

Funding and Research¹

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In the academic world, especially in those disciplines within the physical and biological sciences and engineering, where there exist large sources of external federal and corporate research funding, a measure of the importance of one's research is directly linked to the size of one's research grant. The usual argument is: *“If your research is important, it should be able to generate funding to support it, especially from Federal funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation”*. While there is an element of truth here, to apply this as a blanket measure to all research ignores the value of work that has little support because no one has yet realized its worth.

This line of thinking that money defines worth, while always in existence amongst administrators of elite institutions has permeated to those colleges who had teaching as their primary mission. Faculty in teaching colleges would devote themselves to mentoring undergraduate students, and would spend the majority of their time developing their pedagogical skills. The trends are that even at such schools, even without any abatement of the teaching loads, faculty are expected to mimic the research effort and draw in the same funding as their colleagues in research universities.

One can understand why administrators see engineering, the physical and biological sciences, and medicine as sources of income. Overhead moneys taken from grants in those disciplines help to pay for other units at the university where funding is less readily attainable. Less understandable is why we faculty also buy this line of thinking to the degree we do. We judge our colleagues too often based on the size of their “operation”, and less on the importance of their work or their capabilities in teaching, writing books, or mentoring graduate students. This is not the case in fields where fundraising is not common. *Different disciplines have different measures of accomplishment.*

Somewhere between the two extremes, “funding is everything” and “funding is completely unimportant”, is the true course. It is important to attract funding because it

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forces researchers to examine their ideas and to defend them, and to help support needed facilities that are more expensive to maintain than those required by some of the liberal arts. It also provides funding to support students, their computers and their trips to conferences. Funding adds some legitimacy to the research. Nevertheless, there is research that is so far out of the mainstream, or so futuristic, that funding is nonexistent. The work is below the radar cross section. Such work also needs to be respected and understood.