COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES
AUGUST 2015

FY 2016 BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS
The current statutory cap on domestic discretionary programs is inadequate to fund needed investments in student aid, higher education, job training, and other critical programs. While the House FY16 Labor, HHS and Education appropriations bill maintains or increases funding for many of these programs, the Senate bill would cut a number of them. AACC supports the former, but opposes the Senate legislation.

AACC Position: Increase the cap on domestic discretionary spending to allow for adequate investments in critical programs benefitting community colleges and their students. This includes Pell Grants, WIOA, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, TRIO, GEAR UP, Strengthening Institutions, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Colleges, Tribally Controlled Colleges, and the NSF’s Advanced Technological Education Program. Final legislation should protect higher education and workforce training programs, as in the House FY16 Labor, HHS, and Education funding bill.

MAINTAIN THE PELL GRANT PROGRAM
More than 3 million community college students received Pell Grants in the 2013–14 award year, comprising 33% of Pell Grant funds. Both House and Senate LHHS appropriations bills maintain the maximum award, but tap the current Pell “surplus” to fund other programs.

AACC Position: Maintain the current $4,860 discretionary Pell Grant, which will allow the 2015–16 $5,775 maximum grant (funded in part from the “mandatory” portion of the budget) to increase the following year by the CPI. Additional non-defense discretionary resources that result from a potential budget deal should be used to restore cuts to the Pell surplus.

TUITION-FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Community colleges support the core principles of President Obama’s America’s College Promise proposal because it could ultimately make college as accessible as high school. Legislation to authorize this plan—the America’s College Promise Act (H.R. 2962, S. 1716)—has been introduced in Congress.

AACC Position: Enact the America’s College Promise Act to provide free tuition to community college students in certain programs. Support broader efforts to move the tuition-free community college movement forward.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION (HEA)
Congress is currently in the process of extending and modifying the HEA, with enormous implications for community college students and institutions. Top AACC priorities follow.

Reform Graduation Rate Requirements
Many community college students who ultimately graduate take longer to do so than students in other sectors, and often from a different college. According to the National Student
Clearinghouse (NSC), the 6-year graduation rate of full-time community college students (from any institution) is 57%. Yet, the “official” U.S. Department of Education graduation rate is just 21%.

**AACC Position:** Transfers-out must be included in all completion rates, and the rates for community college students should be measured at 100%, 150%, and 300% of the “normal” program length. The latter will capture most community college students who complete.

**Reinstate the Year-Round Pell Grant**
In 2008, Congress created a “year-round” Pell Grant to increase persistence and graduation rates and to enable students to complete their degrees more quickly. However, after just one year, Congress eliminated the year-round Pell Grant for budgetary reasons, cutting off nascent student and institutional plans to take full advantage of this expanded assistance.

**AACC Position:** Reinstate the year-round Pell Grant to reflect today’s student population and to enhance persistence and on-time completion.

**Decouple Pell Grant and Student Loans Eligibility**
Institutions that exceed certain cohort default rate (CDR) thresholds lose their eligibility for federal loans and the Pell Grant program. It is illogical and unfair to deny current students Pell Grants because of the behavior of former students, particularly when the number of defaulters from community colleges is generally a small fraction of their Pell recipients. Default rates are unreliable as a proxy for quality, particularly when only a minority of students borrow, as is often the case at community colleges. The potential loss of Pell Grant eligibility may result in institutions opting out of federal loans, which can have negative impacts on students.

**AACC Position:** Modify the HEA so that institutions exceeding statutory CDR thresholds lose eligibility to participate in federal student loan programs, but not the Pell Grant program.

**CAMPUS ACCOUNTABILITY AND SAFETY ACT (CASA)**
CASA aims to improve institutional responses to incidents of sexual violence and services provided to victims of these crimes, a goal that community colleges support along with ongoing prevention. The bill would require campus climate surveys, tighter ties with local police forces, and the availability of confidential advisors for students. The bill authorizes stiff fines for violations. This issue figures prominently in the Senate’s HEA reauthorization plans.

**AACC Position:** Legislation addressing sexual violence on campus must adequately reflect different institutional types, particularly primarily non-residential institutions like community colleges. This requires flexible campus survey provisions and a minimum number of confidential advisors based on more than campus size. Additional fines are unnecessary, as the HEA already has a fine structure in place that is adequate to ensure compliance with CASA’s requirements.

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