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## Diversion of Funds from Research

The various components of the federal government act with what they believe to be laudable intentions. But the cumulative effect of their actions is often a poor result. Important examples are the bureaucratization of the universities and a related severe injury to academic research. An ever-increasing share of monies ostensibly appropriated for research is being creamed off by university administrators to support federally mandated or inspired bureaucracies. The fraction of the grant funds actually devoted to research is in many instances two-thirds or less.

At one time, federal support of research was provided with a minimum of federal stipulations and the result was world leadership. But after they were hooked on federal dollars, most university administrators, with the notable exception of Kingman Brewster, did not have the wit and courage to protest when Congress held research grants hostage to social and other legislation. Today, 59 different federal laws and regulations such as fair employment practices affect the cost or conduct of research. Agents of the federal government can threaten a cutoff of federal funds if their whims are not catered to. The university bureaucracies use the real or implied threat of the feds to enhance their own power and status on campus and to expand their already swollen ranks. During a period when the number of professors was being held constant at many universities, the administrative complement increased threefold or more.

Diversion of funds hits aspiring young scholars most severely. Many of them cannot obtain research support. Young researchers who do obtain a grant must spend an inordinate amount of time coping with the paper work. Top-rank professors who hold large grants or contracts fare better, but at a cost. They are sufficiently well supported that they can minimize the impact of the bureaucrats. A practice they often follow is to create their own counterbureaucracy. Thus the slim research dollar is further attenuated. This practice helps to reduce routine annoyances, but it does not eliminate deleterious effects of the downgrading of the status of research.

Recently I canvassed a cross section of leading research professors around this country. The consensus was that despite their favored position, they were finding it harder and more time-consuming to achieve objectives. One veteran with a long record of notable accomplishments soberly estimated that the time required by his group to complete a substantial project had doubled. He had recently spent some months in West Germany and had found to his dismay that tasks there were being accomplished with the kind of verve and effectiveness that at one time characterized efforts in this country. Other professors noted that many of the best young people were leaving academia without advanced degrees and that a brain drain of established investigators to industry and to other countries was picking up momentum.

The impairment of academic research is a process that both Democratic and Republican administrations have contributed to. In its budget cuts the Carter administration has been relatively solicitous of research. However, the Office of Management and Budget, which is the President's servant, is proceeding with its demands for unrealistic accountability embodied in its revision of the A-21 regulations. Politicians and bureaucrats in Washington seem not to realize that perfect time and effort accountability is a costly delusion. The bean counters drain off funds, spawn a bureaucracy, destroy morale, and hinder progress of research. They do not seem to understand that for research to be vital, creativity must take precedence over highly detailed bookkeeping.

University presidents who are close to what is happening and who have a responsibility to take constructive action have been relatively inert. If they would act in concert and marshal their alumni, their political clout would be enormous. Instead, they temporize. Ultimately the scientists will have to engage in cooperative political effort both on and off campus.

—PHILIP H. ABELSON