



# West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education  
News Clippings

Week of February 1, 2009

February 01, 2009

## Report shows more graduates working in W.Va.

CHARLESTON -- An ongoing study by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the West Virginia University College of Business and Economics showed that more graduates of state post-secondary institutions were working in the Mountain State in 2007.

The second in a series of studies commissioned by HEPC, "From Higher Education To Work In West Virginia 2007" examines the impact of the higher education system on the state's economy. The report analyzes work participation and wages for state public higher education graduates during the past decade, with results by residency status, degree, major, gender and race. The first report was released in January 2008.

The Research Trust Fund, which was created by the West Virginia Legislature last year, will match state dollars with private donations to strengthen the research programs at the state's leading universities and alleviate the drain of talented citizens who leave West Virginia to seek employment.

"We are pleased to see that we are doing a fairly good job at keeping our graduates in fields like the legal, health and education professions," said Brian Noland, HEPC chancellor. "But we would like to improve our work participation rate in high-tech fields like engineering and the sciences."

The new study shows that, excluding federal government employees, the West Virginia work participation rate increased from 46.4 percent in 2006 to 47.1 percent in 2007, according to Dr. George W. Hammond, associate director of the WVU Bureau of Business and Economic Research and lead author of the report.

According to Hammond, wages earned by state higher education graduates working in West Virginia in 2007 rose by 4.5 percent over 2006, again excluding federal government employees. Annualized wages for higher education graduates during the previous decade hit \$39,317 in 2007, including federal government employees.

"Overall, of the 107,455 state public higher education graduates during the past decade, 52,186 were working in West Virginia in 2007," said Hammond. "These graduates earned a total of \$2 billion in gross wages, not including fringe benefits."

The data analyzed in the report cover graduates from state public institutions of higher education during the academic years from 1996-97 to 2005-06. Data on graduates is matched by Workforce West Virginia, with data on employment and wages covered under the state unemployment compensation system. The employment data is well known to be of high quality, but it does not include all individuals working in a state at a given time. For instance, the dataset excludes the self-employed.

Highlights of the report include: For recent graduates (2005-06 academic year), work participation rates are higher, averaging 58.1 percent in 2007. Work participation rates fall to 40.5 percent for graduates during the 1996-97 academic year.

Graduates with associate degrees were most likely to work in the state (66.5 percent), followed by those with master's (51.1 percent), first professional (physicians, lawyers, 46.2 percent), bachelor's (43.4 percent) and doctoral (24.6 percent) degrees.

The full report is available at [www.wvhepc.org](http://www.wvhepc.org) and [www.bber.wvu.edu](http://www.bber.wvu.edu).



February 6, 2009

## Legislature ready to debate on PROMISE scholarship

By Amanda White

The future of the PROMISE scholarship was a big topic at Thursday night's question and answer session among members of staff, faculty and students in addition to nine West Virginia state representatives at the Legislative Look Ahead.

According to the State Journal, the scholarship's ad-hoc committee concluded that more state funding is required to meet the growing tuitions in West Virginia. This has led several members of the West Virginia Legislature to propose a capping of the scholarship at \$4,500.

"There will be no additional money put into the PROMISE Scholarship," said West Virginia state Sen. Bob Plymale, D-Wayne. "We have kept our promise."

In the Legislative Look Ahead held at the Marshall University Graduate College earlier Thursday morning, Gov. Joe Manchin expressed his full approval of the cap as well.

Delegate Kelli Sobonya, R-Cabell, however, disagreed. She stated that the legislature was letting down hard working students by capping the scholarship at \$4,500. She was supported by Delegate Don Perdue, D - Wayne, who said that the capping of the scholarship was unreasonable if tuition prices continued to rise.

"I believe that we said that we would do those things," he said. "I don't think that we should even talk about capping the PROMISE scholarship until we talk about capping tuition."

According to Sen. Evan Jenkins, D-Cabell, some of the problems now arising with the funding of the scholarship can be attributed to poor handling of the original legislation.

"I think we, as a public body, need to think long and hard before putting a project in place."

Dan Hager, senior health care management major from Hurricane, W.Va., has the scholarship and said that he can see both sides of the arguments. Although he would like to have more of his education paid for by the scholarship, he understood the state's need to limit spending.

"It would be nice to see us control the cost of education rather than cap the PROMISE scholarship," he said.

Student Government Association President Matt James said capping tuition was not brought up in the SGA because of the lack of need, as Marshall ranks as one of the lower tuition rates in the state.

"I hope that students know that our representatives do care about Marshall," he said.

February 2, 2009

## After Bresch, WVU Plans to Reform Records Keeping

MORGANTOWN -- West Virginia University says it will implement reforms in academic records keeping after a consultant's report found the university's system was flawed and left questions about some degrees it had awarded.

In question are 27 executive MBA degrees and 261 undergraduate degrees awarded at West Virginia University from May 1997 through August 2008, according to a Feb. 2 report.

The degrees will stand, interim President C. Peter Magrath said Monday of the eMBA degrees.

"Those discrepancies, as unfortunate as they are, are a result of the university's inability, failure to follow the best practices that we will now have," Magrath said.

"Those degrees will stand from the time of graduation," Magrath said. "Same thing applies to the approximately 260 degrees, out of something like 36,000 or 37,000 offered in this period, where record keeping was inadequate and you can't absolutely prove or find out what happened — but those degrees were awarded, and they stand as is the case for all of the others."

AACRAO Consulting, a service of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, issued the the report on WVU record-keeping practices.

The independent, nonprofit group was hired in August 2008 following uncertainty surrounding the degree status of former eMBA student Heather Bresch. That issue led to the resignation of some of the university's top administrators, including President Mike Garrison.

AACRAO Consulting was hired to analyze WVU's recordkeeping policies and practices and make recommendations in four areas, according to the report. The areas were general university academic records management and records retention policies, retention by faculty of class records, procedures for tracking grade and transcript modifications and the final checking of records before graduation.

The degree-by-degree audits that uncovered the 288 degree discrepancies were not part of AACRAO Consulting's mandate but rather were conducted internally and were included in AACRAO's review.

The consultants concluded that many record-keeping discrepancies resulted from inadequate use of the BANNER electronic grade retention system and to the use of "shadow" records systems in individual academic units.

The consultants offered 29 recommendations that fall primarily into four areas, according to AACRAO Senior Consultant and Project Director Wayne Sigler: integrating accountability into records management; taking a proactive, stake-holder focused approach; staying more current with best practices in academic records management; and developing an organizational structure that assures integrity and reliability.

Among specific recommendations is the establishment of a permanent registrar and the requirement that all academic units rely on the BANNER system as the system of record.

Magrath accepted the report's conclusions and emphasized that all recommendations would be implemented.

"The only thing that we can and will tolerate at WVU is that we do implement and have from here on out best practices and the gold standard so that others will come to us and look at us as a model of how this needs to be done," he said.

"Our graduates are prized and valued; they come out of good, strong programs that are led and taught and mentored by outstanding faculty and staff at this university," he added.

Asked whether, given the affirmation of the 27 eMBA degrees with irregularities, Bresch's degree would be reinstated, Magrath said there is a distinction.

"That degree had not been awarded, and it was subsequently awarded under circumstances that became controversial, and that degree was in effect rescinded, if you will, by the only authority that can do that ... the Board of Governors," he said.

"These other degrees, the report does not say they were improperly awarded; they were awarded, but the recordkeeping was not best practices, that's been explained, the same applies to the undergraduate degrees," he said. "All those degrees were awarded, were awarded at the time, and they stand."

AACRAO Consulting is undertaking a second phase to review policies and procedures.



February 5, 2009

## New B&E policies address credit issues WVU College to be reviewed next school year

BY CASSIE SHANER, The Dominion Post

WVU's College of Business and Economics will undergo an accreditation review in 2010, and officials will investigate how the school has responded to problems identified by both the Heather Bresch degree investigation and an internal audit of the executive MBA (eMBA) program.

Bill Trumbull, who was out of town Wednesday, addressed the accreditation issue through WVU spokesman Dan Kim. Trumbull was named interim dean of the college last spring.

"The AACSB, the official accrediting agency for business schools nationwide, has known about the college's 'credits' issues [what they accept as transfers, etc.] since last summer and Dean Trumbull has spoken to AACSB officials about this," Kim said. "He believes their focus, when the accreditation process gets under way, will be on policies, procedures and actions that the school is undertaking now, not 5-10 years ago.

"What's occurred has certainly caused concerns, but B&E's policies, set forth in their new procedures manual, are consistent with acceptable business school standards nationwide.

"Dr. Trumbull feels confident the program will maintain accreditation."

Kim said the accreditation is in "good standing."

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International grants accreditation to undergraduate and graduate business administration and accounting programs. Schools accredited by the agency have earned "the highest standard of achievement for business schools worldwide," according to the AACSB International Web site.

As of December, the WVU College of Business and Economics was one of 560 schools accredited for its business programs and one of 168 schools accredited for its accounting programs.

Amy Ponzillo, public relations coordinator for AACSB, said WVU's accreditation expires in 2010, and an accreditation team will likely visit the B&E school to review its programs during the 2009-'10 academic year.

A draft of an internal B&E audit of the eMBA program, acquired by The Dominion Post, lists a number of accreditation concerns. Among other issues, the audit indicated that WVU had allowed students to transfer coursework from unaccredited programs, graduate without taking required courses, enter the program without submitting THE

FULL report by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers can be read by going to [dominion post.com](http://dominionpost.com) and clicking on the link.

GMAT scores and take courses from adjunct faculty who were not academically qualified.

For example, after noting that 88 students took independent study courses in place of required classes listed in the eMBA plan of study — several of which are required by AACSB International, according to the document — the audit draft indicates that the matter will have to be investigated further, “as it is an AACSB International standard that could have been violated.”

However, Jerry Trapnell, AACSB executive vice president and chief accreditation officer, said there is no specific list of courses required for accreditation. Curriculum guidelines, faculty qualifications, transfer rules and admissions requirements are all based on the institution and its mission.

“There’s no one size fits all,” Trapnell said. AACSB business program standards listed online indicate that admissions policies must be “clear and consistent with the school’s mission.”

Trapnell said concerns about the Bresch degree were brought to the agency’s attention by the media, but officials saw no reason to conduct WVU’s five-year accreditation maintenance review ahead of schedule.

AACSB accreditation is based on the overall quality of a business school and its ability to meet and improve upon its mission. WVU, like other schools, is entitled to “due process time” to address problems or issues identified within its programs, Trapnell said.

“If the university’s taken a number of actions that are positive, that’s probably what we will look at,” Trapnell said. “It’s a forward-looking view and not so much focused on the past. ... You don’t solve things overnight.”

Trapnell would not comment on WVU’s 2010 accreditation review, saying matters related to the review are “between us and West Virginia University.”

WVU declined to comment on the draft audit received by The Dominion Post.

“The draft document you describe as originating from the College of Business and Economics would be considered an internal memorandum and not a public document, nor one that was conducted by an independent, objective consulting group,” Kim said.

“The university is relying on the work of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) to look at the issues surrounding awarding degrees.

“They are an independent, external, nationally recognized organization bringing the expertise and objectivity required to review our procedures and processes. We have accepted their findings and are moving ahead with all of their recommendations because we have confidence in the credibility and thoroughness of their work.”

The draft audit and the AACRAO findings released earlier this week differ in a number of areas. For example, the internal audit initially indicated that 80 of the 652 eMBA students who graduated from 1995-2007 had not met the requirements for the degree, according to the draft. But a review of the audit conducted by the AACRAO indicated that about 27 students who graduated from 1997-2008 had not met the requirements.

AACRAO was hired to review the internal audit and examine records management practices campus-wide after an investigative panel determined that Bresch, the daughter of Gov. Joe Manchin and chief operating officer of Mylan Pharmaceuticals, had been retroactively awarded an eMBA degree she did not earn.

February 6, 2009

## Bresch demands WVU explain revocation of degree

By The Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. -- The woman at the center of a scandal that forced West Virginia University's president to resign last year demanded an explanation Friday why her master's degree was revoked but 288 other apparently deficient degrees will be allowed to stand.

In a letter to the university's Board of Governors, obtained by The Associated Press, Heather Bresch said she has "no choice but to revisit my options," given recent revelations in a report on degree-granting and record-keeping practices between 1997 and 2008.

Bresch said she is not suggesting the other degrees be rescinded.

"Rather, I am asking for a detailed explanation of what differentiates my situation from them," wrote the daughter of Democratic Gov. Joe Manchin and executive of Pennsylvania-based generic drug maker Mylan Inc.

Board Chairwoman Carolyn Long said the letter will be referred to the provost's office and declined to comment further.

Jason Parsons, the board's student representative, said, "I think there are a lot of questions that people have, and those questions are legitimate and should be answered."

WVU requested the review by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers after Bresch was retroactively awarded an executive master's of business administration in October 2007 that investigators later concluded she had not earned.

The investigators found administrators and academic officers in the College of Business and Economics added missing courses and grades to her transcript. Bresch was 12 credit hours short of the required 48.

Bresch has repeatedly insisted she substituted work experience for classroom work in her final semester with the blessing of then-program director Paul Speaker -- an assertion Speaker has denied. Her letter also includes a copy of an internal business school record, showing she graduated in 1999 with a 3.0 grade-point average.

The association's report found 27 eMBA degrees like Bresch's were awarded despite apparent credit-hour deficiencies or other records discrepancies. So were 261 undergraduate degrees.

But Interim President Peter Magrath said Monday that while the 261 will be further examined, all 288 degrees will stand. While Bresch's degree was not awarded until years after she left the program, the others were awarded in a timely way, he said.

The AACRAO report also suggests WVU might have a difficult time proving "just cause" for revoking the degrees, such as fraud, deceit or error by the student.

Graduates, however, might have grounds to sue for breach of contract if their degrees are revoked, attorney Sandra Schuster wrote.

The report shows other eMBA graduates were allowed to substitute work experience for credit hours, and Bresch said she was shocked that AACRAO did not interview Speaker, who ran the eMBA program for eight of the 10 years in question. She also contends the new report undermines a key conclusion of the panel that investigated her situation.

The panel said institutional failures surrounding her degree were "unique," but she says the AACRAO report shows "larger systemic problems with record keeping that continue to exist.

David C. Hardesty was president at WVU for all but the last year of the AACRAO review. He was replaced in the fall of 2007 by politically connected attorney Mike Garrison, whose appointment had been widely criticized by faculty, many of whom had supported another candidate.

Garrison and Bresch are longtime friends, and her boss is a benefactor of both the governor and WVU.

The panel investigating the Bresch matter concluded that while neither she nor Garrison did anything wrong, there was "palpable pressure" from the administration to accommodate Bresch.

Garrison ultimately resigned, while others involved in the matter were demoted.



February 7, 2009

HEATHER BRESCH'S LETTER TO THE WVU BOARD OF GOVERNORS

To be read during the public session of the West Virginia University Board of Governor's meeting on Feb. 6.

Dear Board of Governors:

I write this letter to you in your capacity as a member of West Virginia University's Board of Governors, the responsible and governing body of West Virginia University, recognizing that your responsibility is to determine, control, supervise and manage the financial, business and education policies and affairs of West Virginia University.

I have had the opportunity to read the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers Student Academic Records Management Consultation Report (the "AACRAO Report"), as well as other relevant documents and other information regarding the inquiry in to my MBA degree in 2007 and 2008.

For months, I, like many others involved in this scenario, have patiently waited for the release of the AACRAO Report. The findings of the AACRAO Report validate widespread issues relating to the management of student records at West Virginia University and more specifically, the College of Business and Economics. The University's response to the AACRAO Report leaves me at a loss to understand any distinction between my situation and those of the 288 cited in the report. As I read Interim President McGrath's rationale for letting all 288 degrees stand and his explanation for distinguishing my circumstances from the other students, I have no choice but to revisit my options regarding the University's decision to revoke my degree.

The record is clear that when I inquired about my transcript, my records at Admissions and Records showed that I appeared to be short the hours needed to complete my MBA. It is now well-established and verified by the College of Business and Economics that I had 36 credit hours of the 48 needed for completion of my degree by taking and completing the required classes with my cohort. I completed the remaining hours needed through outside work experience which was approved by then program director Paul Speaker. It is worth noting that during the process conducted by the Investigative Panel retained to review my degree, Paul Speaker, himself, testified that WVU did not allow any outside work to be substituted for credit hours. Obviously, we now know this to be completely untrue. The AACRAO Report verifies that many students have substituted outside work experience for credit hours. It is also interesting and quite frankly shocking to note that Paul Speaker who ran the eMBA program eight of the ten years in question was not even interviewed by AACRAO.

The Investigative Panel recommended revocation of the degree that I continue to believe in good faith I earned in December 1998 when I graduated. In light of the observations and recommendations set forth in the AACRAO Report, it cannot be denied that the key findings the Investigative Panel used to support the revocation of my degree must now be called into serious question.

Contrary to the Investigative Panel's assertion that the institutional failures leading to the revocation of my degree were 'unique to this particular, high profile case, rather than a reflection of across the board weaknesses in the Executive MBA Program or systemic failure in WVU record keeping', we now know there were and remain significant and systemic issues regarding record keeping by and between the College of Business and Economics and Admissions and Records at West Virginia University. In fact, there are no fewer than eight single spaced pages and 29 items in the AACRAO Report that cover concerns and necessary improvements to the record keeping system, not the least of which is a recognition that there are numerous and clear examples where students, like me, believed they had graduated but do not appear according to either Admissions and Records or the College of Business and Economics to have completed all required hours, courses or credits.

In light of recent developments and armed with the information we now have, it is improper, at best, not to look at the inconsistent treatment between me and the 288 students documented in the AACRAO Report. Please understand that I am not suggesting that the 288 degrees should not be recognized; rather, I am asking for a detailed explanation of what differentiates my situation from them.

I am enclosing documents that I believe are relevant for your review and consideration. They include my testimony before the Investigative Panel, the Investigative Panel's Report, the draft College of Business and Economics Audit and an email from Dean Sears with a spreadsheet attached from 2005 acknowledging and verifying my status as a graduate of the eMBA program, two full years prior to the inquiry regarding my degree.

I await your response.

Sincerely,

Heather Bresch

## MU's new rec center turns heads

BILL ROSENBERGER, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- Marshall University opened its new recreational center Thursday afternoon to throngs of students, staff and alumni.

Their responses to what they saw were generally the same.

"It's awesome. It's definitely a worthwhile investment," said alumna and Marshall employee Amy Saunders. "You're not going to be disappointed."

The new \$30 million center took more than a year to construct, but the wait was worth it. It seems every one of the 123,000 square feet is filled with new equipment, lockers, pools, studios, courts and even a 40-foot climbing wall.

"They're all happy (the university) built it," said Dave Stewart, director of campus recreation. "So many fitness opportunities. We're tired of talking about it. We're ready (to be open)."

Students Chelsea Swain and Jessica Jacobs, who opted for the high-end Woodway treadmills, said the center may have been costly, but it was needed.

"We're a little behind the times," said Jacobs, who is a junior. "I think we're caught up. We deserve it; we're a large university."

The recreational center is the second major project to be completed at Marshall in the past eight months. Last August, the new first-year dorms opened. Combined, they could have an impact on recruitment and retention.

"It will obviously impact recruiting immediately," student body president Matt James said. "It will play a big role in retention. I'm happy to see our school grow. There's so much more potential."

The center, built on the previous site of 20th Street Baptist Church, is designed to provide and promote enjoyable, healthy programs in outstanding facilities, with superior service. It's promotional tag is "Fun, Fitness, Friendship, Forever."

"It will be the best in the state," Stewart told a waiting crowd of at least a few hundred. "This building is for you."

It features a four-court gymnasium for basketball, volleyball, badminton, dodge ball and pickleball. There is more than 17,000 square feet of fitness areas on the second and third floors, along with four fitness studios for yoga, spinning, belly dancing, kickboxing and aerobics.

The aquatics center features a three-lane lap pool, 20-person spa, a vortex pool and a leisure pool. There also are three racquetball courts, a 1/7-mile, three-lane track and a massage suite.

There are locker rooms for men, women and family, each handicap accessible with dozens of showers. There also are digital lockers for everyday use, along with lockers that can be rented by members. And all of the treadmills and elliptical machines have televisions and iPod attachments.

The center now serves as the largest employer on campus, with 125 students -- both graduate and undergraduate -- serving in a service or training capacity. Many of the students are enrolled in exercise science or sports and recreation courses.

Joe Troubetaris, a last-semester graduate student majoring in exercise physiology and cardiac rehabilitation, is completing his studies while working in a number of different capacities at the rec center. He said there is plenty of free weight and strength-training equipment to go around, especially when compared with what students had in Gullickson Hall.

"No one will ever have to wait for cardio," Troubetaris said. "This is incredible what we can offer."

The dedication is scheduled tentatively for April.

# Charleston Daily Mail

DAILYMAIL.COM

February 4, 2009

## W.Va. 45th in Advanced Placement test rankings

by The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- West Virginia ranked 45th nationwide in the percentage of public school students earning a score of 3 or higher on the Advanced Placement examinations.

The College Board said Wednesday in its Advanced Placement Report to the Nation that 6.9 percent of 2008 graduates of West Virginia's public high schools earned a 3 or higher on at least one AP exam. That's up from 6.7 percent of graduates scoring a 3 or higher in 2007.

Maryland ranked first with 23.4 percent of 2008 graduates scoring at least 3 on their AP tests.

The College Board says a score of 3 is a predictor of college success.

Nationally, 15.2 percent of students in the class of 2008 scored at least 3 on the AP tests, which give students the opportunity to earn college credit.

February 5, 2009

## VETERANS AFFAIRS

### College officials worried about GI education aid

**Colleges worry that the Department of Veterans Affairs is moving too slowly providing new education benefits for veterans in time for fall.**

BY DAVID COFFEY, [dcoffey@mcclatchydc.com](mailto:dcoffey@mcclatchydc.com)

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' top education official said Tuesday that veterans who hope to attend college next fall should be able to use new increased GI benefits to attend even high-cost private colleges.

Officials of independent colleges and universities -- under heavy budget pressure from endowment losses and the recession -- sounded worried, however. Many said that the VA was moving too slowly for veterans to know how much financial help they'd get before they decided which colleges to attend.

Increased benefits under the new so-called Yellow Ribbon program call for the VA and private colleges and universities to offer grants that cover the difference between the tuition and fees at a state's most expensive public-university and the same costs at a private institution. The VA and the private school split the added costs 50-50.

Participation by private institutions is voluntary, and they alone determine the number of Yellow Ribbon scholars they'll accept. To date, however, the VA hasn't told the institutions what the highest tuition in each state is, among other details.

Keith Wilson, the VA's director of education service, assured officials Tuesday at a Washington conference of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities that the VA is "moving as aggressively as possible" to fill in the financial blanks.

Nonetheless, Yellow Ribbon's list of participating universities and the aid they'll offer won't be made public until April 1, after most private college and university admissions decisions are made. Aid to qualified vets won't be available until Aug. 1, after many fall semester bills are due.

Late notices are likely to reduce participation, Wilson acknowledged, in part because colleges and universities won't know how much to budget for Yellow Ribbon scholars.

Schools also are supposed to make grants to veterans on a first-come, first-served basis, which further handicaps those who need to know aid details before deciding which colleges or universities to attend.

James Wright, the president of Dartmouth College, in Hanover, N.H., urged members of the association to support the program, even if the number of veterans who receive aid is minimal this year.

The Yellow Ribbon program is one aspect of the broader Post-9/11 GI Bill, which takes effect Aug. 1. Unlike the old GI Bill, whose educational benefit expired 10 years after service, the new bill is good for 15 years after the soldier's last active service date. Benefits can be passed to other members of the veteran's family after six to 10 years of service plus an additional four-year service commitment made after Aug. 1, 2009.

The new GI Bill includes a \$1,000 annual grant for books and a monthly stipend for room and board equal to the military's housing allowance.

Some school officials wondered Tuesday where the new aid will come from, and whether it would take money away from need-based scholarships.

"We find ourselves in somewhat of a collision course as we're determining whether we can participate with those two conflicting policies," said Scott Fleming, an official at Georgetown University in Washington.

Veterans with three or more years of service after Sept. 10, 2001, are eligible for the grants.

The idea was to enable veterans, with help from private schools and the VA, to attend any private colleges or universities to which they could gain admission.

## Colleges Show Interest in New GI Bill Program, but Many Are Wary of Its Cost

By MEGAN ECKSTEIN

As college administrators deal with dwindling budgets and rising demand for student aid, they also face decisions about whether, and to what extent, they can afford to commit to participate in a new federal program that seeks to help veterans attend private colleges, graduate schools, or out-of-state public institutions.

Under the program, created through the GI Bill that was signed into law last summer (The Chronicle, September 24, 2008), the federal government will match, dollar for dollar, any financial aid that colleges provide to veterans above the cost of the most-expensive public institution in that college's state. The general provisions of the GI Bill provide military personnel and recent veterans with enough aid to attend the most-expensive public college in the veterans' home states.

Advocates of the new program, known as the "yellow-ribbon program," worry that veterans' ability to afford the colleges of their choice would be limited if many colleges decide they cannot find the money to chip in to cover veterans' education costs.

Before they can decide to what extent they might be able to participate in the program, college administrators are waiting to see details of final regulations, which are expected sometime next month. The institutions are particularly interested in finding out how the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will determine what the most expensive public institution is in each state and what fees would be counted toward that total.

No university has explicitly said it can't afford to join in the yellow-ribbon program because of the financial crisis, but many administrators will remain apprehensive until they can calculate how much it would cost them to participate, said Keith M. Wilson, director of the education service at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In addition to the uncertainty over how much the program might cost individual colleges, it is also unclear how the program will be administered and how much extra work might be involved for institutions that participate.

### **'Gathering Steam'**

Nevertheless, Mr. Wilson said, judging by conversations he's had with college administrators and the number of comments Veterans Affairs received on its draft regulations, interest in the program already "seems to be gathering steam." Interest among public colleges has grown especially quickly, he said, because many of them hadn't realized they could participate in the yellow-ribbon program.

The GI Bill provides veterans who have at least three months of active duty, or one month of active duty if the veteran was released on duty-related disability, with tuition assistance to public colleges in their home state, a stipend for books and supplies, and

a housing allowance based on the cost of living near the college the veteran elects to attend.

The program was shaped in large part by Dartmouth College President James E. Wright, Sen. James H. Webb Jr., Democrat of Virginia, and former Sen. John Warner, a Republican of Virginia; all three men are veterans themselves and wanted to help make college as attainable for young veterans as possible.

Under the program, colleges can choose to admit any number of veterans they'd like, as long as veterans are admitted on a first-come, first-serve basis. Each college can also choose how much of its tuition it wants to waive for those students, which makes participation possible for colleges with limited budgets.

"We wanted to give the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans as many options as possible," Mr. Wright said in a speech this week at the annual meeting of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities.

Helping veterans pay for private colleges would benefit the institutions, too, he argued, because they would gain hard-working students who would in turn help the institutions maintain enrollment levels. He expects Dartmouth to participate. "I don't look at this as being a significant additional expense," he said. "It is money that will be spent on some exceptional students."

### **Concerns About the Fine Print**

But some college officials, while enthusiastic about the concept, have expressed concerns about the specifics of the yellow-ribbon program.

One issue is that the law requires that colleges provide their aid to veterans in the form of a tuition waiver, not a scholarship. The idea is that a tuition waiver is open to all veterans, while a scholarship could be designed for a more limited group, such as students who served in a particular branch of the armed forces, enrolled in a certain academic major, or demonstrated financial need.

Mr. Wilson made clear at the private-college leaders' conference this week that the Department of Veterans Affairs' goal is to help all veterans at once, not slice them into smaller categories to be treated differently.

"I would much prefer it's a scholarship," Mr. Wright said, adding that Dartmouth College has many existing scholarships that could be awarded to veterans to help cover the university's cost of participating in the yellow-ribbon program, but the regulations that were drafted would bar that. Without the option of using scholarship money to finance the veterans' education, some colleges worry they will be extending more aid than they can afford or that the scholarships already in place won't be used most efficiently.

But, Mr. Wright said, "I don't think most places will look at this as a deal breaker."

Another major concern was that in areas with especially low in-state tuition rates, like Florida and Washington, D.C., the program would be more expensive for private colleges and the veterans who want to attend them than it would be in other areas of the country where public tuition is higher.

Patricia McGuire, president of Trinity Washington University, said at the private-college group's conference that she was very interested in the program but didn't think she'd be able to afford much veteran assistance if the regulations remained the same, without any measure to deal with the disparity among in-state tuitions around the country.

Annual undergraduate tuition at her university totals almost \$19,000. But in-state tuition at the University of the District of Columbia is about \$2,500 per year. That difference suggests that her institution might need to help cover a wide financial gap for veterans enrolling under the yellow-ribbon program.

Mr. Wilson said his department had heard that same concern during the comment period for the GI Bill regulations, but that the problem could probably be fixed only by changing the underlying law itself.

### **Issues for Large Universities**

Large institutions with multiple undergraduate and graduate programs may also face some difficulties with the program as it is now designed, said Suzanne L. Day, Harvard University's director of federal relations. Each of Harvard's major programs, such as its law, medicine, business, divinity, dental, and other schools, has its own tuition rates and admission schedules. Therefore, it would be hard for the university and unfair to the veterans to create a single agreement, she said.

"It just seems like if the agreement has to be campuswide, it's going to be extremely difficult," she said. "It's very hard to move forward without final regulations." However, she stopped short of saying that being forced to develop one campuswide agreement would be a deal breaker for Harvard as it decides whether to participate.

Business schools tend to admit students much earlier than other schools, so if Harvard were tied to a single agreement under the veterans' program and followed its first-come, first-served rules, the slots the university had agreed to fill with veterans through the yellow-ribbon program might fill with veterans applying to the business school, Ms. Day said. And that would leave veterans who wanted to attend the law school or enroll as undergraduates unable to receive aid under the yellow-ribbon program.

### **Sifting Through Suggestions**

The comment period for GI Bill draft regulations ended last month, and Mr. Wilson said his department was still sifting through the suggestions.

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities was among those that submitted comments.

"The overarching theme of the comments was to urge the VA to be as flexible as possible, particularly during the first year of operation, in order to see what's going to work best for veterans," said Susan K. Hattan, a senior consultant in the group's government-relations department. The letter also asked for clarification of the length and terms of the formal yellow-ribbon agreements.

About 350,000 veterans now receive education benefits at about 6,200 institutions. Mr. Wright said he expected that number to increase by as much as 25 percent next year. That includes an estimated 50,000 National Guard members who would be eligible for

the new aid; those members haven't always met requirements set for the rest of the armed services because many of their units aren't on active duty for long-enough periods of time.

Mr. Wright said it would be difficult to achieve high participation rates in the first year of the program, because the regulations would be finalized in the middle of colleges' budgeting process and toward the end of the season in which institutions are finalizing admissions offers. But he says he holds out hope that the following year will be better for the program, particularly if the nation's budget situation can be turned around.

## House approves national center for campus safety

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Tuesday approved creation of an office in the Justice Department to help university security forces train for and prevent violent incidents such as those that hit Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University in recent years.

The National Center for Campus Public Safety would issue grants to campus safety agencies, encourage research into improved college safety and conduct training.

The center would be run through the Justice Department's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, said Rep. Robert Scott, D-Va., sponsor of the bill with Rep. Louis Gohmert, R-Texas.

The bill, which passed on a voice vote, also cleared the House in the last session of Congress but was not taken up by the Senate.

Supporters cited the need for more coordinated plans to prevent campus violence following the 2007 attack at Virginia Tech where a mentally disturbed man shot 32 students and teachers to death before killing himself, as well as the incident at Northern Illinois where a gunman killed five students before shooting himself.

*The bill is H.R. 748.*