

Military grants wear 'handle with care' tag

By ERIC BENJAMINSON
Of the Emerald

Military influence in American higher education is a fluctuating issue at the University.

How influential is the United States military in affairs of public higher education? When University administrators accept military grants, they examine them carefully for possible controls and restrictions.

Two current funding packages support research in problems of employee attendance and efficiency. Richard Steers, associate professor of management, and Steven Keele, professor of psychology, are the grant recipients.

The fact that both grants originated from the U.S. Navy's Office of Naval Research in Washington, D.C., is coincidental, according to Frances Barken, research information assistant for the office of Federal Relations.

"The Office of Naval Research is not the only military source of grant money that the University has used," Barkan says.

No "secret research" is conducted by the University, says Aaron Novick, dean of the Graduate School.

"Grants and contracts are accepted with the intent of supporting the work of faculty," he says. "Nothing is taken

which would interfere with the right to publish or disclose information."

Two types of research aid are generally used by the University: grants from which faculty members receive funds for projects of their own design, and contracts which are awarded to "contractors" who enter the highest bid for a job that needs to be done.

Grants are awarded more often than contracts, and are received most commonly by science and arts and letters faculty. Contracts are used mostly in educational research.

Barken is the University's source of information about federal grants. In general, all grants that do not restrict research are used by the University.

While there are no actual restrictions on areas of research, Novick discounts the possibility of working in such sensitive areas as weaponry even though technically, the work is not prohibited.

"At this institution, no faculty members are working on projects which are in such areas," he says.

At the same time, Novick cautions that "the end results of research cannot be foreseen. What will finally come of much academic research is often unclear."

Steers has been receiving a grant from the Office of Naval Research for the last three years. The award, worth a total of \$236,390, funds his studies of

the psychological links between organizations and individuals, and the associated career commitment.

"My research centers on employee motivation. I am particularly concerned with problems of absenteeism and a lack of commitment," Steers says.

Steers sees similarities between military and civilian problems in this area. He is now working to develop a comprehensive model of absenteeism.

"My studies benefit the military as much as they apply to my own research. All the armed services are plagued by absenteeism and turnovers in personnel," Steers says, noting that 35 percent of naval enlistees never complete their original contracts.

Steers says he has no prejudices about military grants, especially in connection with the Office of Naval Research.

"They have a history of hands-off research funding," he says.

"They have not supported covert projects like those the Central Intelligence Agency funded at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After all, we suggested our project to them, not vice-versa."

Steers sees a strong danger in controlled grants coming from the civilian sectors of government, which are often more restricted than those from the military.

Novick and Barkan both suggest that many public and private sources that support academic research are cutting back their assistance due to the state of the economy.

"Their dollars are simply worth less," Barkan says.

Faculty and administrators say that continued research funding is essential. "Teaching follows research," says Novick. "There would be little to teach if research was to discontinue."

Novick sees a remote danger in the continued acceptance of military funding in an age of declining civilian grants, but also stresses that the military provides only a small percentage of the money involved in academic research.

University Pres. William Boyd says the military grant issue is one that arose in the 1950's and became a volatile controversy during the Vietnam era.

Because of the uproar, stiff ethical standards were written into university procedural papers.

"We can stay free, but we must watch our funding carefully, and be doubly alert all the time," he adds. "There is a trend now for non-military as well as military funding to become restricted. We must not let our grant needs lead us into a subtle network of control."

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