

## THE UNIVERSITY AS A FORCE IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

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This is a subject which warrants planning and financing as an important area of research into the programming and administration of social research. But this paper is not the product of such investigation. It is an impressionistic overview of developments based on some three decades of participation in, and observation of, efforts to plan, finance and conduct research in the social sciences.

Permit me to set forth my conclusions first, and, then, to proceed to elaborate upon them:

1. The University is becoming a less, rather than a more, important force in determining the general direction of social science research and in the planning of specific projects.
2. Non-university bodies--government, foundations and business--are becoming more important forces in determining the direction and character of social research.
3. Social research has been channeled increasingly into "social problem" areas--particularly into the areas of concern to sponsors and sources of funds--rather than to basic social science problems.
4. There is great imbalance in social science research problems reflecting more the availability of funds than of research needs.
5. There is need for a careful consideration of alternatives in the planning of social research and the role of the university in the process.
6. There is need for research personnel to take more initiative in the planning of research, if not entirely to take the initiative, at least to reverse the trend and to achieve a better balance than now exists.
7. There is need for an increase in free research grants--grants that will permit social scientists to follow the leads that emerge in the conduct of research rather than the decisions of personnel at some remove from the actual research process.

The University. The university, without question, has been and still is the most important agency in the conduct of social science research. Since the 1920's, however, it has probably been becoming a less important force, compared with fund granting agencies, in determining the direction and the character of the research. Several factors have contributed to this trend.

Among these is the fact that the great universities, and certainly the privately endowed ones, have become rela-

tively impoverished over the years. Increased income has, in general, not kept pace with inflation and increased costs. In consequence, the universities have not been in a position appreciably to increase their own support of social science. Moreover, their relative poverty has forced many institutions of higher learning to seek social science research funds partly to help to maintain or to expand social science faculties.

In the great state universities which have adopted social science research as an important part of their mission, problems of budget balancing have been less acute than among the private universities but funds for social science research have not been as easy to get as funds for new construction or expanded faculty. The latter has resulted in greatly increased demand for social science research funds and has led the state universities to increase their competition with the private institution in the search for research grants.

The net effect of the development of the past three decades or so, has been to make both private and state universities greatly dependent on outside sources of funds, not only for the conduct of research, but, also, in part for the expansion or maintenance of faculty or for the enhancement of the prestige of rapidly expanding faculties faced with enormous student bodies and excessive teaching loads. Motivation in seeking research grants undoubtedly, in part, has therefore contained elements other than those provided by the hot pursuit of exciting leads in the development of science.

Another factor that has contributed to the diminution of the role of the university in the planning of research is the failure of university administrations conceptually to keep up with the changing fiscal requirements of social research. "Social science" in the 19th and early 20th centuries was largely a form of "thinking", soft as well as hard, rather than of empirical investigation. Thinking does not require large budgets. Moreover, tradition and accepted budget standards provided relatively little for social science teaching or research compared with natural science outlays. Since the first quarter of this century, however, the social sciences have become much more a body of empirical research disciplines and much less branches of social philosophy. This transition--one

which calls for greatly increased expenditures per student, both for teaching and research purposes, is not yet reflected in university budgets. It has yet to be recognized by university administrators that social data are often more expensive to come by than physical science or biological data--and that social science laboratory requirements may be as expensive as natural science ones. Without question the relative impoverishment of universities, and again, especially of the privately endowed ones, does not accelerate the disappearance of this evidence of cultural lag.

Factors such as these, then, have made the universities more dependent than formerly on "outside" sources of funds for social science research purposes. This development along with changes in the availability of research funds and changes in the administration of such funds have increasingly placed the planning and direction of social research in non-university agencies--in the foundations, in government and in business hands.

The Sources of Funds. The funds available for social science research have, of course, tremendously increased since the 1920's. Foundation funds for social research have been swelled by increased income derived from the boom economy generated by the post-war cold-war climate and, of course, by the advent of the gigantic Ford Foundation. Government funds for social science research have also greatly multiplied and, especially, funds available through the military establishment, the various institutions of health and the National Science Foundation. Finally, business has greatly increased its expenditures for social research both by making such research part of its own activity and, in part, by means of contractual arrangements. The great increase in resources for social science research in government and in business should, at least in part, be gratifying because it reflects in each instance increased recognition of the practical benefits to be derived from such research.

But the broadening of the base of support and increase in magnitude of funds available has not been without its cost. For social science research has more and more reflected the interests of the grantors of research funds than of the interests of the investigators. The foundations, not without justification, have developed "programs," largely in problem areas by means of which in concentrating their largess they have sought to maximize, and to have discernible, impact. Government sources of research funds similarly, have tended to focus on

specific agency missions such as defense, health, housing, urban renewal or improving agriculture and rural life, with the notable exception of the National Science Foundation which is beginning to develop sizable social science research support. But even the National Science Foundation affects the selection of social research by necessarily having to shy away from politically "hot" questions or "soft" areas not likely to have relatively early and demonstrable results. Private business is, of course, in business, and social science research supported by this source is generally definitively aimed at company or industry problems.

These developments have tended to erode university influence in the planning and management of research in several ways. First, each of these sources of research funds has, over the years, expanded its staffs and procured knowledgeable social science personnel to help develop and plan research areas, assist in making grants, and, in varying degrees, "monitoring" the actual conduct of research. Second, by focusing on areas of research activity, they have wrested the initiative in selection of research problems from the personnel actually engaged in research--usually university personnel. Third, by having preferences for specific approaches, methods, inter-disciplinary or multi-disciplinary projects, not to mention universities or specific personnel, they have increasingly affected the design and conduct of investigations and, therefore, the direction of development of the social sciences.

Social Problem Areas. The influence of the grantors of research funds is perhaps no place more evident than in the selection of problems for research. There has been an amazing increase in the proportion of research energy, for example, devoted to defense projects; health and especially mental health projects; metropolitan area studies; economic development studies, especially those requiring foreign travel; and industrial relations, business organization and consumer markets. The proportion of social science personnel "bought" by funds in these applied areas, must in the post-war situation have increased enormously over previous periods. Is the present allocation of research personnel the optimal one either from the standpoint of social engineering or social science? Does the multiplication of specific research projects in these areas reflect the needs of sociology or political science, or economics, or of any of the social science disciplines, for making effective progress in the development

of these various disciplines as sciences?

There is a great need for knowledge which can serve social engineering purposes. It would be absurd to say that applied social research should be discouraged or even curtailed. But it is possible, as in the natural science field, that the knowledge most useful for social engineering purposes may come from basic rather than applied research. Too much concentration on research into social problem areas may retard rather than advance the cause of social engineering as well as of social research.

Imbalance. Not only is social research increasingly concentrated in social problem areas but, also, in selected problem areas reflecting specific interests of trustees of foundations, government agencies or business needs. The result is an allocation of research resources to social problems that is heavily imbalanced by almost any criteria that might be used to determine "need". Many social problems are less significant or less acute, but, rather, because they are too "hot" to handle from the standpoint of present political, class, moral, religious, or ideological conviction. For example, relative to studies now being supported, are there sufficient researches on problems of racial integration, birth control, the integrity of advertising, the role of mass media of communication in elections, the effects of deleterious agricultural and industrial practices on health and mortality, or the consequences of U.S. foreign policy?

Need for Reconsideration. Now, I am not arguing that the influence of research granting agencies is all necessarily deleterious; nor that the grantors do not possess the right, or even the obligation to exert influence on research. But I am contending that there is need for careful evaluation of the effects of such influences on the development of social science, in general, as well as on the quality of specific research undertakings. It is difficult for me to believe that the transfer of the initiative in the selection of research problems in the design of the research, or, in the unrestrained conduct of the research is really conducive to serving the best interest of the fund granting organization, let alone the furthering of social science or the development of the social scientist.

Moreover, it does not necessarily follow that because the research is social problem oriented that it cannot be well designed research that contributes to the development of science. Furthermore, it may be argued with justification, that even imbalance in research

into social problem areas may be justified by efforts to achieve breakthroughs by concentrating research resources. But it is unlikely that the path strewn with research grants is necessarily the most direct path to the improvement of the various disciplines as science, or even to the solution of the problems with which trustees of foundations, government agencies, or business leaders may be concerned.

No one has deliberately planned the way in which direction is at present being given to social science research. It would seem appropriate therefore that, with the increasing volume and importance of social research that some rational decision making with respect to the direction of social science research may not too much impair or retard the complex processes by which social science proceeds and, let us hope, advances.

Planning. Although the planning of social science research has been slipping away from the university faculties to the agents of fund granting organizations, there have been some countering forces. Some of them are considered in another paper at this session (Paul Webbink, "Programming and Financing Social Research"). They consist in the work of such bodies as the Social Science Research Council, the professional societies, and various independent research bodies such as the National Bureau of Economic Research. These organizations have increasingly devoted, or increased their inputs of, energy to plan and to give direction to research. Their activities may be regarded as countering forces to the trends described, because they uniformly involve the mobilization of professional research personnel--largely university faculty--thus enabling them more directly to take a hand in the research planning process. These activities provide dispersed and unorganized university personnel with means to make their individual and collective voices heard on the research front. The activities to which Mr. Webbink has referred include notable achievements in giving direction to needed social research.

One corrective, then, to the increasing influence in research planning of fund granting agencies may lie in the increased use of research personnel by the Social Science Research Council and professional societies to provide direction for research. But such activities are, also, dependent on financing, often from the same fund granting agencies. These agencies, and especially the great foundations, might do well deliberately to support activities which help more

effectively to organize research personnel to counter their own influence in giving direction to research. Such a course of wisdom is not likely to be inconsistent either with the desire of the foundation to illuminate problem areas in which they are interested nor the advancement of the social disciplines as sciences.

Free Funds. The most important corrective factor to the trend described undoubtedly lies in the increase of "free funds" for research. That is, an increase is needed in funds available to competent research personnel which they are free to use at their own discretion in following leads which emerge as they do their research. Such research activity is likely to be more fruitful in the development of the social sciences than the research directed to social problems.

Some awareness of this need is evident in free grants by foundations to individual scholars, but such grants are pitifully small, at present, relative to the "program" type of grants. Appreciable increase of free research funds for freely conducted research could go a long way toward restoring the balance between universities and fund granting agencies in giving general direction to social science research.

#### Concluding Observations

During the 1920's, as social science was turning away from its beginnings as social philosophy to empirical research,

unrestricted research grants did much to promote both social research and the development of social science. With the impact of World War II and the pressing nature of post-war problems, there has been a great widening of the base of support for social science research in the foundations, in government and in business. But one of the effects of the broader base of support and the increase in funds for social research has been the tendency to transfer the planning of research from those who conduct it to the agencies which finance it. Social science research has, in consequence, become much more problem or social engineering oriented. These trends have been exacerbated by the relative impoverishment over the years of privately endowed universities and the rush to expand social research output on the part of rapidly expanding social science faculties of state universities.

There is need for serious consideration of the most effective means of planning and giving direction to social science research so that, on the one hand, the needs of social engineering are met, and, on the other, the social sciences are stimulated to further development as sciences. More specifically, there is need to achieve a better balance in the planning and management of research between the agencies which finance it and the research personnel which conducts it.