



BETWEEN FORUMS

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Title III and the HBI's

When federal funding priorities in higher education shifted from institutions to individuals, one form of institutional support remaining intact was Title III of the Higher Education Act. The intent of the legislation was to assist smaller colleges in their institutional development and to move them "into the mainstream" of American higher education. A less-explicit purpose of the legislation was to provide financial assistance to the nation's historically black institutions.

Since its enactment in 1965, Title III has been evaluated several times. Both the legislation and its implementation have been criticized for lacking an acceptable theory of institutional development and for failing to define what a "developing college" might be. There were entanglements about institutional eligibility and more than a little discussion about the continuation of support to institutions receiving grants. The Office of Education has not been confused, however, about the intent of the legislation to assist a group of institutions serving the educational needs of black Americans, and funding for Title III was doubled suddenly and unexpectedly under the Nixon administration.

Issues concerning the original intent of Title III and reservations concerning its effectiveness have been ventilated in Congress as deliberations have continued throughout most of 1979 and 1980. Much of the debate has centered on whether Title III should continue to support institutions in financial difficulty or to support institutions with large numbers of students in financial need. Proponents of each view have, on occasion, been critical of Title III's effectiveness in accomplishing what the 89th Congress intended in 1965.

A SURVEY OF TITLE III PRESIDENTS

Several attempts have been made to evaluate the impact of Title III on

the institutions it was intended to serve. As funded programs and projects have been brought to question, funding priorities have changed. The one consistency of the act as it has been implemented in the past 14 years may be its continuing support of the nation's historically black institutions. Criticisms of Title III are not greatly misinterpreted, therefore, when they are read as a failing commitment to a group of institutions still in need of federal support and public recognition. Although limited in number, the historically black institutions continue to enroll almost one out of five of the nation's black students.

A Study of Title III Impact on Historically Black Institutions (1980) for the Southern Education Foundation indicates strong support for Title III as originally legislated and implemented. Title III funds are a relative small proportion of the operating funds for the historically black institutions, but their use has permitted these institutions to accomplish a great deal that would have otherwise been impossible. Presidents responding in the survey do not indicate dissatisfaction with the manner in which Title III funds have been administered by the Office of Education. They believe that OE's personnel understand the original meaning and intent of the act, and funds, for the most part, have been expended in adherence to Congressional intent.

A substantial proportion of the funds received under Title III has purchased professional, technical, and other specialized services which the colleges could not afford without outside funding. Contrary to criticisms voiced in Congressional hearings, the responding presidents do not report an undue expenditure of their funds by assisting agencies. They estimate that almost two out of three Title III dollars have been spent for personal services within their institutions, with most of the remaining funds expended for operating supplies, equipment, and materials.

SPECIFIC BENEFITS OF TITLE III

The use of Title III funds has been significant in improving institutional planning and management, curricular offerings, and student services. Title III has been an important means of institutional support to the historically black institutions, and responding presidents suggest that the funds have meant more to their institutions than to two-year colleges in general or to four-year colleges that are predominantly white. Compared to other federal legislation of the 1960s, the presidents are of the opinion that Title III has been of substantial help in making higher education more accessible to minority groups.

In the area of institutional planning and management, the availability of Title III has been of substantial help in long-range planning and in the

establishment of institutional research offices. Improvements have been noted in management information, budgeting procedures, and fund raising. Workshops or seminars funded under Title III have helped in the professional development of administrative staff. Title III has been effective in permitting the presidents to obtain consultative services of a professional or technical nature, but they are particularly appreciative of the value of Title III funds in permitting attendance at national or regional conferences serving to upgrade their administrative skills and those of their staff.

The benefits of Title III are not as quickly seen in the employment of new administrators as they are in the employment of new technical or semi-professional personnel. The responding presidents suggest that improvements in the management of their institutions may result from the reassignment of administrators to other activities or functions, but there is much in their responses to imply that Title III institutions have sought to improve institutional management through the recruitment and use of administrative support personnel. Personal observation alone would suggest that the origin of many institutional research, planning, and development offices is indebted to the availability of federal funding.

IMPRESSIVE GAINS

Presidents participating in the survey are most appreciative of changes that have taken place in their academic programs. A definite majority report benefits from the establishment of new major fields or areas of specialization, and an even larger majority are pleased from the benefits of new courses to strengthen established majors. The benefits of interdisciplinary studies, interdepartmental cooperation, and interinstitutional cooperation are less attributable to the presence of Title III funds but must be regarded as significant. The most impressive benefits, as seen by the presidents, may be in the area of instructional improvement when Title III funds have facilitated the use of instructional media, the purchase of teaching supplies and materials, and the acquisition of better laboratory equipment.

A substantial proportion of their faculties has received some kind of assistance from the use of Title III funds, and responding presidents rate workshops and seminars as quite effective in faculty development. Program planning and development has been possible under Title III, and the presidents rate the effectiveness of such efforts highly. They are also pleased with the improvements in instruction that they can attribute to institutional planning, but a slight majority only are enthusiastic about the benefits of institutional research to instruction and/or faculty development. Outside consultants and speakers at faculty workshops are also rated as

effective in improving instruction, but a significant proportion of the presidents fails to see any direct benefits from self-studies that were conducted for purposes of accreditation. Perhaps by coincidence, the same approximate number report that self-studies have been greatly effective in improving instruction.

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS

Title III funds have been of particular benefit in the area of student services. When asked to identify services their institutions could not provide without Title III funds, counseling was mentioned most frequently, followed by basic skills programs and career placement. A clear majority of the presidents testify to the effectiveness of Title III funds in providing assistance to students through study skills, writing, and reading labs. They are also appreciative of the assistance made possible in the development of personal or social skills and the improvement of speech as a means of communication. Title III is rated less effective in the area of student advisement, many of the presidents obviously recognizing the need for better advice to students in financial aid and academic decisions.

Almost one out of five presidents report, however, that student services have received "minor emphasis" through Title III funding in their institutions. Because of funding priorities, they have placed a greater emphasis in both their proposals and their funded projects on institutional planning and development, administrative improvement, and program development.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE FUNDING

Neither the SEF study nor any of the other Title III studies "prove" that federal efforts to assist the nation's historically black institutions are unconditionally successful. There is much to suggest, nonetheless, that Title III has succeeded in ways that other legislation of the same era did not. Title III has continued to supply a small-but-much-needed form of institutional support to a small-but-needy group of institutions that serve a valuable national role. Title III has permitted a concern with institutional development, administrative improvement, and program planning at a time when other sources of funding ran dry.

The nation's commitment to its historically black institutions has again been confirmed in an executive order directing federal agencies to seek ways for better participation by those institutions in all federal programs. If higher levels of participation in federal programs by historically black institutions are forthcoming, Title III must surely be given some credit for its developmental efforts in that direction.

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REFERENCES

A Study of Title III Impact on Historically Black Institutions. (Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 1980).