through 1997. Johnston and Bachman are

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research scientists at ISR; O'Malley is an associate research scientist.

"The Monitoring the Future project is designed to assess the changing lifestyles, values, attitudes and preferences of American youth on a continuing basis, as well as to improve our understanding of those changes," Johnston says. "The issues we address are broad in scope and of fundamental importance to the nation: substance abuse, education, health, work, leisure, deviance, victimization and race relations, as well as attitudes toward our major social institutions, ecology, sex roles and so on."

The annual surveys measure about 1,500 variables among seniors, and somewhat fewer among the eighth- and 10th-graders who have recently been added to the national assessments. Some 50,000 students in about 500 public and private secondary schools are surveyed each year, yielding nationally representative samples of eighth-, 10th- and 12th-grade students. Because previous 12th-graders are followed-up by mail, the study also contains a national sample of young adults and college students each year.

"Since we're looking at young people as they enter adulthood, we feel that many of the values and habits they have today are indicative of the ones they'll have later, as they come to comprise the citizenry of the country, thus the title, 'Monitoring the Future,'" Johnston explains.

In the first 15 years of the study, the survey focused on high school seniors. "The senior year represents the end point in our system of universal public education, and thus reflects the cumulative impact of that system," Johnston says. "A research effort that examines the views of seniors will thus indicate changes, or the lack thereof, in the impact of our major socializing institutions: the family, the school, and increasingly, the media."

Eighth- and 10th-graders were added to the survey in 1991 because "it is at these ages that many of the problem behaviors being studied tend to begin, and prevention and intervention efforts are increasingly aimed at these age groups," Johnston says.

"There is also a widely recognized need to improve our

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understanding of those who drop out of school before the end of their senior year," adds Bachman, who is a nationally recognized authority on dropouts. "There are practically no dropouts before eighth grade. Further, we plan to follow a sample of each year's participating eighth-graders to determine who drops out, when and why. Eventually, we should have good national samples of dropouts whom we can accurately describe and study."

The Monitoring the Future project is "unusual in three respects: its longevity, the breadth of subjects that we cover, and the nationally representative nature of the survey," Johnston says. "Launching a new panel, or follow-up, study on each class is also quite rare, allowing us to avoid mistakes which might result when only a single cohort or class is studied."

As an example of the survey's impact, its results are used to measure progress toward one of the goals set at the National Education Summit to be achieved by 2000. One of the six goals calls for "safe, disciplined and drug-free schools," and Monitoring the Future is providing most of the findings used to measure its accomplishment. The study also is used to measure progress on some of the national health goals set by the federal government for 2000.

In addition, the survey provides outcome measures for the National Drug Control Strategy and has "helped set the agenda for national drug control policies," Johnston says. For example, in the late 1970s, the survey called attention to the rise in daily use of marijuana among high school students, which peaked at 11 percent among seniors in 1978.

"As a result, both the government and the media paid much more attention to the issue, and the scientific community began to examine more extensively the potential consequences of regular use," Johnston says. "Since then, daily use among seniors has declined dramatically, from 11 percent to 2 percent; and we have shown that this was due to a reduction in demand, not through any appreciable change in supply." In 1991, some 83 percent of seniors said it would be fairly easy to get marijuana if they wanted some.

"We have shown that the reduction in marijuana use resulted from greater awareness of the risks involved and

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higher levels of disapproval of drug use among young people," Johnston says. "Between 1978 and 1991, the proportion of seniors who indicated that people who smoke marijuana regularly run a 'great risk' of harming themselves physically or in other ways rose from 35 percent to 79 percent."

"A similar thing happened with cocaine in the late 1980s," Bachman says, "which helps illustrate the importance of the demand-reduction approach."

The study reports less encouraging results for cigarettes: daily cigarette smoking among high school seniors has remained relatively steady at around 20 percent over the last decade. "This lack of progress will have extremely important consequences for the health of the nation 30 years from now, and it is not widely recognized, so we are doing our best to bring it to the attention of policy-makers and the public," Johnston says. "Clearly, preventing smoking by young people needs to rise on the national health agenda."

Johnston blames massive cigarette advertising "that preys on children and adolescents" for much of the persistence of the smoking problem among the nation's young people.

Alcohol use also has been declining in recent years, though not so dramatically as marijuana and cocaine. "Part, but not all, of the decline is due to increases in the minimum drinking age to 21 in a number of states," according to O'Malley, who has conducted several analyses of the "natural experiments" that occur when states change drinking laws.

The study's results are widely reported in national media, and the U-M researchers regularly testify before Congressional committees. "We want this study to contribute to the solution of many of these important problems that face young people today, and the fact that we have another five years of support gives us that much more opportunity," Johnston says. "In the longer term, we hope that the study becomes an American institution that lives beyond the careers of those of us who are currently involved."

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