

# University of Minnesota Research in Social Science

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA research programs in the social sciences represent the present diverse influences on institutional research. No single mode of organizing research in human relations is dominant. Old methods are combined with new. The need to protect and assist individual research has produced special administrative machinery. Group research, rare a generation ago, is now a first-rate force in both pure and applied aspects of the social sciences.

Five types of research activity and organization coexist in the university. They include: (1) A large number of individual projects; (2) a coordinating and research-serving office; (3) continuing interdisciplinary research by an organized group of representatives of various departments; (4) centers for the study of problems and policies in special fields; and (5) service and training organizations. No category is a pure one. Personnel, functions, finances, and even study projects may overlap from one category to another. A scholar may work in one or more projects, or may be active in one and on an advisory committee of another. A single organization may do pure research and also contract for services to public or private bodies. Variations in the categories can be best revealed by taking up in order the five groupings.

## Individual Research

A high regard for the contributions of individual and independent research workers to the development of social science has led to measures to strengthen their contribution at Minnesota. Mounting research costs, the need to encourage scholars to move further afield for their data and to help them make their way among the many potential sources of support have inspired new supports. The need for more money has been met by an increase in funds for individual research. For the year 1949-50, the graduate school allocated about \$25,000, or 20 percent of its unrestricted research funds, to projects in social science. Over the past 3 years, 91 members of the social science departments were aided.

The project review committees have tended to favor basic or exploratory research. Further to enable researchers to move out of the classrooms, the university has established a program of summer research appointments, available yearly to scholars for uninterrupted and uninhibited periods of research. Thirteen social scientists have profited from them in 3 years.

Often the "lone wolf" researcher in American universities has been handicapped by not knowing the sources of financial aid, by not having time or money to seek such aid personally, or by being too shy to solicit funds. To add to the assistance given such workers by deans and department heads, the university has organized a special agency to handle their problems—the Social Science Research Center.

## A Coordinating and Research-Serving Office

The Social Science Research Center of the Graduate School makes surveys and reports to the faculty on research in progress in the social sciences on campus. It seeks to encourage research among faculty members in new and important areas of the social sciences. It helps individuals and groups with research in progress or with a desire to undertake specific research to obtain financial assistance from the university and from foundations and other outside sources.

Experience with the Social Science Research Center has indicated important possibilities. Existing needs that go unaided and resources that go undeveloped quickly focus on such an agency. Activities that might otherwise be operated out of a vest pocket assume shape, permanence, vitality, and character. One caveat should be mentioned: a research-serving center ought not be confused or mingled with research-doing. It ought not acquire control or operating interest in research. It must point up, clear up, give fiscal and structural strength, "front" for its clients, and pass on to other work.

## Interdisciplinary Research

Continuing research by an organized group of scholars from various social science departments is a growing method of activity and organization. For 2 years the University of Minnesota has had a laboratory for research in social relations operated

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by a committee of 12 from the departments of political science, sociology, economics, child welfare, and psychology. It is supported by grants from the graduate school and the Carnegie Corporation. Its executive secretary and administrator are freed from other obligations to spend half their time with the laboratory. The tendency is to place all members in the laboratory for one-third time and to compensate the departments for their loss, from laboratory funds. The laboratory distributes its energies over a series of projects related to its theme "Social Responsibility in a Complex Society."

#### **Centers for the Study of Problems and Policies in Special Fields**

The University of Minnesota has six active agencies of research in special problem areas: the Research Division of the School of Journalism, the Industrial Relations Center, the Institute of Child Welfare, the Research Bureau of Intergovernmental Relations, the Bureau of Institutional Research, and the Agricultural Experimental Station.

The Research Division of the School of Journalism, established in 1944, employs 5 full-time and 70 part-time staff members. It is headed by a director responsible to the director of the school of journalism and the dean of the college of science, literature, and the arts. A committee of faculty members advises the director. The annual budget is met by contributions from the University, Naval research funds, and private communication agencies. The Research Division studies the characteristics of mass media of communication, analyzes public opinion determinants, and explores new techniques of research in both areas. It also conducts research on the effects of social controls on media of communication and the operations of individual and group pressures upon the mass media.

The Industrial Relations Center is headed by a director responsible to a special interdepartmental committee of 8 members. It employs 11 full-time and 16 part-time staff members on an annual budget met by university support, foundation grants, and income from cooperative research with private organizations. Its research focuses on the conditions of the labor market and on problems in industrial relations.

The Institute of Child Welfare, responsible to the president of the university and headed by a director, conducts research on the development of children with a staff of 14 full-time and 14 part-time technical workers, and a clerical staff of 6. It instructs and

trains personnel, operates a continuing research program, and derives its funds from a combination of sources—the university, special State appropriations, and income from fees and services.

Research in Intergovernmental Relations, organized within the department of political science, is a 5-year project to study the administrative and political relationships among officials in local, State, and Federal Governments. Its personnel consists of faculty members on a part-time basis, research assistants on a half-time basis, and clerical help. The published reports of the projects will close the research program.

The Bureau of Institutional Research, established in 1924, has spent about \$100,000 in the last 10 years on its studies. Most of its research concerns the educational and vocational guidance of students, the effect of university education on later life, and the investigation of teaching and administrative problems. Its reports are used to guide educational and administrative policy, and its staff consults with the faculty on relevant individual problems.

The Agricultural Experiment Station devotes part of its resources to research in rural sociology and agricultural economics. With additional aid from the University's Department of Agriculture and the Arts College, members of the departments of agriculture and sociology conduct research on a variety of problems, such as the financial structure and practice of grain cooperatives, farm management, rural population changes, and rural churches. Most Federal grant money is marked for agricultural economics, and the staff and facilities in this area are larger than those in rural sociology.

The six agencies noted contribute opportunities for graduate students to obtain special skills and knowledge. Participating faculty members have a chance to integrate their theories with constant research activity, and the results of their work filter into the study and thinking of other faculty members and the student body. Moreover, they perform immediate public services in many cases.

#### **Service and Training Organizations**

Three agencies occupied for the most part with providing research and other services to private and official groups and the public at large constitute the fifth category of social science research at the university.

The Municipal Reference Bureau serves as headquarters and service agency for the League of Minne-

sota Municipalities. Its director is *ex officio* executive secretary of the league. He is responsible to the dean of extension and, in his league capacity to the Executive Board of the League. The combined staff amounts to eight full-time and two part-time persons, and the university and league together meet the bureau's budgetary requirements. The bureau surveys salaries, tax practices, certain kinds of ordinances, and similar matters. It also publishes a *Village Handbook* and produces the monthly *Minnesota Municipalities*.

The Center for International Relations and Area Studies is guided by an Interdepartmental Committee on International Relations and Area Studies. It possesses a small budget and no full-time personnel. It is not primarily a research organization but provides assistance to student and town organizations in their international affairs programs and acts as an official United Nations publication and opinion outlet. The center is studying the teaching of international relations in American educational institutions.

The Public Administration Center trains students for professional careers in the governmental services and provides informational and research services for the public. Financed by the university, the center employs two persons full-time and four part-time. It maintains a public administration library, furnishes information on specific vocational opportunities in the public service, publishes information on administration, and conducts research for the Minnesota Commission on Efficiency and Economy in Government.

### Trends and Prospects

In brief, the University of Minnesota pursues research in the social sciences in five general categories. The administration is committed to no single form and is thus in accord with the general sentiment of social scientists. The most stable method of research today seems to be the problem area type, drawing from university, foundation, and contractual sources of funds; it is usually headed by a director who is a faculty member, has an advisory committee and an annual budget, and employs both full-time and part-time technical help. Its character depends largely on its director, who determines whether the other social sciences are to contribute to its work and whether the "next project" will be "pure" or "practical."

Individual research incurs greater difficulties in

the scientific environment that fosters bigness both in and outside of universities. Moreover, individual research, to progress, must take in broader reaches of data and use more refined techniques; both are conditions that increase costs. Therefore, deliberate effort to assist individual research must increase. Every responsible administrator, from department chairman to president, must face this task in greater measure.

There is at present a trend towards interdisciplinary and interdepartmental research groups at Minnesota. Their results will markedly influence the pattern of future research in the social sciences. If not successful, interdisciplinary research of the laboratory type will perhaps become more of a single project arrangement among several men, and the functions of the parent organization will evolve into research-serving and developing functions. If successful, it will compel present problem area groups to become more interdisciplinary in their approach and personnel. And, since the impact of research reacts sharply on instruction, new seminars, new graduate curriculums, and new textbooks will follow in succession.

## Surplus Property Program Consolidated

RECENTLY ENACTED LEGISLATION (Public Law 754, 81st Cong.) authorizes the donation of Federal surplus equipment and supplies to eligible medical institutions, hospitals, clinics, and health centers on the same basis as donations of personal property have been made in the past to educational agencies and institutions. The past successful experience in the utilization of Federal surplus for educational purposes was a major factor which prompted the Congress to enact similar legislation for public health purposes.

Real property had been available during the past year to both educational and public health institutions, but until the enactment of the new legislation, only educational institutions were eligible to receive personal property donations.

### FEDERAL ORGANIZATION

With public health agencies authorized to participate in the program and eligible to receive property on the same basis as educational institutions, the Federal Security Agency established an integrated organization to serve both educational and public