

FEDERAL INSTITUTIONAL GRANTS FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES

A Statement by THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES

There are three commonly accepted functions of institutions of higher education: research, service, and instruction. Yet, with the exception of the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, the bulk of federal funds has gone to the support of research or for the purchase of services.

Through research grants and through contracts for services to be performed the federal government and undergraduate colleges have been brought into many useful relationships which have proved beneficial to both parties concerned. For example, grants from the National Science Foundation for equipment to be used in the undergraduate instruction in science can strengthen the offerings of many of our colleges which could not otherwise compete with the facilities available at larger institutions. Similarly, contracts for Peace Corps training or for teacher institutes make it possible for many of our colleges to undertake educational programs that would otherwise be beyond their capacity.

As useful as these federally funded programs of research and service are, they do not provide funds needed to improve basic instruction. Federal funds for research or for the performance of a contract must be expended for a specific project or for the performance of specific services. Even where they may be spent for books and equipment, they must be spent for books and equipment related to specific areas of instruction. In the case of the Higher Education Facilities Act, federal funds may be spent for the construction of instructional facilities but they must be spent under highly specific conditions and for a specific building project.

Almost inevitably, the institution must decide how much of a commitment it wishes to make to a specific program if it intends to accept federal funds for the support of that program or for the performance of a contract. This in itself is not bad, but it offers a temptation to institutions to distort their programs in order to obtain federal support for them. As a result, some institutions have placed undue emphasis on those areas of instruction for which federal support was available.