

A REQUEST TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

We, as science educators in small, primarily undergraduate institutions, are seriously concerned about the trend within the National Science Foundation toward an increased emphasis on funding of large basic research efforts with concomitant decreases in funds directed toward science education and smaller-scale research. Based on the 1967 dollar, funds for basic research have increased by 96 per cent since 1968 while in the same terms funds devoted to science education have declined by 79 per cent. It is clear that basic and applied research cannot be accomplished with fewer and fewer resources devoted to educating people to accomplish that research. Current decisions affecting expenditures for science education will affect our scientific capacity in the next decade.

Of most immediate concern is the budget for fiscal year 1979 proposed by the Assistant Director for Science Education. Deletion of the Undergraduate Research Participation (URP) and Student-Originated Studies (SOS) Programs, and decreased allocations for others (e.g., the Instructional Scientific Equipment Program, ISEP) would be extremely counter-productive considering the proven effectiveness of these programs. While we are sympathetic to programs which respond to some crisis or newly-perceived problem, it is short-sighted to decrease allocations for programs which are currently part of the backbone of effective science education.

We ask that Congress insure that Undergraduate Research Participation (URP) and Student-Originated Studies (SOS) Programs are continued, and that funding for the Instructional Scientific Equipment Program (ISEP) be maintained at the 1978 level as a minimum. Furthermore, we urge that the National Science Foundation be directed by Congress to recognize the significance of the ratio between funds for science education and funds for basic research, and that the downtrend in that ratio be reversed.

Letter by Dr. J. Casanova; use any part of it you choose, but note that it is limited to the URP issue.

The purpose of this letter is to convey to you our deep concern regarding the impending decision to terminate an important program of the science education directorate of the National Science Foundation, and to enlist your support to restore that program to the NSF budget. The program of which we speak is the Undergraduate Research Participation Program (URP). This has been one of the venerable and most effective programs that has ever been mounted by the NSF. Yet it has been deleted from the fiscal 1979 budget request itself.

In the 19 years since its inception, URP has served for the benefit of thousands of undergraduates to gain their first experience in scientific research. For many of these students, the program has provided the impetus to cause the transition from "student" to "emerging professional". These young people have gone on in the area of professional careers from medicine to industrial researchers and development, through university teaching. The modest funding of two million dollars for this program has yielded positive results out of proportion to the investment. For many students, the URP experience has been the capstone of an undergraduate career.

During a meeting of the URP project directors in Washington, 6 February 1978, it became painfully apparent that the NSF decision to recommend termination of the URP program was part of an interne-cine struggle in the foundation and that the decision was strongly supported by many of the Foundation's staff. Whether the struggle is one of philosophy or power, it seems wholly inappropriate that the URP program should become a pawn for sacrifice.

At many of our smaller colleges and universities, where quality education is strongly emphasized, URP provides the only effective research available to undergraduates. In hundreds of institutions, the URP program is the only opportunity for some undergraduate research activities in science departments. Termination of URP would unquestionably deny the first important research opportunity to thousands of fledgling scientists and a major cutback benefiting science students in many institutions.

The new director of the science education program at NSF has criticized the URP program for lack of effectiveness in identifying "talent among minorities and women". The implication is entirely misleading. The URP program has drawn successfully upon the undergraduate science population available and represents a cross section. It was never intended to be a crisis response program. If the Foundation believes the key emphasis in URP is ineffective, changes can be made within the existing time proven program.

We urge you to do what you can to restore funding for URP. It is a program which directly affects many students. It has for years successfully identified and encouraged this nation's young scientists. And it has done so while remaining one of the lowest cost programs. We hope that we can depend on your support for this program.

Sincerely yours,