A Glimpse of Columbia History . . .

Holbrook F. J. Porter, superintendent of buildings and grounds, took this 1888 photo of the engine room at the old Madison Avenue campus.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Federal and State Budgets Impact Science and Student Aid

BY ELLEN S. SMITH

On Jan. 20, Gov. George Pataki introduced his fiscal year 2005 budget covering April 1, 2004-March 31, 2005. Deficit projections and a “no-tax” pledge by the leaders of the Assembly and Senate and the governor make the budget year difficult. The governor is now in the 30-day amendment period, during which he can make changes to the final budget he will submit to the legislature. For the first time a new program for capital financing in the higher education sector includes private colleges and universities (including Columbia) along with the SUNY and CUNY systems. Competitive grants, which will require a three-quarter match by institutions, are geared toward proposals that emphasize economic development and high technology, academic critical facilities and urban renewal/historic preservation. NYSTAR’s programs, including matching for Columbia research grants, were funded. In the area of student aid, the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) would give a portion of the scholarship as loans. Other programs such as HEOP, STEP, and Direct Institutional Aid have been cut 5 percent. Dental programs have been cut and, in the case of clinics, not funded. On Feb. 10, Columbia and Barnard students will go to Albany to lobby against the loan proposal and student aid cutbacks.

At the federal level, President Bush submitted his fiscal year 2005 (Oct. 1, 2004-Sept. 30, 2005) budget to Congress the week of Feb. 2. Budget deficits have greatly affected program funding. In the meantime, four months into fiscal year 2004, Congress passed the Omnibus Appropriations Bill funding many key agencies.

The Omnibus Bill provides funding for 8 of the 12 largest research and development funding agencies, but also affects the other four agencies whose budgets have already been signed into law. It contains across-the-board cuts in R&D (6.59 percent) for all agencies except Defense (DOD).

After five years of annual 15 percent increases, the National Institute of Humanities’ (NIH) budget growth will slow down considerably in fiscal year 2004. Most NIH institutes receive increases of about 3 percent. After adjusting for an across-the-board cut, the NIH R&D portfolio increases by 3.2 percent, a modest increase in percentage terms. The Omnibus Bill adds $847 million to NIH R&D for a total of $27.1 billion. The National Science Foundation (NSF) enjoys a budget increase, but falls well short of a five-year doubling plan signed into law last December. Congress provided $4.1 billion for NSF’s R&D activities (excluding education, training, and overhead programs), an increase of 4.7 percent.

The other R&D funding agencies collectively see only modest increases in their R&D portfolios, with increases for some agencies offset by flat funding or cuts in others. The fiscal year 2004 Omnibus Bill provides $1.3 billion for Commerce R&D programs, an $11 million ($0.9 percent) boost over 2003. Commerce has two major R&D agencies: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). NIST R&D declines 3.9 percent, but NOAA R&D rises 5.8 percent, for a total of $724 million, in contrast to proposed agency cuts by the Bush administration. This increase is largely driven by a doubling of the National Environmental Satellite and Data Information Service budget.

The package provides the smallest increase for education in six years. Total education funding will be $55.7 billion, only a $2.5 billion increase (4.8 percent) over fiscal year 2003 levels. In addition, $713 million of this increment would be targeted toward a shortfall in current Pell Grant funding, an increase of 5.7 percent. Under the spending plan, the maximum Pell Grant remains frozen at $4,050, the same maximum as for the past three years, and funding for the Supplemental Educational Opportunity Program will increase by $15 million, but budgets for most other student aid programs remain unchanged or decline. Graduate education programs will be level-funded at $41 million.