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Fellows. From Where? To Where?

In selecting the students on whom we pin our hopes for future scientific leadership, ability, as best we can measure and predict it, is surely the factor to which we should give greatest weight. Thus, in many of the most respected fellowship programs selection is made on the basis of ability alone, without regard to other considerations.

If selecting fellows for this or the next few years were the only problem to consider, ability would suffice and we would not have to consider other aspects of fellowship programs. But there are also the problems of increasing the total supply of potential fellows, and of multiplying the sources from which they come and the institutions at which they can profitably continue their studies. The selection of fellows on the basis of ability alone, and from the nation as a whole, does little to help solve these problems. Some critics even contend that the problems are aggravated by an unduly high concentration of talent in a few outstanding institutions. There has long been wide agreement that the existence of some universities of very high quality is good for all universities. Exceptionally high quality is not only good in itself but has the additional value of providing models for other universities to emulate. But if the best institutions are to serve as effective models the others must be able to follow; those that straggle too far behind lose sight of the leaders.

Thus an argument can be made for awarding some fellowships to students who are the best in their region or university, even though not the best in the nation. It is this argument that prevailed when the fellowship provisions of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 were drawn up. Those provisions were designed to increase "the facilities available in the nation for the graduate training of college or university level teachers and of promoting a wider geographical distribution of such facilities throughout the nation." Accordingly, fellowships are to be awarded upon recommendation of individual universities which have made arrangements with the Office of Education for help in financing programs designed to increase the number of persons prepared for teaching in institutions of higher education.

Graduate programs may be new or may be expansions of older programs, and the programs and their accompanying fellowships may be in any field in which there is a substantial need for additional college teachers. Clearly some will be in science and mathematics.

Fellowships can be awarded for up to three years. The authorized number is 1000 during the first year and 1500 during each of the three succeeding years. Stipends will be $2000 for the first year beyond the baccalaureate degree, $2200 for the second year, and $2400 for the third year, plus in each case an additional $400 per year for each dependent.

Some of these fellowships will almost certainly be awarded to students who would not qualify for National Science Foundation fellowships, which are awarded primarily on the basis of ability and which are national in character. But that fact represents neither rejection nor criticism of the NSF program. The new program is complementary rather than competitive. NSF fellowships will continue to reward and encourage graduate students of highest promise, wherever they are found. The new fellowships, plus grants to the universities of up to $2500 per academic year for each fellow, are intended to increase the number and to widen the geographic distribution of excellent graduate students, and of universities that offer graduate work of high quality.—D.W.