



Research in Jeopardy: Lobbying Washington

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Two weeks after the federal government announced that America was officially in a recession, then-Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi joined University President Shirley Tilghman on campus to discuss a potential solution: investment in science.

At the December 2008 conference in Chancellor Green, Pelosi, Tilghman, five other members of Congress and industry representatives discussed how greater investment in science and technology research could result in increased American prosperity.

Pelosi and the other members of Congress went back to Washington to draft the economic stimulus plan. Two months later, President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act into law, allocating \$22 billion for research funding.

After competing for Recovery Act dollars through peer-reviewed proposals, University researchers received \$28 million of that money.

While the University does not seek specific appropriations — known as earmarks — University Vice President and Secretary Bob Durkee '69 said he believed Princeton's efforts were directly responsible for the substantial overall Recovery Act research funding.

"I think it was an eye-opening workshop for [the members of Congress]," he said. "When it then became time to think about what

would be done as part of the Recovery Act, they were well-armed with information about the impacts that investments in research can have ... That was a key moment that then translated into pretty significant investment over a period of time.”

The high-profile science conference on campus was arranged by one of the University’s lowest profile divisions, the Office of Government Affairs. The office, in charge of lobbying the federal government on the University’s behalf, employs three staff members in an office about a 10 minute walk from the Capitol.

Billions of dollars in proposed cuts to federal research agencies have refocused attention on how action in Washington can affect researchers on campus. However, the [office’s activities](#) extend beyond advocating for research funding. For decades, University lobbyists have worked with lawmakers on dozens of other issues ranging from immigration and chemical security to financial aid and endowment spending, according to interviews with congressional staff members, University officials and lobbying analysts and a review of lobbying disclosure reports.

A five-month investigation by The Daily Princetonian shows that the office’s lobbying activities have grown dramatically since it was founded in Washington three decades ago. In the past five years, the number of hours University employees spent lobbying has nearly quadrupled. The University documented \$420,000 worth of lobbying activities in 2010, which grew from \$120,000 in 2006 — a number calculated directly from hours spent lobbying on the federal, state and local levels.

Princeton’s increase reflects a trend of growing educational lobbying in Washington. In 2010, the education industry spent \$98 million on

lobbying work, greater than the amount spent by tobacco companies, automotive companies or banks. This amount is more than triple the \$31 million spent by the education industry in 1998, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

For Princeton, a focus on research

Over the past five years, the University logged at least 284 instances of lobbying — categorized as contact with the federal government or lobbying preparations — according to a ‘Prince’ analysis of reports filed with the Senate Office of Public Records. The University spends a significant portion of its lobbying efforts advocating for research funding.

Joyce Rechtschaffen ’75, the director of the Office of Government Affairs and a former high-ranking congressional aide, said that lobbying on the Hill largely consists of informing Congressmen about the work of University researchers and educating members about the variety of challenges universities in general face.

“I think it’s really important to explain Princeton to lawmakers and for me to explain Washington, D.C. to Princeton,” she said. “They’ve been around each other for a long time but they don’t necessarily always understand each other well.”

The University works to ensure that the agencies that control research grants are adequately funded. These include the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Researchers undergo a peer-review process to compete for individual project funding.

The Department of Defense is one major source of research funding at the University. In 2010, researchers received \$24 million from the Pentagon. Much of the Pentagon research is scientific, ranging from flu vaccines and breast cancer treatment to microchip research and the first steps in building a quantum computer. Other projects, however, have focused on the impact of international development programs on terrorism and insurgency.

Lobbying in Washington extends beyond advocacy for research dollars. While less than 10 percent of the student body benefited from Pell Grants in 2008, the University makes supporting them and other types of financial aid a priority. Durkee said that this support demonstrates the University's commitment to nationwide equal access to higher education.

The University has also lobbied on bills such as the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 and 2007, to ensure that the bills did not negatively affect the attraction of international students and scholars.

Princeton also advocates for funding of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, which supports the University's publication of the Thomas Jefferson papers, a collection of the president's written works.

University 'right in the middle of the pack'

Most research universities agree on supporting or opposing legislation that impacts higher education, said Barry Toiv, the vice president for public affairs of the Association of American Universities.

Princeton is a member of the AAU, which represents a group of 63 top research universities in the United States and Canada. The University was a founding member of the group when it started in 1900, and Tilghman served as the chair of the association from 2008-09.

“Our folks are very good at working with the staff and policy makers and playing a coordinating role, as well as an intelligence-gathering role, as well as an analytical role on how we might address issues,” Toiv said, “so that collectively our universities could have an impact.”

Indeed, congressional records indicate that universities differ significantly in two strategic, rather than substantive, areas: their intensity of lobbying and their pursuit of earmarks.

At \$420,000 in annual lobbying expenditures, Princeton is ranked 37th for spending among the education industry in 2010, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. The University’s spending makes it “right in the middle of the pack” of other universities, said Matthias Jaime, a lobbying researcher for the center.

Harvard, Yale and Penn are the only other Ivy League schools that out-spent Princeton, with expenses of \$600,000, \$620,000 and \$593,503 respectively.

The State University of New York, which has 64 campuses, tops all education lobbying, spending \$1.640 million, reports indicate. Behind it is the California State University system — with 23 campuses — at \$1.345 million.

The pursuit of earmarks in federal legislation also divides the schools. While congressional Republicans have tried to ban all earmarks from legislation, earmark use continues. The nonpartisan Congressional

Research Service found \$4.8 billion in earmarks in the recent continuing resolutions that have kept the government funded during the protracted budget deadlock.

Research funding from the federal government, channeled through institutions such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, is typically distributed through a competitive peer-review process in which a panel of other researchers vets proposals.

Projects earmarked for direct funding, however, circumvent that step and are not required to undergo peer review. Proponents argue that earmarking ensures that smaller programs are not crowded out from highly-competitive peer-review processes, and earmarking can provide much-needed funds for cash-strapped universities.

Still, Princeton has never pursued earmarks, Durkee said.

Beyond current concerns over federal funding for research, Durkee noted that a wide array of bills proposed at any time can have a direct impact on Princeton.

“We also can be affected by legislation in many areas, not just in the areas that relate directly to education and research,” he said.

This week, when the government faces its first shutdown in over a decade, the focus is undoubtedly on research funding, which Durkee called a critical investment. A shutdown would mean a freeze on new federal research grants. But the current proposed billions of dollars in budget cuts could be an even greater threat to scientific research.

“If you stop making that investment [the effect] may not be next year or the year after that or the year after that. [But] when you’re not

keeping pace with innovation, when you haven't educated a generation of researchers," Durkee said, "there'll be a price to pay."

Staff writer Anastasya Lloyd-Damnjanovic contributed to this report.

To see a spreadsheet describing the University's lobbying efforts over the past five years, visit [this site](http://bit.ly/AhenX1) (<http://bit.ly/AhenX1>).

This article is the last in a [three-part series](#) about how federal funding affects University science. For feedback or tips, please email investigations@dailyprincetonian.com.