

# the heffter research institute

DAVID NICHOLS, PH.D.

**BY** NOW MANY OF YOU may have heard rumblings about the Heffter Research Institute. It was mentioned briefly in OMNI magazine last year; there was an announcement of its impending arrival at the LSD 50th Anniversary celebration in San Francisco; several versions of the Heffter Institute prospectus have been on Internet; and recently the Brain/Mind Bulletin had a short note on it. It was incorporated as a non-profit in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in September 1993. So, what is the Heffter Institute? Named after the German scientist who in 1897 discovered that mescaline was the active principle in peyote cactus, it was founded by a group of seven individuals who have a strong interest in promoting scientific research on psychedelics: David Nichols, a professor at Purdue University, Mark Geyer, a professor at UCSD, Charles Grob, an MD at Harbor UCLA Medical Center, Dennis McKenna, a pharmacognosist at Aveda Corp., George Greer, a psychiatrist in Santa Fe, Phil Wolfson, a psychiatrist in San Francisco, and Jerry Patchen, a Houston attorney who has represented the Native American Church.

They have recruited a Scientific Advisory Panel that so far includes some of the world's foremost researchers of psychoactive compounds, as well as experts in cognitive science, psychology, and anthropology. Most of them have appointments at academic institutions and medical research institutes. This group will help to guide and design research protocols that will stand up to scrutiny by the scientific community.

## **Objectives**

The overall objectives of the Heffter Research Institute are to foster and support research using psychedelics, to identify legitimate therapeutic uses for psychedelics, and in general to study the use of psychedelics as tools to explore the mind/brain question. The initial plan is to support well-designed research projects outside the Institute that have an immediate need for funds.

Perhaps one of the things that sets the Heffter Institute apart is the founders' ultimate goal of establishing a sufficient endowment so that research on psychedelics will never again suffer for lack of funds. Indeed, they hope eventually to raise enough money to build an actual research facility so that researchers who presently have no place to do their work, or who would like to do this research but are overburdened with institutional commitments, will have a central place to carry on investigations using psychedelics. To some extent, it seems to be an attempt to restart the "Spring Grove experiment," but this time to build in a funding mechanism that will prevent the experiment from being aborted by politics. It seems like a good long-term plan, but it will certainly be costly.

## **Need**

Do we need the Heffter Institute? If you believe in this research, you have to wonder why no work was done for so many years. Although part of the explanation was cumbersome governmental regulation, years of perseverance could get you FDA approval to do a study with LSD. However, once you got approval, there was no good way to get funds to

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## *a central place to carry on investigations using psychedelics*

pay for the study. Things have loosened up a little bit lately, but funding is still the big issue. If you're well-connected, and know good fund-raisers, they may be able to locate donors to provide support for a specific study. But if you're a scientist, you can't spend all your time fund-raising or there's no time for research. Is an Institute an effective way to do science? A lot of people think it is. If you look across America, you see the Scripps Institute, the Howard Hughes Institute, the Roche Institute, the Vollum Institute, etc. Centralized collaborations in these settings by outstanding scientists are leading to some of the really exciting breakthroughs in science today.

The Heffter Institute is envisioned as eventually being able to do solid research and gaining respect similar to these institutions, but with its own focus on psychedelics, unique in the world of science today. A major difference is that these, and all other institutes were founded by philanthropists who were supremely wealthy. A typical institute today might be started with a single founding gift of between \$20-40 million! To actually develop the Heffter Institute to the level where most institutes start will require a lot of work and a long period of time, but it is certainly possible to do it. One of the founders has remarked, "there must be 10 or 20 million people out there sympathetic to this cause. If there were just some way to reach them all and get them to give \$1 each, we'd have the funding problem solved!" In the meantime, the Heffter Institute has just filed its application with the IRS to obtain tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status, a prerequisite to begin fund-raising.

For now, the Heffter Institute is seeking volunteers who have skills that may be helpful in getting the Institute off the ground. They are also soliciting ideas for research proposals that might ultimately become targeted for funding. Your ideas and comments (or donations) can be sent to: The Heffter Research Institute, 330 Garfield St., Suite 301, Santa Fe, NM 87501. •



## Heffter Research Institute

Research  
at the Frontiers  
of the Mind

*The Heffter Research Institute's new logo includes visual references to the mystical mathematics of Pythagoras, the golden mean rectangle, and the infinite logarithmic spiral found throughout nature from spiral galaxies to the arrangement of seeds in flowers.*

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