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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Washington Watch

AACC's Federal Policy Update

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December 20, 2016

Wishing you happy holidays!

On December 9, the 114th Congress wrapped up its work on a continuing resolution (CR) to fund the federal government through April 28. The new stopgap measure, P.L. 114-254, funds most federal programs at current levels. AACC hosted a webinar about the new policy landscape and status of key legislation on December 13.

Community College Agenda for the Trump Administration

The presidential transition is underway, with the new administration nominating cabinet and subcabinet positions. As the new administration begins to formulate its higher education policies, AACC has developed a briefing document that presents "its vision of how the federal government can help community colleges fulfill their mission of building a stronger America by providing high-quality education and related programs."

2017 Community College National Legislative Summit

We are looking forward to seeing you February 13–16 in Washington, DC, at the upcoming Community College National Legislative Summit (NLS) sponsored by ACCT and AACC.

Federal Agency Guidance & Grants

State Authorization Regulations Issued—The U.S. Department of Education (ED) published final regulations in the December 19 Federal Register that amend the state authorization sections of the Institutional Eligibility regulations, as well as the required institutional disclosures for distance education and correspondence courses. The new rules, effective July 1, 2018, are almost unchanged from the proposed regulations issued in July 2016.

Early January Deadline for Applications for Waiver of Institutional Match—Colleges and universities have until January 9, 2017, to submit applications for waiver of institutional match for campus-based programs under parts A and F of Title II and Title V of the Higher Education Act. The waiver eligibility requirements are spelled out in the notice posted by ED and available in the Federal Register notification.

Community Colleges Selected to Participate in Loan Counseling Experimental Sites—Community colleges are well represented in the loan counseling experiment. Thirty-five of the 51 postsecondary institutions invited by ED to participate in the experiment are community colleges. Half of the students at each of the institutions will be assigned to a treatment group, while the other half to a control group. The former will receive additional loan counseling and the latter the statutorily required entrance and exit counseling. The evaluation of the experiment will determine whether the additional loan counseling improves student decision-making concerning how much they borrow, success in loan repayments, and student outcomes, such as academic progress and completion.

College Completion Toolkit Released—ED announced the availability of a Toolkit of Promising Practices for Improving Student Degree Attainment. This report is one of several prepared by the department aimed at achieving the goal of increasing college completion, especially of underserved populations. One of the promising practices is Valencia College's Pathways to Completion program.

2016–17 Federal Student Aid Handbook Now Available—ED released this month the complete 2016-17 Federal Student Aid Handbook. Intended primarily for college student aid administrators and counselors, it begins by delineating the changes from last year's edition. It is fully indexed and includes chapters on the application process, aid eligibility requirements, and the return of Title IV aid, as well as verification and veterans.

DOL Updates Apprenticeship Program Rules—On December 19, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) published new regulations in the Federal Register revising the equal employment opportunity provisions for the registered apprenticeship program. The new standards add protections against discrimination based on age, genetic information, sexual orientation, and disability. The regulations are effective January 18, 2017.

Policy Related Reports

Enrollment Declines Persist—With the exception of 4-year public institutions, whose fall enrollment grew by an anemic 0.2%, college enrollments continued to decline. The overall decline was 1.4% from fall 2015 to fall 2016, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Center's Term Enrollment report, ranging from a 0.6% change for 4-year private, non-profit institutions to 14.5% for 4-year private for-profit institutions. Two-year public institutions experienced a decline of 2.5%, even higher for students over the age of 24 (5.5%) and men (3.1%).

A new feature of the report was undergraduate enrollment by program. At public 2-year institutions, the highest enrollment (35%) is in liberal arts and sciences, general studies, and humanities, which saw a 5.1% decline. The next highest enrollment is in health professions (14%), which too saw a decline of 1.2%. The highest percentage increases were in a mixed bag of programs: history (9.6%), architecture (9.4%), mathematics and statistics (8.3%), psychology (8.2%), and biological and biomedical sciences (8%). For more information, see Community College Daily.

Finding "Hot Jobs"—DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics has an easy-to-navigate website for finding labor market information at the national, state, and local level. One of the features is a U.S. map populated with state information on the fastest growing jobs and those with the most new jobs. For select occupations, information on the range of median salaries is provided. Links are also provided to other sites for more labor market and earnings information.

A "Carrot and Stick" Risk-Sharing Plan Offered—The current higher education accountability system, which focuses on cohort default rates, is inadequate according to a new Center for American Progress (CAP) report on risk sharing. To avoid accountability plans that engender unintended consequences, such as limiting access due to colleges adopting more selective admissions policies, or unduly punishing colleges that educate underserved populations, CAP offers an alternative plan. The stick, if you will, is comprised of two measures: the default rate and the repayment rate. But for risk-sharing purposes, these apply differently based on two factors: whether or not students graduate and the type of credential sought. There is a carrot or bonus that rewards institutions for serving at-risk students. The bonus payment will be subtracted from the risk-sharing repayment.

According to the report, approximately 45% of public 2-year colleges would receive a net bonus payment under this plan. And of the 55% that would have to make a risk-sharing payment, "half would make a payment equaling roughly 2% of loans received. This amount is even smaller when considering the very low borrowing rates at these schools." The authors of the report favor adjusting the loan limits to reflect attendance intensity and credential level while preserving aid officer flexibility.

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