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## Stable Federal Support

Has the Federal Government acquired any responsibility for the continuing and general support of higher education in the United States? The answer may be debatable, but the amount of federal money going to institutions of higher education has reached a level that makes it necessary to consider the question.

Federal assistance provides research support, new equipment, building aid, library improvements, student assistance, and other forms of help to a college or university that can qualify. Other federal money flows to universities that assist federal agencies in meeting their obligations for training programs, demonstrations, assistance to other countries, and other services or action programs.

Despite important differences, the financing of all these activities comes in the form of individual grants or contracts that are made for specific purposes, for a limited period, without commitment for the future, and with some restrictions on use. Such funds have often had an emergency character and have been appropriated to meet needs that were considered temporary. The result is that a university often includes a substantial number of independently planned and temporarily financed extensions or "subagencies" of a variety of federal agencies.

This kind of financing is in marked contrast with the reasonably stable funds that colleges and universities have traditionally counted on for most of their annual budgets. State appropriations, student fees, and income from endowment, in varying proportions, have provided the solid core of academic budgets. Although none of these sources has been fully guaranteed for the future, all have been sufficiently stable to permit long-term commitments and planning. Moreover, the nature of these sources has encouraged prudent use of the funds. Income from fees and endowment can be used where needed most, and if not spent this year is available next. Many state colleges and universities receive lump-sum appropriations, and those states which require more detailed budgets usually allow appropriations to be used quite flexibly.

These more flexible funds now provide for about three-fourths of higher-education expenditures. The more inflexible federal grants and contracts supply about a quarter of the national total. The percentage varies greatly from one institution to another, however. In some it is close to zero; in others it is far more than half.

Higher education and the Federal Government have both benefited greatly from their financial and intellectual collaboration. The partnership will continue. But the amount of money now involved and its highly segmental character strain the ability of many institutions to plan and use their other resources most constructively, and these strains are most acute in the institutions that receive the most federal dollars.

The question therefore arises: has the Federal Government acquired a responsibility for contributing to the continuing and general support of higher education? The institutional grant programs of some agencies indicate a limited acceptance of such responsibility. But no general policy decision has been made, and no very effective one can be made by individual agencies. Decision at a higher level will be necessary, and that decision will be difficult, for constitutional, religious, regional, and educational issues are all involved in a matter of national policy. This whole problem is likely to become more vexatious before it is settled.

—DAEL WOLFLE