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**Author**

TAYLOR, Barrett J. (CANTWELL, Brendan)

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**Abstract**

This paper conceptualizes the US federal government's response to the 'Great Recession' as a 'natural experiment' whose broad emphasis on counter-cyclical spending contrasts with the tendency towards stratification within the quasi-market for academic research support. Regression results indicate that resources tended to flow towards a few already-advantaged universities, but also supported universities with lower levels of investment in research equipment and smaller bases of support from business and industry. Because the extent to which these results describe quasi-market mechanisms generally or merely reflect the peculiarities of the US system is unclear, the paper concludes with propositions that could be critiqued and refined through studies in other national contexts. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)