Studying social science boundaries is describable less by terrestrial cartographic analogy than by analogy to astronomical explorations within some rapidly expanding nova of continually changing composition. The whole continues to grow in size, and at the same time, the component parts expand into each other's space and interact with one another to create new forms while their cores move further and further apart and become more differentiated in form.

The subject of our recent study at the boundaries of social science has been research and research-like work undertaken to contribute to policy development, planning, evaluation and guidance for the expanded social programs of government. In large part, this work is indistinguishable in objectives, style and personnel from much of the traditional core of work within social science disciplines, such as economics, sociology, political science and to a lesser extent, anthropology.

In all the foregoing regards, other research and research-like activity at the boundaries explored are quite different and remote from anything previously characteristic of social science. First, the great expansion of the domestic social programs of government in recent years has led to the mobilization of research and similar efforts to serve these activities, thereby investing research with more intense and visible relationships to the material interests of politically significant groups than has been true of past social science research. As compared with traditional social science research, recent social program research thrives on greater external regard for its worth, but regard based on different ideas of utility. As a consequence, different tests are applied in determining what research is to be done, by whom, how and at what cost.

Particularly visible is the matter of scale as measured in dollars per project or size of research teams. Scale alone would suffice to account for some other distinctive changes at the boundaries: in how this research is organized (rarely the solo scholar with scant support and personnel); in the institutional settings in which work goes on (rarely the university department and frequently the for-profit firm); in method and style (it must meet tests of merit applied by people other than academic peers); and in the identities and identifications of the individuals and organizations who perform it (as greater financial scale provides greater pecuniary incentives attracting new producers into the field). Scale is more product than symptom of the altered political position and ascribed worth of social program research. The study conducted by the authors recently was oriented to two matters closer to the roots of change. Attention was specifically directed (1) to research conducted for the evaluation of major governmental social programs and (2) to competitive public contracting as the instrumentality for bringing about mobilization of specific resources for that purpose.

Evaluation Research

The study focused on evaluation research because the need to evaluate public programs has been a major source of expanding demand for social research. Since evaluation re-
Social Research Performers

Research organizations must shift with the tides of legislative change and political passions.

Research has the power to affect major allocations of public funds, it is research to which worth can be assigned on the basis of the magnitude of governmental expenditures in the program area to which it relates. This same property makes the research politically visible and requires that it be politically defensible. The selection of performers by soliciting competing proposals, the second focus of the study, serves this need. Whatever the outcome of a study, the responsible agency can claim that it had selected the best alternative for doing the study on the basis of "free competition." Other factors also make competitive procurement by the advertisement of "Requests for Proposals" an increasingly prevalent feature of the social research world at the time of study, and hence one worthy of special attention for the sociology of social science.

In 1971, the authors undertook a small study to explore how the emerging system of social program research operated selectively with regard to types of organizations favored and how it influenced study approaches and work styles. First, records of two federal departments—the United States Department of Labor and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare—were examined and information was collected about thirty-six "competitive evaluation research procurements," which these agencies had issued during the preceding fiscal year. The activities surrounding these thirty-six requests for proposals (RFPs) form the basis of some analyses published in earlier papers.

One of these papers, The Competitive Evaluation Research Industry, dealt with many aspects of the emergence of evaluation research as an identifiable and significant area of social scientific work and stressed the complexities inherent in research efforts which have to accommodate to contracting traditions inherited from defense research and development (R & D), civil service legal and accounting procedures and the newer demands for participation by groups for whose benefit the programs have been instituted. The discussion raised the related issue of the introduction of competitive procurement procedures into the area of evaluation research and examined some of the ways in which research organizations adapted to the social program research contracting system.

Government Support

The most common point of reference used in published considerations of recent developments in the economics of relationships between government and the research world is the system of government science support. The usual concerns are the extent to which newer modes of research financing and their results are consistent or inconsistent with the norms of academic science. In the social program research procurement world, the primary concerns are consistent with the norms of competitive business enterprise.

The means by which the funds of government are allocated among social scientists and social science problems and approaches under traditional mechanisms "for the support of science" are also competitive ones—perhaps as fierce an economic competition as that in relation to procurement of social program evaluation research by the government. Rather than viewing the nature of the changes that have been taking place at the boundaries of social science through the prisms of either the traditional normative perspectives of academic science or those of the business and practical perspectives of many of the newer actors in the social research scene, the authors prefer a neutral framework for examining differences in the forms the competitive process assumes and the consequences for the participants in it.

One such framework that is extremely useful (and is also not remote from the doctrine of science) is based on a simple distinction between general and specific, broad and narrow. In Table 1, this distinction is applied to interests of the research funding sources and to the capabilities (and interests) of the research performers who are in potentially successful competition for the former's funds. In each instance, the parties are classified as to whether they are "specialized" or "broad."

The academic model of the organization of research...