Funding Innovative Programs for Adults: Searching for Policy on the Improvement of Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of funding policies and grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). It examines these policies in light of the changing and ephemeral sense of purpose of adult education.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the funding policies and actual grants of the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) from its inception through 2010. Starting with the work of Burton Clark (1968) in the1950s, it has often been noted that adult education sways with the funding source. Clark maintained that the lack of consistent funding added to the lack of direction within adult education. While he was defining adult education as primarily what we today call adult basic education, the idea is still intriguing. Study of funding sources of adult education has focused primarily on foundation support. (e.g. Stubblefield, 1988; Stubblefield & Keane, 1994; Lagemann, 1989; Rose, 1989). However, in recent years, the story of innovation lies with the federal government. Leahy (1991) did an overview of the funding of adult basic education programs, but her study really focused on individual projects, not policy trends. This study is part of a larger study looking at the connections between innovation in higher education and adult education. Specifically, it aims to initiate an examination of the implicit and explicit policies that are inherent in the funding of projects and programs by FIPSE.

Perspective or theoretical framework including relevant literature and research design
The theoretical framework draws on the work of Grant and Riesman (1978) related to their categorization of reforms within higher education. They posit that there have been two types of reform. First, the telic reforms deal with reforms that have as their goal reform of the system (or aspects of the system) of higher education. They go on to state that telic reforms "embody a significantly different conception of the goals of undergraduate education. To some degree, they represent an attack on the hegemony of the giant research-oriented multiversities and their satellite university colleges." (p. 17). For Grant and Riesman then, these reforms were a form of resistance to the research based university model. They saw the changes taking place as a form of reaction to the "Academic Revolution" outlined by Jencks and Riesman (1968) who hailed the development of a research based model of higher education as a blow to the hegemonic control of higher education exuded by presidents and Boards of Directors. Popular reforms, on the other hand, are those reforms which are developed to meet external demands. For Grant and Riesman these include changes in undergraduate education that would lead to increased student autonomy, new patterns of organization, and "attempts to respond to the demands of minorities and other previously disenfranchised groups". It is particularly interesting that while Grant and Riesman predicted that the telic reforms were more important, in fact it has been the popular reforms that have continued. Although this framework could be viewed as somewhat dated, it seems to us that adult educators have for too long ignored the ways that adult education has been viewed from the

perspective of higher education. This study aims to be begin an integration of these areas. Afterall, much of the story of non-traditional higher education is the story of adult education.

This historical paper begins an examination of the shifts in funding priorities of FIPSE. This is an historical case study of a particular agencies structures, priorities, decision-making, and when possible outcomes. The materials used include: published reports from the period of 1972- 2010; oral histories with individuals involved with funding agencies and/or innovative programs for adults; and an analysis of grants made by the key funding sources name above during this era. This is a preliminary effort to categorize the grants and develop a framework for understanding funding trends.

Method

This is an historical study focusing on funding trends over time. However, because this study focused on specific funding practices and repercussions, the ways that we narrowed down the material will be discussed at length. The first step was to go through FIPSE annual reports and other FIPSE publications such as *Resources for Change*, identifying all funding initiatives by category such as curriculum content, institutional type and impact, primary population served, and improvement approach. These grants were made as either part of FIPSE's general funding of projects or were designated as special initiatives. We examined grants from 1975 through 2010. However, at this point we still have a gap from 1980 to 1994. We have not been able to locate this information in either published form or on-line. In addition, this information was supplemented through oral histories published about FIPSE and other published materials.

Once this material was compiled (and this was a continuing and iterative process since the information was not as easily accessible as one might think) we were faced with the problem of how to handle it. After several false starts, we decided to organize the abstracts within each category by year up to 1980. For the later group, we used the online database and collected the number of funded programs by year and category. This was translated into an excel spreadsheet for easier analysis. Finally, the information was supplemented by research on particular programs that illustrated the trend. As a first step, we have aggregated the data and compared two periods, 1975 – 1980 and 1994 through 2010.

Findings

Areas related to adult education were heavily funded by FIPSE in the early period (1975-1980) and again after 2008. Funding initiatives initially fell into the categories of faculty training in curriculum development and access to higher education. During the 1990's, there was a growing shift in FIPSE initiatives, focusing primarily on technology. From 1994 to the present, funding initiatives focused on faculty development in instructional technology, adult career development, and veteran's academic success.

Early Period

Grants made during the early funding period focused on extending access to higher education. Part of this initiative focused on faculty development particularly in areas related to instructional and curriculum development. One interesting focus of grants was on the individualization of instruction. For example, in 1973 Ottawa University in Kansas obtained funding for the Breaking

the Personnel and Institutional Barriers to Effective Individualized Education within a Contract System of Educational Planning program. This program involved faculty development through workshop to develop advising skills to support a program based on individualized graduation contracts. The program also developed a modular curriculum, a faculty resource network and an office of Educational facilitation to support the program and provide student services. The program funding of $568,553 began in 1973 and ended in 1974. In 1979 a consortium of community colleges were awarded a grant to expand a previously funded program that trained faculty and developed active learning courses for freshmen. The program aimed to address the need for alternative teaching styles and techniques at the community college level since the average community college freshmen were perceived to be unprepared for college level work. The aim of this new program was to create programs at seven colleges across the country, impacting over 200 students in the first year and changing faculty attitudes towards teaching. This concern with underprepared students has remained constant. Expansion of access is a primary aim of FIPSE after all.

This early period also emphasized increased access to higher education for minority and underserved populations. For example, Miles College in Jefferson County Alabama developed the Freshmen Year program to increase access to higher education in a predominantly African American, remote rural and impoverished area. However, more than half of the program's participants were adult learners over age 22. The program also included outreach services to encourage high school completion. The program provided basic skills education and educational counseling and advisement. It also developed a first year social sciences curriculum that emphasized the African American experience. This program was funded from 973 until 1976 and received $367,114 in funding.

As compared to the later period there were few technology programs during this initial funding period. However the programs that were developed seem to foreshadow the funded projects in the later years. For example in 1974 the Dayton-Miami Valley Consortium of Colleges and Universities developed Project Reach to initiate a distance learning program using cable television networks to deliver innovative home-based programs to women and their families in two Ohio counties. This project was funded for $705,604 from 1974 to 1976. In 1978 the Satellite Centers Project developed by Pikeville College also aimed to address accessibility by creating three satellite centers in Pike County Kentucky that would make serve locations isolated by steep mountains and poor roads. The centers would begin at offering non-credit, recreational and live enhancing courses as well as basic skills and GED preparation courses.

Late Period
In the later period, there were peaks in funding for faculty development in 1995, 2003, and 2008. On the other hand, funding for faculty development in 2010 was very low. This latter category might reflect budget problems. During this later period, the funds for faculty development focused on the use of technology such as online resources for instructional strategies and materials. Grants focused on the virtual campus; purchasing smart room equipment, and faculty training for using enhanced equipment. There was also some interest in funding faculty programs that focused on global learning and intiatives. For example, FIPSE developed the Learning Anytime Anywhere Partnerships (LAAP) initiative which funds innovative programs in

distance learning in a variety of circumstances. These involved both curricular innovation, teacher training, and innovative uses of technology. Fordham University instituted a program for teachers through its educational technology center that was designed to prepare teachers for standards based instruction programs to raise student achievement. This program aligned broad federal initiatives dealing with professional standards based instruction and the FIPSE initiative on online learning. While the concept of higher education or post-secondary education is somewhat expanded here, we assume that the focus on distance learning was the primary interest. What we see here, is that this program of combined initiatives relegated broader curricular imperatives to the focus on distance learning. However, this grant was listed for 2000-2005. A visit to the website now indicates that this program is no longer active. They received $1,419,215.00. In 1999 three Indiana colleges partnered to develop a program targeting faculty skill and confidence in developing online courses. By using a faculty development tool call Virtual Instructional Designer (VID) they hoped to enhance faculty pedagogical, instructional design and media expertise for online instruction. VID would provide multimedia interactive tutorials, case studies and a customized learning plan for course development. The customized learning plan would aid faculty in the use of media, best practices, and a focus on student needs. This pilot program received $1,152,788 from 1999 to 2003. LAAP grants also reflect innovation in online instructional styles. For example in 2000 the Association of Jesuit Colleges and universities received funding for a program called A Model for Competency-Based Distance Assessment. This program addressed the inappropriate use of seat time as an assessment tool for distance courses by implementing assessment based on the achievement of specific competencies. This competency-based model will organize course design from the bottom up by first identifying the competencies to be mastered, then determining the evidence that would be needed to indicate competency. Third student behaviors or performances required to reveal the evidence would be identified and finally the development of instructional tasks to elucidate the specified behaviors. This program received $1,049,588 in funding over a three year period.

The later period also showed funding support for programs that increased access for adult learners with an emphasis on career development and program/certificate completion. FIPSE funds such programs under its Innovative Strategies in Community Colleges for Workers, Adults and Displaced Workers Initiative. For example, in 2009 Bellingham Technical College, WA received funding for its Adult Technical Education Pathway Project (ATEP). This project aimed to redesign its adult basic education program so that the first year of study resulted in a workforce credential. The project focused on: (1) Faculty development in terms of effective instructional strategies for basic skills populations, increasing retention and transition rates. (2) Student support services including a seamless entry process, new orientation, and career and academic counseling. (3) Restructure of the teaching and learning environment to include separate math, reading and writing courses that emphasize technology, career and information literacy. (4) Tracking of student progress by using teacher observations, student surveys, and student lessons and reflections to determine students' needs. This program was funded at $500,000 for a three year period between 2009 and 2012. In 2009 three Washington community colleges partnered to develop the Compressed Education and Intensive Support for Learners in high-Growth Job Training Program. Through the development of shortened (compressed) programs and intensive student support this project aimed to persistence, attainment of

certificates and degrees, and increase job placement rates in high growth fields among working adults and displaced workers. This program received $742,272 in funding from 2009 to 2012.

FIPSE also developed an initiative to support academic success for veterans by creating Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success. The programs funded under this initiative aim to establish a central location where the special needs of veteran students can be addressed. Through this initiative FIPSE hoped to increase enrollment, persistence, program completion and job placement for veteran students. For example, the Community College of Allegheny County received funding to develop a Center of Excellence for Veteran Student Success on their campus that would act a central location for student services for current and perspective veteran students. The center would provide services such as financial aid, registration, career services, student health, advisement, disability services, and student life and job placement. The center would facilitate learning communities, programs to prepare students for college level work and build computer literacy. The center also sponsored both a face to face and virtual social club. This program received $423,435 in funding from 2010 to 2013. While not funded under the Centers of Excellence initiative, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System obtained $951,000 in funding through FIPSE's Congressionally Directed Projects division to develop the Statewide Veterans ReEntry Education program. This program would provide career and educational services to veterans, National Guard members and reservists. One objective of this project was the use of a database to simplify and streamline the process of awarding college credit for military training and experience. This program also aimed to improve opportunities and methods for providing training to current military members and veterans who aspire to obtain civilian occupational credentials. They also aim to develop an educational and life planning system that is sensitive to the needs and barriers of veteran students.

Conclusions

The principal finding can be summarized in terms of the focus on the expansion of access through faculty development, support programs, and increased technology. Looked at broadly, the data indicate that both in the early years and more recently starting in 2008 there has been an interesting focus on adults. In the earlier period, the grants focused on two areas: curricular innovation and expansion of access. These issues also related to a focus on faculty and faculty development. For example, innovation in the curriculum was connected to a focus on faculty ideas about their respective disciplines and their notions of teaching. During the later period, these two areas were important; however the innovative practices seemed to focus solely on technological innovation, rather than curriculum.

Starting in the late 1950s and continuing until the early 1980s, higher education research and writing were replete with concern about the state of education. One of the most interesting findings of this study deals with the shifts in priorities and what constitutes innovation. At the beginning, FIPSE grants were concerned with innovations in curriculum and the expansion of access. The focus was on innovative approaches to the liberal arts and to expanding this vision of a liberal education to previously excluded groups. A key group here was an interesting focus on undereducated adults. Over the years, this focus on liberal education and on adults shifted. Issues of access remained, but the concern became more centered on traditionally aged students.

However, a concurrent development (which continued the focus on adults) was a shift toward the use of technology in higher education. This included of course, innovations in distance education, but also included innovative approaches to teaching science and careers education. One of the central issues related to this funding is that of long-term impact. The original idea behind FIPSE grants was the provision of funds as seed money to generate innovation. There is a classical notion of innovation undergirding much of the funding approach. However, the end result has been the development of an imperative of funding that lessens the possibility of thoughtful innovation. Hence the increasing interest in technology and the loss of interest in curriculum.

Implications for adult education theory and practice
These findings have implications for both higher education and especially for adult education. These preliminary findings indicate that adult education has been used as the laboratory for incubating innovative approaches to higher education. While the initial emphasis on liberal arts encouraged the proliferation of programs for adults throughout the country, the later shift toward technology has had a profound effect on education at all levels. It has also led to the fact that while adult education has expanded exponentially in the past twenty years, adult educators have been increasingly marginalized. The evidence at this point seems to point to the ways that these funding decisions are made and the lack of coherence within the field of adult education.

All too often, adult educators tend to view adult education in a vacuum. Analyzing these grants, gives an indication of broader policy changes and issues, while allowing us to better understand the framework for the development of the field. We need to have a fuller understanding of how change has been advanced, what exactly are the motivations behind change, and what the broader implications of changes are. This paper is a beginning step in understanding these issues. Additionally, it is part of a broader study analyzing the ways that funding sources have shaped the entire field of adult education.

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