

THE FUND FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION (FIPSE) Celebrating Four Decades

Forty years ago, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare created the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). Guided by a powerhouse board of educational leaders, FIPSE has supported undergraduate educational experimentation and innovation. In 2009, two of FIPSE's most notable grantees, *The Posse Foundation* and *College Summit*, received national and international recognition when President Obama donated his Nobel Peace Prize funds to their endeavors. Funded by FIPSE in 1998, *The Posse Foundation* sends promising high school students to top-tier U.S. colleges and universities. Funded by FIPSE in 2000 and again in 2003, *College Summit* uses data to close the college enrollment gap among low-income students.

Its broad legislative mandate enabled FIPSE to quickly influence higher education. As Dickinson College Professor Priscilla Laws, stated, FIPSE functioned as the federal "venture capitalist" for higher education.

Throughout its history, FIPSE secured presidential recognition for its grantees. In 1998, the University of Washington's Women in Science and Engineering program won the Presidential Award of Excellence in Science, Engineering and Mathematics Mentoring.

Over time, FIPSE's mandate evolved and as federal dollars declined, FIPSE shifted toward evidence-based projects that promised success. Under its flagship, *Comprehensive Program* (CP), FIPSE awarded hundreds of curricular reform and program design grants. In 2002, *Change Magazine* dedicated its September/October issue to a commemoration of FIPSE's three decades of accomplishment.

Before online learning became ubiquitous, FIPSE's *Learning Any Time Anywhere* (LAAP) Program launched numerous online and distance education initiatives that now form the cornerstone of electronic course delivery.

FIPSE was instrumental in propelling *Elderhostel* (now, *Road Scholar*), to world leadership in lifelong learning. FIPSE's nationally-recognized efforts addressed higher education gender-equity issues. In its first competition, FIPSE enabled colleges to recruit and enroll low income and minority women in college courses. Later, FIPSE funds helped college women enter business and enroll in graduate-level Management programs. In its heyday, a substantial FIPSE grant to the Modern Language Association incorporated diaries, journals, letters, memoirs and reminiscences into Women's Literature Programs. When epidemiologists revealed significant differences between male and female health outcomes, FIPSE supported the development of Medical School curricula in women's health. FIPSE underwrote the design of the Iowa Electronic Markets, an online futures market where contract payoffs are based on real-world events like election results. In these and hundreds of other awards, FIPSE changed the way that education does business.

On the curriculum front, FIPSE underwrote critical innovations in specific academic disciplines. Its awards to Professor Uri Treisman for his revolutionary calculus pedagogy documented African American students' success in Mathematics; FIPSE's support of *Reacting to the Past*

(RTTP), a multi-institution consortium, used game designs to teach history. In these and other, unconventional initiatives, FIPSE transformed traditional college policies and practices.

Although the Comprehensive Program has been FIPSE's flagship endeavor, other FIPSE programs have linked the *Fund* to the *National Science Foundation* (NSF) and the *National Endowment for the Humanities* (NEH) to sponsor multi-disciplinary, science and humanities collaborations. In recent years, FIPSE cooperated with the Departments of Veteran Affairs and Defense to design veterans' education services.

From 1993 to 2010, FIPSE expanded into multi-lateral international programming. Marrying language learning, study abroad, and cooperative research, FIPSE bi-nationally and tri-nationally funded educational exchange partnerships with the European Union, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and Russia. These programs enabled domestic undergraduates to study abroad. In unique collaborations, US institutions developed agreements with foreign universities that allowed American students to enroll in overseas institutions. As a result, students in a host of fields, including engineering, agriculture, and film studies completed academic studies in partner nations' native languages. Today, FIPSE is involved in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), supporting the *Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes* (A) project, 17-nation feasibility study that will assess college learning outcomes.

Beginning in the 1990s, FIPSE began to administer a growing Congressionally-Directed grant portfolio. In 2008, when a nursing shortage became a national crisis, approximately 50 Congressionally-Directed Grants supported a broad variety of nursing programs. FIPSE's grants trained nurses in rural locations, assisted practicing nurses in completing advanced degrees that allowed them to become nursing faculty, and helped programs that transitioned Naval Hospital Corpsmen and Army Medics into civilian nursing careers.

In recent years, FIPSE has branched into unique arenas. FIPSE's *Underground Railroad Educational and Cultural Program* supports research, exhibitions, and other museum-based historical ventures that explore African American History, Slavery History and the History of the Underground Railroad. FIPSE's *Off-Campus Community Service Program* placed student workers in early childcare centers and emergency preparedness facilities. FIPSE's Pilot Program for Course Material Rental addressed the high cost of textbooks and electronic course materials. And finally, in order to make court proceedings assessable to the deaf and hearing impaired, *Training for Realtime Writers* grants support training in closed captioning of video programming.

In 2011, responding to the President's call to reestablish the U.S. as the global leader in college completion by 2020, the Department proposed a new initiative, called *First in the World (FITW)*. *FITW* funding will promote degree and certificate completion, while fostering college access and retention.

Today, we celebrate FIPSE's and the Department's long-lasting achievements. FIPSE's change strategy evolved early and motivated faculty and professionals to transform higher education. FIPSE moved innovation from the margin to the mainstream; it empowered students and parents; it lowered campus costs. FIPSE makes a difference in higher education.