

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education: Background and Funding

Bonnie F. Mangan
Information Research Specialist
Knowledge Services Group

Summary

The Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) supports projects to encourage innovative reform and expand education opportunities to underrepresented groups. This report describes the historical context leading to the establishment of the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education, provisions governing the program, and the variety of projects funded by FIPSE. As part of the Higher Education Act, FIPSE is up for reauthorization in the 109th Congress. H.R. 507, the College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005, contains provisions reauthorizing FIPSE.¹ This report will be updated to reflect major legislative action on FIPSE reauthorization.

Since its inception over 30 years ago, the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) has funded projects to encourage innovative reform and expand educational opportunities to underrepresented groups. Through grants under this program, institutions of higher education (IHEs) have developed programs to improve teaching and curriculum. FIPSE was created by the Education Amendments of 1972 (P.L. 92-318) as an amendment to the Higher Education Act (HEA).²

Background

With the passage of the 1972 Amendments to the HEA, the debate over assistance to students versus institutional aid for funding higher education was settled in favor of aid to students in the form of Basic Educational Opportunity Grants (BEOG). FIPSE, a small program to improve postsecondary education, was a remnant of earlier proposals for a foundation to support innovation in education. In 1967 the Carnegie Foundation Commission on Higher Education's *Quality and Equality: New Levels of Federal*

¹ See CRS Issue Brief IB10097, *The Higher Education Act: Reauthorization Status and Issues*, by Adam Stoll.

² P.L. 92-318, Title III, § 404.

Responsibility for Higher Education proposed an independent federal agency, a national foundation, to encourage experimental development in higher education. A 1971 report by the Newman Task Force, *Report on Higher Education*, also favored federal actions to support innovation in higher education.³

College enrollments greatly increased in the decade leading up to passage of the Education Amendments of 1972. This was attributable to several factors including the baby boom generation reaching college age, the civil rights movement, and the expanded student aid provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (P.L. 89-329).⁴ As the college student population became increasingly diverse, issues of access and affordability grew. FIPSE was created in part to help revitalize a traditional and less inclusive higher education system.

FIPSE Provisions and Projects Funded

As authorized by the HEA, FIPSE supports innovative projects to achieve a variety of purposes. These include efforts to:

- encourage the reform and improvement of postsecondary education and provide equal educational opportunity for all;
- create institutions and programs offering new paths to career and professional training and new combinations of academic and experimental learning;
- establish institutions and programs based on communications technology;
- carry out changes in the internal structure and operations in postsecondary educational institutions to clarify priorities and purposes;
- design and introduce cost-effective methods of instruction and operation;
- introduce institutional reforms to expand opportunities for individuals to enter and reenter institutions of higher education and pursue programs of study tailored to their needs;
- introduce reforms in graduate education, in the structure of academic professions, and the recruitment and retention of faculties; and
- create new institutions and programs for examining skills and awarding credentials and reform current institutional practices relating to credentialing.⁵

A National Board composed of 15 members and a Director appointed by the Secretary of Education serve in an advisory capacity to the Secretary. Members serve for overlapping three-year terms and represent public interest groups, including students and the education field. Those from education constitute a minority of the Board. Selection

³ For background on the 1972 Amendments to HEA and proposals for an innovation entity in higher education, see Lawrence E. Gladieux and Thomas R. Wolanin, *Congress and the Colleges: the National Politics of Higher Education* (Lexington, MA: Heath and Co., 1976), pp. 50-54.

⁴ Virginia B. Smith et al., *Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education: The Early Years* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2002), p. 1.

⁵ 20 U.S.C. § 1138.

to the Board is based on an individual's ability "to contribute an important perspective on priorities for improvement in postsecondary education and strategies of educational and institutional change." The Board advises the Secretary on the preparation of grant competitions and the means of evaluating, disseminating, and adapting demonstrated improvements in postsecondary education.⁶

To achieve the goals set forth in its legislation, FIPSE awards grants that support "exemplary, locally developed projects that are models for innovative reform and improvement in postsecondary education."⁷ The FIPSE National Board along with the Secretary establish funding competitions, priorities, and procedures for granting awards. Because FIPSE defines higher education broadly, applicants for its discretionary grants and contracts include not only IHEs but a variety of public and private nonprofit institutions and agencies offering education after high school. These can include, among others technical and business schools, testing agencies, professional associations, cultural institutions, and student groups.⁸ Awards are typically three years in duration but some may be five-year grants.

FIPSE supports projects that define a widely felt need in higher education, present a strategy for meeting the need, and also demonstrate the ability to implement the strategy. Seed money from FIPSE promotes innovative educational reforms for specific local problems identified by the grant applicants. Funded projects should have the potential for greater dissemination and wider influence. Currently, the discretionary grant programs supported by FIPSE include:

- **Comprehensive Program** — Most awards are made through this program and focus on projects that improve practices in higher education. Each year FIPSE announces invitational priorities in the *Federal Register* for those areas of reform and improvement that the Administration, working with the educational community and FIPSE staff, have determined to be most critical. Applicants must submit a preapplication to be eligible to submit a final application. The competitions generate numerous applications and, on average, 1 in 30 receives funding, making FIPSE one of the most competitive federal grant programs.⁹
- **International Consortia Programs** — These programs include the U.S./European Community Program, the North American Mobility Program (United States, Mexico, and Canada), and the U.S./Brazil Program. Funding supports educational consortia of institutions from the

⁶ 20 U.S.C. § 1138a.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2004 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2003), p. R-42. (Hereafter cited as ED, *FY2004 Justifications*.)

⁸ *Operating Principles of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Fiscal Year 2002*. Available at [<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/fipse/princp.html?exp=0>].

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2001 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2000), p. S-64.

different countries to promote mutual understanding, and increase educational opportunities, and student and faculty exchanges.¹⁰

In 2002, FIPSE priorities were revised to reflect the Administration's priorities in higher education. While applicants may propose any project within the scope of the authorizing statute (20 U.S. C. § 1138), the invitational priorities of particular interest to the Administration include:

- improving the quality of K-12 teaching through improved teacher preparation;
- promoting reform in curriculum and instruction from college preparation through graduate levels using student-centered or technology-mediated strategies;
- designing cost-effective methods of improving postsecondary instruction and operations; and
- supporting ways of ensuring equal access to postsecondary education and improving rates of retention and program completion especially for underrepresented students.¹¹

Funding History

Over time, annual appropriations for FIPSE have been significantly increased by congressionally directed funding for specific projects added during the appropriation process. In FY2005, FIPSE received 418 congressionally directed, noncompetitive grants totaling \$145.2 million. Competitive grants received \$17.4 million. This funding went to support continuing multi-year grants. Consequently FIPSE cancelled its FY2005 competitive grant process.¹² **Table 1** shows Presidential requests and final total appropriations for FIPSE from FY2001 through FY2006, distinguishing FIPSE-specific funding from congressionally directed funding.

¹⁰ ED, *FY2004 Justifications*, p. R-42.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, "Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education-Comprehensive Program (Preapplications and Applications); Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2003," 67 *Federal Register* 79066 (Dec. 27, 2002). These same priorities were listed in the "Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 2005," 69 *Federal Register* 176 (Sept. 13, 2004).

¹² As per telephone conversation with Levenia Ishmell at FIPSE, Mar. 8, 2005.

Table 1. FIPSE Funding, 2001-2006; Including FIPSE-Specific Funding and Congressionally Directed Awards

Fiscal year	Presidential request	FIPSE-specific funding	Congressionally directed	Total appropriations
2001	\$31,200,000	\$31,187,000	\$115,500,000	\$146,687,000
2002	\$51,200,000	\$31,222,000	\$149,700,000	\$180,922,000
2003	\$39,138,000	\$31,968,000	\$139,100,000	\$171,068,000
2004	\$39,138,000	\$32,000,000	\$125,700,000	\$157,700,000
2005	\$32,000,000	\$17,400,000	\$145,200,000	\$162,604,000
2006	\$22,211,000	to be determined	to be determined	to be determined

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Fiscal Year 2006 Justifications of Appropriation Estimates to the Congress*, vol. II (2005), p. S-60.

Legislative Action in the 109th Congress

This section describes congressional action relating to FIPSE as part of the overall reauthorization of the HEA.

H.R. 507 (Representative Boehner)

The College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005 includes provisions to amend and extend FIPSE through FY2011. Funding authorization is set at \$40 million for FY2006 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the five succeeding fiscal years. With respect to FIPSE, the legislation newly seeks to improve postsecondary education by assuring educational opportunity for the “nontraditional student population,” and by the promotion of distance learning. Under areas of national need, the legislation adds two programs: support for the teaching of traditional American history, and activities that enable IHEs to work with civic and private organizations to help communities address severe problems relating to economic development, infrastructure, and crime prevention.