

Letters

Bureau of the Budget Cost Sharing and Effort Reports

In March 1965, the government promulgated a revision of regulations issued by the Bureau of the Budget, and more specifically, Circular A-21. The government's theory is that it reimburses the universities for costs incurred for research, and that it does so only if it agrees that the costs are allowable. Circular A-21 sets forth criteria for allowability of costs for research at nonprofit institutions, and in particular, states that salary costs are allowable only if supported by timely and current reports of time and effort, reported after the fact (not less often than quarterly). The new regulations introduced at the same time another new requirement, that the report of time or effort must show the distribution of the individual's time or effort among three categories of duties: (i) instruction and unsponsored research; (ii) administration; and (iii) sponsored research.

Objections to these reports have arisen in a number of universities at the professorial grass roots, and some of the reasons for the objections can be summarized as follows.

1) Effort and time reports are meaningless. In a recent letter, Richard Palais, chairman of the mathematics department, Brandeis University, stated: "On top of this first insanity of trying to make sense of percent of total effort devoted to a grant there has been the second insanity of having to somehow divide up this percent into the sum of a part paid for out of Federal funds and a part paid by Brandeis. While the first insanity can probably be explained, if not excused, as the result of a misunderstanding of the nature of professorial effort, the second is so utterly ridiculous as to be unworthy of serious discussion." In a discussion involving a joint Brandeis-Harvard-MIT group, Dean Trottenberg of Harvard did say that "there isn't a single administrator in the country who

does not realize that the effort and time reports are double talk."

2) Short term scientific accounting is an absurdity, and any requirement in this direction is noxious to scientific performance and inhibiting to scientific thought. Tenure positions and grants by foundations such as the Sloan and Guggenheim foundations recognize this explicitly. Grants to research professors should be, and are, refereed by one's peers, just as an appointment to tenure is subject to *ad hoc* committees and approval of the administration. Once the grant is made, however, it should be like salary, that is, irrevocable. At most a brief report of the year's progress can be asked. This should be the practice with any source of support, including government grants.

3) The agreements of March 1965 have been entered into without consultation with the professors, by business officers and accountants, after lengthy consultations with representatives of the Bureau of the Budget. No evil was intended and one does not question their good faith. Nevertheless, they did not realize the implications to academic personnel of the agreement. It is unacceptable that decisions concerning the nature of universities for the foreseeable future should be made in this way, without proper faculty representation. The threat to unfettered research and academic independence does not come only from certain pressures in the government, but from inadequate reactions of administrative officers, and inadequate representation of the professorial position.

4) George Mackey, former chairman of the mathematics department at Harvard, observed that the act of signing effort or time reports causes a professor to ratify a change of his status from that of "independent thinker, partially subsidized so as to have the leisure to think, to that of a professional, employed to do a job." (Letters, 2 Sept. 1966). Why should a professor ratify such a change?

5) The percentage information concerning the distribution of "efforts" in various categories is none of the university's, the government's, or accountants' business. In the words of Andrew Gleason (chairman of mathematics at Harvard): "An official request from the university (however benign its purpose) as to how much of our time is spent on research conflicts with this view of our appointments. The right to inquire merges imperceptibly into the right to direct. The government is already asserting its right to inquire into the disposition of research time which it is financing. If the university submits official documents which indicate that it has the right to inquire into how its members use their research time, the government may soon put much more pressure on the university to account for the actions of its faculty. Such pressures tend to erode academic freedom. The university should do nothing which may accelerate this erosion."

6) The present agreements introduced new criteria after *de facto* practices had been in operation for nearly 10 years. It is impossible to continue working under the permanent threat that an academically acceptable situation may be altered to an obnoxious one every 2 years (or whatever).

7) The contracts can be used as instruments of political-economic blackmail. Even granting that the Smale case is an exception, there have been professors who said that persons holding contracts should not speak out politically for fear that certain monies from the government would be curtailed, for research, or for travel grants. It is a general problem for this society to decide whether to make the award of grants dependent on the political "shutting up" of the recipients. This is precisely the present state of affairs in the U.S.S.R., and I personally regard it as totally undesirable. In that country, the scientists are well paid, well housed, and have reasonably good working conditions (relative to the rest of the population), *at the cost* of keeping politically silent. They have moved into this position from that of Stalinism and Lysenkoism, and hence regard it as an improvement. I would regard our moving into this position in the United States as a political catastrophe. In determining priorities, when faced with a choice between scientific achievement and intellectual-political freedom, I believe one should choose the freedom, without hesitating.

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8) The entire spirit of the contracts is now so ambiguous that people have a terrible time determining whether what they are doing is compatible with them. This is quite independent of effort or time reporting, and even though one may have found it convenient for 10 years to operate in this ambiguity, things have progressed to a point where it cannot be tolerated anymore.

Various people are struck in different ways by the above points, and give them different emphases, but I believe they are all worth mentioning. Furthermore, they involve much more than the immediate problem of effort and time reports. They involve the nature and extent of government subsidies to universities in the foreseeable future. There is no doubt that if the universities of this country are to continue at the same level of achievement and intellectual productivity as in the past 10 years, then there will have to be a large financial contribution to their budgets from tax money. It does *not* follow, however, that this should imply a corresponding loss of intellectual and political freedom, although we may well be forced to reconsider the very basic structure of the present means of channeling tax money into the universities. This, of course, can be done by dialogue, and I don't see anyone needing to accuse anyone else of treason or sinister designs for suggesting the need for such considerations.

The need does exist, and it is urgent. The situation has evolved to the point where professors who refuse to sign a meaningless document, which is nothing but double-talk, are pressured by their administrations for financial reasons. As Palais wrote to the coordinator of sponsored research at Brandeis: "We are greatly disturbed by the fact that the Universities have allowed themselves to be maneuvered into a position where their professors can be blackmailed into an action contrary to their institutions' traditions and to their own best interests. We now feel that we must fill out these effort reports, retroactively and for the immediate future, in order to protect Brandeis from the possibility of having to pay back large sums which it has received from the government and already disbursed or committed. We wish to make it clear that this is done under strong protest, and as a temporary measure to protect the University's financial interests. It does not imply on our part an acquiescence to the

principle of effort reporting." At Berkeley, the chairman of the department of mathematics, Leon Henkin, refused to fill out the forms, and stated: "When the University or supporting agencies require preposterous forms to be completed, it inevitably weakens the respect with which their serious policies are treated."

Various math departments are seriously considering substantial curtailments of their activities because of the obnoxious accounting practices now imposed. The problem obviously transcends the present crisis provoked by the revision of A-21, dated March 1965. But if the only choice given to us is to curtail, or lose past freedoms, then let us curtail.

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The Genesis of Creativity

Students are the best judges of an instructor's ability to present the subject matter in a clear and interesting manner as Denenberg has suggested (23 Dec., p. 1504). But is lucidity of presentation a sufficient or even a necessary condition for the development of creativity?

The primary function of a scientist is to solve problems, not merely to recognize relationships that have been elucidated by others. Too frequently students bemoan the effort they must exert in a given course and in the process they postulate an inverse proportionality between the pedagogical skill of their instructor and the magnitude of the effort they must expend to learn a subject. Actually, it is by this very expenditure of effort that students develop the ability to solve problems.

The ideal teacher is one who can stimulate the student to make this effort. He will know when to leave certain concepts unemphasized and then assign problems whose solution requires a comprehension of these concepts.

The question remains, however, whether his contribution to the intellectual development of his students will be appreciated, or even recognized by them. "The undisturbed oyster produces no pearl," but is the oyster aware of this?

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