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Small Colleges and Small Minds

Although the place of scientific research in the independent liberal arts college is not so clearly defined as its place in a university, the contribution that research can make to education seems so clear that we wonder why, if research is welcomed in some liberal arts colleges, it is opposed in others. The core of the argument for scientific research, as pointed out by Laurence M. Gould, president of Carleton College, in an article in the AAAS volume *Symposium on Basic Research*, is that while there may be good research scientists who are not good teachers, the evidence is that there are no good teachers whose competence is not increased by good scholarship. Yet the instructor in an independent liberal arts college who opposes research tells us that *his* institution is a teaching college, that research is good and teaching is good but the two are incompatible.

The theory that the conscientious teacher, as distinct from the over-worked teacher, simply has no time for research may be endorsed explicitly by the administration of a college or by influential members of particular departments in a college, but it may also receive a kind of indirect support. A prominent figure on many campuses is the instructor who is forever marking exams, grading papers, and drawing curves representing his students' performance. He is full of schemes, such as giving comprehensive examinations to the entire student body, that if instituted would require the assistance of all his colleagues. With such a person on hand, it soon appears that any instructor who so much as opens a book is goofing off just as surely as the student who cuts classes to improve his bridge.

To be sure, the administration of scientific research on a college campus poses many problems. Should the teaching load of an instructor who gets a grant for research be reduced? Should his salary be reduced? If the grant does not include salary, how much time should the college allow the instructor for his research? What percentage of the grant should the college charge for the use of its facilities and equipment? But these problems, if troublesome, can be solved. They are not arguments against the contribution that scholarship can make to effective teaching.

Instructors may all agree that in a liberal arts college the quality of teaching is the most important consideration. They may also agree that one can be a first-rate teacher without doing a stick of research, and that research, like teaching, can become a device for keeping oneself busy without actually working. But why in small colleges should some instructors oppose the recognition of good research as a consideration second to good teaching? The real reason is not one of those mysteries that science cannot explain. Consider the effect of such an additional consideration on faculty promotions and prestige—and even on the ability of a college to acquire teachers of merit. We suspect that some instructors oppose research, and other forms of scholarship as well, because, when a college encourages scholarship, competition for positions on its staff grows sharper.—J.T.