



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of May 31, 2009

June 1, 2009

Program to let out-of-state veterans attend W.Va. colleges for free

By Alison Knezevich, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. - Starting in August, veterans from across the country will be able attend college in the Mountain State for free.

New legislation requires all public universities and colleges to participate in the federal Yellow Ribbon Program. Gov. Joe Manchin signed the bill Monday during a ceremony with state higher education officials.

The Yellow Ribbon Program is part of the post-9/11 GI Bill that Congress passed last year. Under that law, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs pays eligible veterans' tuition up to the highest in-state undergraduate rate. But those tuitions and fees are higher for out-of-state students.

Now, the institutions will waive half the difference between the in-state and out-of-state tuition and fees, and the VA will match those waivers. That means no out-of-pocket expenses for veterans from other states.

"This allows in-state tuition and fees for any veteran across the country," said Brian Noland, chancellor of the state Higher Education Policy Commission.

West Virginia is the second state to require all its public schools to participate in the program, Noland said. New Mexico is the other state to take part.

Officials hope the program will especially attract veterans from West Virginia's neighboring states, said Skip Gebhart, administrator of the HEPC's Office of Veterans' Education Programs.

"Most of our schools are on the border," Gebhart said. "We think there are a lot of people who -- now knowing they won't have to pay extra -- will start looking at those programs."

Most private schools in West Virginia have also chosen to take part in the program, he added.

Gebhart's office is now educating schools about the Yellow Ribbon Program and how to best recruit veterans, he said.

Interested veterans should contact the admissions office of the school they want to attend. The institution will work with the veteran and VA to determine eligibility.



June 1, 2009

Lawmakers pass \$11B state budget Committee work gets under way today

BY DAVID BEARD The Dominion Post with the Associated Press

The state Legislature passed the slimmed down Fiscal year 2010 budget on Sunday, and the document now awaits the governor's signature. The total budget, including additional federal funds, amounts to about \$11.5 billion.

The \$3.78 billion General Fund reflects about \$197 million in cuts recommended by Gov. Joe Manchin, and tweaked by the 12-member House/Senate conference committee Thursday and Friday. The state used about \$167 million in federal stimulus funds to "backfill" many of the cuts, and only had to trim about \$31 million from its various programs and services, House Finance Chairman Harry K. White, D-Mingo and one of the budget conferees, said previously.

The House voted 83-12 Sunday to approve the budget bill, HB 2010. The split came along party lines, with all 12 no votes from Republicans.

In the Senate, the bill passed 32-0, with two members absent, said Sen. Roman Prezioso, D-Marion, one of the budget conferees. One senator asked about the decision to withhold a \$51 million payment to the Other Post Employee Benefits debt (a benefit fund that includes PEIA), which stands at about \$7 billion.

"It seems that will be a big interim issue," he said.

Based on Manchin's proposed cuts, the Legislature appropriated \$1,826,079,208 for public education. That's \$65,866,557 less than Manchin originally requested before he revised the budget for projected revenue shortfalls, and \$15,558,323 less than the full amount available for FY 2009. This is one of the areas to be backfilled with stimulus funds.

Higher education is another area that will be backfilled. The legislature appropriated \$419,986,513 for for FY 2009, and Manchin originally proposed \$426,970,563 for FY 2010 — a \$6,984,050 increase. After the recommended cuts, the Legislature budgeted \$407,493,284 for higher education.

Delegate Mary Poling, House Education chair and the budget conferee who worked on higher education funding with her Senate counterpart, told The Dominion Post that despite the cut, higher education, including WVU, will be funded at 2009 levels using federal funds.

The total state budget comes from federal funds, the General Fund, the State Road Fund, lottery income and various fees.

The special session to consider bills Gov. Joe Manchin hopes to pass officially commenced Sunday evening, but the real work begins today in the various legislative committees.

Legislators avoided some budget cuts by tapping alternative revenues. A general revenue cut of \$249,000 for the office that fields mine inspectors, for instance, was replaced by lottery proceeds. That source also filled in for cuts of \$30.5 million from teacher pension payments, \$10 million for school safety and \$3.2 million from the Higher Education Grant Program.

They avoided real cuts to funding for fairs and festivals by simply eliminating money for defunct or noncompliant events, said House Finance Chair Harry Keith White, D-Mingo.

Among the branches of government, the Supreme Court saw the smallest general revenue cut, at 1.7 percent. Spending for the Senate and House were each reduced by 2 percent, while a \$15 million boost to a special account overseen by their leadership was deleted.

Lawmakers increased funding in several areas, including \$151,000 to upgrade the secretary of state's computers, \$5 million for education technology system specialists and \$2.5 million for PROMISE scholarships.

They also lessened Manchin's recommended cuts to Development Office accounts totaling \$9 million that fund projects and causes sought by their constituents back home. They similarly blunted the blow to a lottery account meant for county and local fairs and festivals, while spelling out \$2.7 million in funding for more than 415 of those events.

The Manchin administration hasn't ruled out further offsetting cuts with surplus-backed funding measures during the upcoming special session.

"We intend to include supplemental appropriations in the special session call, which leaves us open to discussion for any issues that may be appropriate," said Jim Pitrolo, the governor's legislative liaison. "Keep in mind that we don't have much surplus to work with."



June 6, 2009

WVU hikes tuition 4% Residents to pay \$204 more a year

BY DAVID BEARD, The Dominion Post

WVU's Board of Governors OK'd a 4 percent tuition hike for the coming school year, but not without dissent. BOG members Stephen Goodwin and Jason Parsons voted against it; 11 voted for it.

Interim Provost E. Jane Martin said resident undergraduate tuition will go up \$204 per school year, from \$5,100 to \$5,304 (some schools and programs have additional costs). Nonresident undergraduate tuition will rise \$632 a year, from \$15,770 to \$16,402.

For resident graduate students, tuition will increase by \$226 per year, from \$5,612 to \$5,838. Nonresident charges will climb \$650, from \$16,270 to \$16,920.

Some "program-specific" graduate programs, such as law, business, nursing and pharmacy, will see increases ranging from about 9 to almost 18 percent, according to WVU charts.

Vice President for Administration and Finance Narvel Weese said that WVU is looking at an interim operating budget (it will be finalized in November) of \$855.3 million, and the tuition hike will raise about \$9 million to put toward operating costs.

Martin outlined some of the costs: Employee raises: \$3.2 million. Promotions and "productivity enhancements" (rewards for work): \$600,000.

State mandated \$60 per year of service longevity payments: \$100,000. PEIA employer rate increase: \$1.2 million.

Contribution to child care center: \$750,000.

Credit card convenience fees (when students and families use cards to pay for books and tuition): \$566,000. Utilities: \$400,000. Interim President C. Peter Magrath said WVU expects enrollment to hold steady, at about 28,500 students, with 4,500-4,700 incoming freshmen. BOG faculty representative Steve Kite asked what would happen if WVU didn't raise tuition.

Weese replied that WVU doesn't have large financial reserves. "Our ability to deal with uncertainty and unexpected events is, quite frankly, limited," he said. With about 65 percent of the budget going to people, it would difficult not to have some impact on personnel if the money didn't come in.

Kite also pointed out that enrollment growth has far outpaced faculty growth. He wanted to know if the tuition hike provided for new hires.

Martin said hiring recommendations are up to deans, who have to document the need. But WVU has already added a new teaching assistant professor rank — people who devote most of their time to the classroom, unlike other professors who split time between research and teaching.

Goodwin, who attended via conference call, said West Virginia is going through hard financial times and residents are losing their homes. “A tuition increase this year — it is not the appropriate time for this.”

Weese had previously said that the average national tuition hike is 5-6 percent.

Parsons, outgoing student body president, spoke at length against the hike.

“This university is in the business of people,” he said. “The obligation of this board is to invest its energy — into putting people first.”

He noted that the University of Maryland froze tuition, and Gov. Martin O’Malley wants to invest more money in higher education. Meanwhile, he said, WVU is at the same funding level as in the mid-1990s. So WVU needs to do a better job as an institution to make a case for more state funding.

“We can’t keep going back to the watering well and putting this on the backs of families,” he said. “I know we gotta keep the lights on. But we’ve got to send the message that this university is in the business of people. We need investments in higher education. We need investments in our young people.”

Parsons’ successor, incoming student body President Jason Zuccari and Vice President Whitney Rae Peters attended the meeting and echoed the same theme to The Dominion Post.

“Students and families are taking the burden,” Peters said.

Zuccari recalled the 8 percent tuition hike last year, and pointed out that dollar-wise, the 4-percent hike for nonresidents is heftier than the in-state hike. WVU needs to go to state lawmakers and find more money, he said.

Peters said that while she and Zuccari have studied the budget and the issues, the average student won’t understand the decision to raise tuition. “They may be angry the university doesn’t support them.”

When asked, both said they were aware of state budget problems — Gov. Joe Manchin cut about \$197 million from the Fiscal Year 2010 budget because of expected revenue shortfalls, and will be using federal stimulus funds to prop up the budget for the next two years.

But they still want to lobby the state for more funds, and encourage legislators and WVU administrators and staff to find ways to trim unnecessary spending. Peters said WVU needs to focus on its sustainability program — to find ways to cut long-term costs by using renewable resources and less energy.

BOG member Raymond J. Lane was among the 11 who approved the hike, but he said WVU may have to take a different approach in the future.

WVU serves at least two constituencies, he said. As a land-grant university, it serves state residents and must offer a good value for the dollar.

But it also competes as a “regional, national and global university. Tuition increases allow us to keep the best faculty, to keep the best students.”

In years to come, he said, WVU may have to calculate how to differentiate tuition hikes for residents versus non-residents, and put together a funding strategy.

WVU competes for national and international students, he said, “We can’t fall behind peer institutions. ... [efforts] to attract the brightest and best can only help” in-state students, too.

Other tuition hikes

Martin also described these tuition hikes:

WVU Institute of Technology, 4 percent — \$100 per semester for a resident, \$258 nonresident.

Potomac State, 6 percent, resident, \$80 per semester; 1 percent non-resident, \$36.

WVU residence halls, 4.5 percent hike for all except Stalnaker and Lincoln, which will be raised 5 percent. This is to cover utilities and food. Suites in Stalnaker and Lincoln, after the increase, will range from \$2,305 to \$2,712 per year for the coming school year. Other halls’ rates will range from \$481 to \$2,751, depending on the building and room occupancy.

Budget

Weese also gave an overview of the interim fiscal year 2010 budget. He said they decided to do an interim budget because of the uncertain status of the state and national economy, and because incoming President Jim Clements will be succeeding Magrath on June 30.

The budget will be finalized in November, he said. This will give financial planners more time to gain a better understanding of financial position and determine ways to generate new revenue.

Because of economic uncertainty, they will develop a three-year financial focus instead of an annual focus.

Among the fiscal factors:

Enrollment appears to be steady.

The \$855.3 million operating budget is about \$34 million higher than the projected \$821 million because of increased personnel costs. “We need to have the best and the brightest people or we’re not going to be successful going forward,” he said.

The state promised to backfill \$6 million in budget cuts with federal stimulus funds. House of Delegates Education Chair Mary Poling, DBarbour, previously told The Dominion Post that WVU would be funded at 2009 levels.

Because of hard times, families are finding it hard, and may continue to find it hard, to find or borrow money for tuition and fees.

State budget cuts will continue: \$15 million will be backfilled in fiscal year 2011; WVU will see a permanent cut of 5 percent, \$7.6 million, in fiscal year 2012.

WVU is already 80 million short in state funding compared to peer institutions nationally.

Operating revenues are about \$21 million below what was projected for this year. The gap is caused largely by a shortfall in federal and state grants and contracts — about \$58.5 million below projections.

Tuition income is actually above projections by about \$28.8 million. This is the first time in five years that WVU has raised tuition less than the annual projection of 5.5 percent, and that's because of the bad economy and shallow pockets across the nation.

Kite asked if pay raises would be considered if the budget shows a surplus in November. Weese replied that if more money somehow appears, there would be a "whole host of options on the table" for those who make the decisions. Raises might be among them.

Charleston Daily Mail

DAILYMAIL.COM

Thursday June 4, 2009

New WVU president says no to outside boards Clements to focus on university, thus avoiding the controversy surrounding ex-chiefs Gee, Hardesty

by Ry Rivard, Daily Mail staff

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Ohio State University President Gordon Gee resigned last week from his lucrative position on the Massey Coal Co. board of directors amid criticism from environmental groups.

Former West Virginia University President David Hardesty drew similar heat for sitting on the board of CONSOL Energy, where he earned up to \$70,000 a year.

But incoming WVU President James Clements plans to sidestep such controversies entirely.

The new president, who takes office at the end of this month, doesn't expect to join an outside board, said WVU spokesman Dan Kim.

"At this time, Dr. Clements does not have plans to serve on any external corporate boards," Kim said in an e-mail. "His focus is on West Virginia University and the community we serve. However, he does plan to work closely with the business community to form partnerships that will benefit the university."

Current Interim President C. Peter Magrath does not sit on any corporate boards, but WVU's president does sit on or at the head of several university-related boards, including several that oversee its sprawling health care system and the WVU Research Corporation.

The decision not to join a board could spare Clements headaches from environmental groups.

Such groups called Hardesty's position on the CONSOL board, which he joined in 2005, a conflict of interest and said it would damage the public's perception of coal research conducted at the university.

Gee, who himself is a former WVU president, was attacked by several groups, including the Sierra Club and Greenpeace, for his nine-year position on the Massey board mainly because of the environmental effects of surface mining, which is also called mountaintop removal.

"As one of the nation's most experienced and respected university presidents, your participation on Massey's board provides the company with undeserved credibility," the groups said in a May letter to Gee.

James Finkelstein, an expert on university presidents in corporate governance, applauded Clements' decision, saying it's a good idea to focus attention on the university.

"I think he's probably making a wise decision to start out with," said Finkelstein, a vice dean in the school of public policy at George Mason University.

"He may change his mind later on, it's hard to say," he added.

Nineteen presidents of the 40 research universities with the largest operating budgets sit on at least one corporate board, according to an analysis by The Chronicle of Higher Education. The publication found that the presidents usually receive compensation of at least \$50,000 and a similar amount in stock awards.

Finkelstein said it's hard to tell what companies and university presidents hope to gain from each other because neither is inclined to sit down and talk about it.

"The question you always ask is why are university presidents the only public executives who get to sit on these boards?" Finkelstein said. "Nobody has an answer to that question."

When Hardesty joined the CONSOL board in 2005, he said it would benefit the university's energy initiatives and governance practices.

"The nation has a renewed interest in coal as an energy source and a specific interest in coal conversion, clean-coal technologies and a method of producing methane by extracting it from coal bed seams," Hardesty was quoted as saying. "This appointment is a great opportunity to gain a better understanding of this growth industry and the ways the university can play a role."



June 4, 2009

Magrath won't stay to consult Agreed to aid in transition after July

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

Interim WVU President C. Peter Magrath will not remain on board as a consultant after incoming President James P. Clements takes over June 30.

But Magrath has agreed to assist Clements and others as needed after he steps down, WVU spokeswoman Becky Lofstead said.

"Dr. Magrath has said many times that he has fallen in love with WVU and the people here, and will help in any way possible," Lofstead said.

After Clements was hired in March, Steve Kite, a professor of geography and geology who represents the faculty on the WVU Board of Governors (BOG), said he would recommend keeping Magrath on as a consultant, calling it "an obvious opportunity."

Magrath has served as president of three public universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges. He has done consulting work in the past and serves as a senior presidential adviser for the College Board in Washington, D.C., a job he's said he plans to return to after leaving WVU.

Kite said the board has had informal discussions about hiring Magrath as a consultant, but decided against it.

"The consensus was that that's up to Dr. Clements and Dr. Magrath," Kite said. "It's not really something the board should micromanage. ... They have a great working relationship. They can decide between them whether that would be useful."

The board signed a transition agreement with former WVU President Mike Garrison last summer that kept him on to consult for one month after Magrath took over.

But Garrison's contract entitled him to an annual salary of \$255,000 until June 30, 2010, whether he was employed as president "or in some other capacity." Magrath's contract term ends July 31, but BOG chairwoman Carolyn Long said the board does not plan to keep Magrath on as a consultant for the remaining month.

"There has been no discussion of that," Long said. "That will totally be up to the president."

Lofstead said Magrath and Clements communicate regularly — sharing information by phone, e-mail and in person — and Magrath said the two men have developed a "close, comfortable working relationship" since Clements was chosen March 6.

Clements told Lofstead that he's learned a lot from Magrath and expects their relationship to continue after June 30.

“He said he has the utmost respect for Dr. Magrath and continues to learn a lot from him as they work regularly on a seamless transition and also intersect at meetings, dinners and university/community activities,” Lofstead said.

May 30, 2009

WVU Board of Governors to pick new leader this week

By Davin White, Staff writer

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The West Virginia University Board of Governors will pick a new leader this week, and the board's current chairwoman says she's willing to keep the job.

"If the board asks me to continue as chair, I will do so," Carolyn Long, also superintendent of Braxton County schools, said this week.

A colleague on the board expects Long will be nominated for a second year as board chairwoman at the board's meeting on Friday.

The board member, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the board has not voted, said Long is an excellent chairwoman.

"It's a second job for her," the BOG member said. "She goes up [to Morgantown] on the weekends. It is all-consuming."

The BOG member also said a board chairperson really needs two years to get a firm grasp of the job, but grows weary by the third year of the job.

The board's annual meeting on Friday will be held at the WVU Institute of Technology in Montgomery, instead of in Charleston as usual. Some board members said holding the meeting there would give them an opportunity to see the WVU Tech campus in person.

"Why not be more aware of all the things going on at Tech, the good things going on at Tech?" Long said. "What better way than to go there and have our meeting?"

Long presided over the board during a tumultuous year at WVU. Last summer, President Mike Garrison and other top university officials resigned after a master's degree had been retroactively awarded to Mylan Inc. executive Heather Bresch, daughter of Gov. Joe Manchin. Members of an investigative panel said university officials should not have awarded Bresch the degree, and said they exercised flawed judgment.

Peter Magrath stepped in as interim president while WVU searched for a new president, eventually choosing Towson University Provost James P. Clements. The school also searched for a new provost, health sciences chancellor and other administrative positions.

Changes have come to the Board of Governors, as well.

A bill (SB373) signed by Manchin this month allows for a new faculty representative from either Health Sciences or the WVU Extension Service to be chosen by faculty.

Members of the group Mountaineers for Integrity and Responsibility, which formed in the midst of the Bresch degree controversy, have sought changes to the BOG that "more accurately reflected the diversity, and the diverse interests," of the campus community, according to group spokesman Mark Brazaitis, an associate English professor.

"With Governor Manchin's last four appointments to the BOG, as well as the addition of another WVU faculty member, the BOG is both new and improved," Brazaitis wrote in an e-mail.

Those last few BOG picks are Morgantown businesswoman Diane Lewis, former Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Charles Vest; former Oracle Corp. President Ray Lane and Houston Dynamo executive and former WVU quarterback Oliver Luck.

Brazaitis wrote that he hopes WVU would enter a "golden age" where "hard work, talent, ingenuity, and invention will be rewarded and cronyism will be retired."

"I think we owe this new administration, and this new BOG, our support and best wishes," Brazaitis wrote.

In January, Manchin picked Lewis to fill the unexpired term of real estate developer Parry Petroplus. At the time, Lewis expected to be reappointed this summer.

WVU Faculty Senate chairman and mechanical and aerospace engineering professor Nigel Clark will replace Steve Kite in July as one faculty representative on the Board of Governors.

Jo Morrow, an administrative secretary in the College of Business and Economics, will step in for classified staff representative Paul Martinelli, said WVU Staff Council Chairman Terry Nebel.

This summer, Morrow also will assume Nebel's duties as staff council chairwoman, he said.

Manchin still has one, and perhaps two new appointments to fill on the Board of Governors.

The second term of BOG secretary Ted Mattern, a former superintendent of schools in Preston, Mingo and Upshur counties, expires this year.

Thomas S. Clark, a retired physician and former president of Medical Affairs for Mylan Pharmaceuticals, is eligible for reappointment after his first term expires next month. Clark could not be reached for comment last week.

Marshall researchers get grants from state commission

The Herald-Dispatch

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission has awarded six mini-grants totaling \$27,500 to researchers at Marshall University, the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM) and West Virginia University Institute of Technology (WVU Tech).

Grant recipients from Marshall are Brian Day, Frank Gilliam, Derrick Kolling and Wendy Trzyna.

The mini-grants were awarded through a competitive application process, a news release from the commission said. They're intended to assist faculty members with the preparation of proposals for submission to funding agencies or foundations that can help them with their research.

They're paid through the state's Research Challenge Fund.

Paul Hill, vice chancellor for science and research, said the mini-grants help researchers develop stronger, more-competitive proposals for funding their work. He added that the resulting proposals are often ultimately funded for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Other recipients were Brian Griffith of WVSOM and Jay Wiedemann of WVU Tech.

MU Names New Associate VP for Economic Development

For the past 20 years, Jennifer Kmiec has helped biotechnology researchers obtain patents for their discoveries and sell their ideas to industry.

Story by Paul Darst

HUNTINGTON -- Taking an idea from the laboratory to the boardroom isn't always an easy process.

Scientists who develop highly advanced technology often find themselves lost when it comes to obtaining patents for their discoveries and selling their ideas to industry.

For the past 20 years, Jennifer Kmiec has helped biotechnology researchers do just that. She will become Marshall University's associate vice president for economic development effective July 1.

"It's exciting," Kmiec said. "I'll be working with scientists and faculty on campus. I'll look at their new inventions and evaluate them, looking for new opportunities for patents."

The position also involves conducting market analysis to see whether business and industry might be interested in their research.

Kmiec is the wife of Eric B. Kmiec, who started in January as the first director and lead researcher for the Marshall Institute for Interdisciplinary Research. MIIR focuses on developing biotechnology research and spin-off companies.

"Actually, at Marshall, my job is much broader than MIIR," she said. "I'll work with the Rahall Transportation Institute and the medical school. ... There are plenty of opportunities."

Kmiec most recently was vice president of business development and marketing for InB:Biotechnologies Inc. in Newark, Del. She also has served as vice president for marketing at Athena Biotechnologies Inc. and director of genomics operations for Tapestry Pharmaceuticals Inc.

Associate vice president for economic development is a new position at Marshall, and Kmiec is perfect for the job, said John Maher, vice president of research.

"The associate VP of economic development is a new position we've added in response to the greater level of commercialization activity at Marshall in the recent past," he said. "Jennifer's background in biology with an MBA in technology management, along with her extensive experience working in startup biotechnology companies, made her by far and away the best candidate to fill that position."

While in Delaware, Kmiec was chairwoman of that state's chapter of the Biotechnology Industry Organization. A steering committee now is working on putting together a BIO chapter for West Virginia, and Kmiec's help will be invaluable, said Bryan Brown of Brown Communications. His firm represents the BIO steering committee.

"Jennifer seems to be a real firebrand and is very knowledgeable about biotechnology," he said. "... It's a real positive for the efforts of our steering group."

Spindel named dean of MU's Graduate College

The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- Donna J. Spindel, who has spent the past 33 years as a faculty member and an administrator at Marshall University, has been named dean of the university's Graduate College.

Gayle Ormiston, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs, said Spindel will begin her duties on July 1. She replaces Dr. Leonard Deutsch, who is retiring after 39 years at Marshall.

Spindel's administrative background at Marshall includes service as a chair in two different departments, as associate dean and interim dean of the College of Liberal Arts, as faculty coordinator for online instruction and as director of University Honors. She came to Marshall in 1976 as an assistant professor of history.

Most recently, Spindel served as interim chair of the department of English from 2008 to 2009. She said she is honored to have been selected to serve as the dean of the Marshall University Graduate College.

"I was attracted to this position because it is one of the few at Marshall which offers such a broad view of academic units across the university," she said. "I am also excited by the prospect of working closely with Marshall University's nearly 50 MA and doctoral degree programs, of serving as a central advocate for graduate education at Marshall, and of providing leadership in our ongoing efforts to shape graduate education in the 21st century world."

Spindel graduated in 1971 from Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts with a B.A. in History, with distinction, received her master's in 1972 from Duke University, and received her Ph.D. in Early American History in 1995, also from Duke.



June 2, 2009

4-year colleges graduate 53% of students in 6 years

By Mary Beth Marklein, USA TODAY

Even as colleges nationwide celebrate commencement season, hundreds of schools are failing to graduate a majority of their students in six years, a report says today.

Nationally, four-year colleges graduated an average of just 53% of entering students within six years, and "rates below 50%, 40% and even 30% are distressingly easy to find," says the report by the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. It's based on data reported to the Education Department by nearly 1,400 schools about full-time first-time students who entered in fall 2001.

Some findings aren't surprising. Harvard University boasts one of the highest rates, 97%. Southern University at New Orleans, which faced upheaval in 2005 with Hurricane Katrina, reported 8%.

Even so, the report documents a "dramatic variation" even across institutions with comparable admissions standards, which suggests some schools are more effective in educating similar students.

"While student motivation, finances and ability matter greatly when it comes to college completion, the practices of higher education institutions matter, too," says lead author Frederick Hess. When similar colleges have a large gap in graduation rates, "it is fair to ask why," the report says.

Education leaders said the report could be useful. "We can learn from universities who are beating the odds," says Geri Malandra of the American Council on Education.

Examples from the study, which grouped schools by categories in Barron's Profiles of American Colleges:

- Among schools that require only a high school diploma for admission, Walla Walla University and Heritage University, both in Washington state, reported graduation rates of 53% and 17%, respectively.
- Among colleges that require high school grades averaging a B-minus or better, John Carroll University in Cleveland and Chicago State University in Illinois graduated 74% vs. 16%, respectively.
- In the "most competitive" group, Amherst College in Massachusetts and Reed College in Portland, Ore., graduated 96% vs. 76%, respectively.

The data have limits: They don't account for students who transfer, for example. And they should not be used as a sole measure of quality, the report says, because "schools should not be unfairly penalized for maintaining high standards."

But as graduation rates grow increasingly central to discussions about accountability, co-author Mark Schneider says, families ought to be thinking that way, too. "We are emphasizing transparency" and urging students to factor graduation rates into decision-making, he says. "It's one of these little secrets that everybody in the industry knows. We're just trying to highlight it."

The Mistakes to Avoid

By Kent John Chabotar

When confronting economic turmoil, the demands of short-term crisis control can overwhelm colleges and universities. In a higher education version of Maslow's hierarchy that prioritizes survival above other needs, the institution neglects vision, strategic thinking, and sound management as it struggles to reach enrollment targets or make payroll. Such practices may meet immediate needs at the expense of long-term sustainability. What classic mistakes do colleges and universities make in economic downturns?

Mistake #1: Forgetting danger signs. Many presidents and boards use a "dashboard" of strategic indicators to monitor academic and financial health. They help separate facts from fears. Yet, a common problem is that the dashboards do not have targets (when will we be satisfied?) or, related to current circumstances, minimums (when should we be worried?). Using Guilford College as an example, fiscal danger signs that would get our attention include fewer than 380 traditional first-year students (when 400 or more has been the norm since 2004), student fees above the average of our competitors, financial aid discount much above the 39 percent rate of recent years, an increase in expenditures higher than increases in revenue or enrollment, graduation rates below 6-year averages, and an alumni giving rate less than 20 percent. We would also be concerned if operating net assets decrease or endowment spending exceeds 5 percent of its lagging average market value.

Mistake #2: Not considering all budget options. When a budget deficit looms, the easiest cuts in spending and personnel are across-the-board. They are also wrong to the extent that they ignore differences in centrality to mission, size, and efficiency. Few budgets can be fixed without attending to personnel numbers and compensation.

Consider making some positions part-time, offering early retirement, using vacancy savings to pay more for added responsibilities, and using student labor paid with credits and not cash.

My own bias is to reduce positions before reducing salaries because employees ought to be fairly compensated. Institutions can often lose positions, at least at the start of the crisis, with less stress and effect than anticipated. When I was the new CFO at Bowdoin College, we cut 70 positions — not a catastrophe when you consider that we had 1350 students and 630 faculty and staff — while budgeting raises of 19 percent for faculty over two years and lesser amounts for administrative and support staff.

With growing enrollment, significant savings are possible by increasing average class size and the student-to-faculty ratio rather than new hiring. An increase in average class size from 20 to 22 gains 10 percent in productivity that would not turn seminars into

large lectures. Sometimes tightening up on course reductions for faculty with administrative duties has the same effect.

“Growth by substitution” may allow you to take some budget savings to invest in “signature” programs or other programs with great market interest. Pay attention to effects on cash inflows and outflows when major construction or renovation projects are planned or deferred. A \$1 million renovation may have minimal effects on the budget and financial statements because the cost is spread out or depreciated over the years of useful life. On the other hand, payment of the \$1 million to construction companies and other vendors occurs now and depletes cash. In any case, develop multiple scenarios of revenues and expenses. Budget as conservatively as possible based on the least optimistic but still plausible scenario. Make the hard choices early; for example, waiting until the middle of the fiscal year to cut the budget means that any reductions in positions or spending have only half the year to take effect. If you get good surprises later on, you can restore some of the reductions.

Mistake #3: Thinking that bigger is always better. If student fees, fund-raising, and endowment are not supplying sufficient resources, institutions often turn to enrollment growth. As a short-term measure, more students can boost revenue if financial aid is controlled and related increases in faculty and staff are contained. When Guilford increased our enrollment by 45 percent in five years, the good news was administrative and support staff increased only 20 percent. The bad news was that the faculty grew by 60 percent, which undoubtedly reduced average class size and improved course discussions but mitigated the financial benefit of enrollment growth. Students transfer more often these days — sometimes starting at less expensive community colleges and then transferring to four-year institutions — so actively recruiting upperclass students can supplement intake of first-years. Just be sure that the transfers get the same kind of welcome and orientation. Pay attention to student retention and persistence. What factors at your college or university prompt students to stay or leave? Many institutions, including Bowdoin when I was there and Guilford today, have targeted programs for sophomores, who can feel neglected and unguided in comparison to the special attention that they got as first-years. It is usually more cost-effective to keep a current student than to recruit a new one.

New academic programs are not an economical way to attract more students, especially if the lack of resources diminishes course quality, advising, programming, and placement in graduate schools or jobs. Enrollment growth in an institution with excess capacity is far more beneficial to the budget than growth that necessitates new construction of academic and social spaces. Finally, among the most significant indicators of financial health is endowment per student — a study I conducted a decade ago as Bowdoin College’s CFO showed a high correlation between endowment per student and rankings of national liberal arts colleges in U.S. News — which is diminished when enrollment grows more rapidly than endowment.

Mistake #4: Not managing the crisis. No matter how severe the crisis, campus leaders cannot act like passengers on a whitewater raft who have little control over their situation. Never panic. It helps to have a strategic plan or at least strategic thinking to guide actions. Increase visibility and communications. Use a variety of media and methods, including web-based, to discuss problems and proposed solutions. These might include community meetings, open office hours, letters to alumni and parents, and articles in the student newspaper and staff newsletter. It is better to have periodic updates rather than one large and often impenetrable “state of the campus” address. Be

sure that the institution has a spokesperson with a clear message that is truthful and instills confidence without underplaying the danger. Community members may not support major budget reductions that upset the status quo but at least they will get the process and parameters.

Do not let economic crises hide longer-term strengths or weaknesses, and the need to act on them. For example, an institution may try to explain to its accrediting agency that a financial predicament is due to the economy when, in fact, they have been running budget deficits and overspending from endowment for years. Find the money to invest in marketing, recruiting and fund-raising because a steady enrollment and gift flow help maintain revenue. Solicit donors to replenish endowed funds with special attention to financial aid funds essential for student access and affordability. Respond to greater needs in counseling and career services caused by anxious students and families. Do not let others use the crisis to further their own agendas to challenge the administration or push “pet” programs.

Mistake #5: Not properly involving the board. Given their ultimate fiduciary responsibility, the governing board has to be informed and involved. Use the executive committee or other leadership team to work with the president or chancellor. The CEO and board should speak with one voice to ensure clarity of message and calm the community. Show that you appreciate their anxieties. Design special messages for the board that provide data and recommendations not necessarily shared with the wider community. In the spirit of “give, get, or get off,” board members should be expected to donate money themselves, encourage others to give, and to lobby with legislators and others whose support is essential.

Mistake #6: Confusing strategy and tactics. Strategy is about the basic direction of the institution and its mission, priorities, and role in the world. Tactics are the means we use to achieve the strategy. Tactics deal with “how to” questions; strategy is about “why.” A strategic response to unfavorable economic circumstances might involve, for example, adding a new student population like working adults; transforming the business model from low tuition/low financial aid to high tuition/high financial aid, as many public universities are now considering to cope with plunging state aid; and dropping major programs in liberal arts to focus on pre-professional programs. Students will be attracted to majors with excellent job prospects. If the strategy is embedded in a formal plan that is aimed at long-term competitive advantage, protect the plan’s financial resources even while cutting the budget or the crisis will get worse or reoccur sooner. We made this mistake at Guilford during two years of tight budgets when the strategic plan was among the first items cut, and should have been among the last. Depending on the strategy that the institution selects, tactics often involve improving efficiency and work processes, better ways to recruit new students, and more profitable bookstores, summer programs, and other auxiliary enterprises.

Mistake #7: Not asking the right questions. It is hard during an economic crisis to ask fundamental questions about the institution. Yet answers to these questions can position the college or university more effectively to deal with whatever develops. Some of the best questions are:

How does the economy affect our strategic plan and priorities?

How much of our revenue is at risk?

What would we do if the budget had to be reduced by 20 percent?

Do we know which of our programs and activities are mission-critical, and what each costs?

Who are the people most critical to our success?

How do we differentiate ourselves from the competition? What is our competitive advantage?

What are we communicating to major donors?

What does our community know and when/how do they know it?

“This too shall pass” was a warning to King Solomon, and it should be a comfort to college and university leaders. The current crisis will subside as the economy inevitably swings between boom and bust and the financial markets fluctuate between bull and bear. It would be tragic if higher education did not learn from our mistakes and apply these lessons both now and the next time that the economy falters. History can be a great teacher if we pay attention.

Kent John Chabotar is president and professor of political science at Guilford College, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

June 5, 2009

Colleges Should Start Planning Now for 'Net Price' Calculators, Experts Say

By JEFFREY BRAINARD, Atlanta

College officials need to begin planning now to comply with a new federal requirement that they post on their Web sites within roughly two years the net price to attend their institutions, panelists said at a meeting of institutional researchers here this week.

"This is going to end up being more complex as you get into it than people realize," Mary M. Sapp, assistant vice president for planning and institutional research at the University of Miami, told members of the Association for Institutional Research.

Congress mandated the new feature last year to give prospective students a clear idea of the actual cost to attend each institution. The net figure will be derived from total cost—tuition, fees, room, board, and other expenses—minus average aid from all sources of grants (but not loans).

Colleges will be required to display the figures through a net-price calculator, a tool they will create on their Web sites. The U.S. Department of Education is developing a generic template for a calculator that colleges may adopt in order to comply. Institutions are also free to develop their own, customized versions—although that, of course, will cost them more.

The department expects to finalize by August a design for its calculator, including the specific types of data it must contain, said Elise S. Miller, a program director at the agency's National Center for Education Statistics, who previewed the likely features at the Atlanta meeting. The completion of those rules will trigger the two-year deadline for colleges to comply.

Covering the Basics

Institutions will need to balance many considerations in deciding which type of calculator to create, said Ms. Sapp, who outlined for the audience the calculators' likely effect on colleges. The agency's format will be simpler to set up and maintain. But because of the tool's one-size-fits-all approach, it may not accurately depict all of the nuances of a college's cost. For example, the calculator won't include questions to determine whether a student qualifies for merit-based aid. (Some institutions don't offer merit aid, and the department wants to keep its template as simple and broadly useful as possible, Ms. Miller explained.)

Colleges should consider a customized calculator, especially if they offer students a wide range of aid depending on their financial circumstances, Ms. Sapp suggested. Colleges might also want to use a customized approach in order to post different net prices for different academic programs.

Whichever method colleges choose, Ms. Sapp encouraged them to annotate the calculators with plenty of supporting detail to explain the basis for the numbers—for

example, to specify that room and board is based on a double-occupancy room and a 20-meal-per-week dining plan.

Another knotty decision for colleges is which year of cost and aid data to provide. Some colleges may prefer to offer aid figures based on the following year's projected levels of student aid, which may best reflect current economic conditions. However, that approach may not always work to a college's advantage: The resulting net price may make those colleges appear more expensive than peer institutions that are using data from a previous year, Ms. Sapp said. (The rules will require that colleges use cost and aid data from the same year. The department will probably require posting of the most-recent data available, Ms. Miller said,)

All of this means that for students to benefit from the calculators, they may need to read and compare very carefully all of the fine print.

The Association for Institutional Research has published a fact sheet about the net-price calculator rules on its Web site.

June 5, 2009

Competencies Over Courses in Medical Education

By Ben Eisen

Modern technology has allowed medical innovation to take place more rapidly than ever before, often fundamentally altering the field. Doctors are required to have in-depth knowledge that changes as medicine moves forward, but many say the dominant system of medical education -- often centered around outdated course requirements and rote memorization -- is not keeping up. Instead, experts are pushing for a competency-based science curriculum that evaluates medical and premedical students based on their application of broad and overarching skills, rather than specific facts learned in required courses.

The American Association of Medical Colleges, in collaboration with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, on Thursday released a report aimed at defining these scientific competencies. The paper, "Scientific Foundations for Future Physicians," identifies eight competencies in the medical school curriculum and eight in pre-med programs that all students should master on their way to becoming doctors. In doing so, the report's authors hope to update the knowledge base in medical education while also shifting the paradigm of teaching away from restrictive required courses. This paper joins a 1998 AAMC report that set forth social and behavioral competencies in medical education.

"All physicians need a strong foundation on which to base the art and heart of [medicine]. They need the heart to care and the art to communicate," said Dr. Carol Aschenbrener, executive vice president at AAMC. "We know science has changed a lot and new information is coming to light. We've not changed our educational approaches in light of that. The report is trying to shift people away from focusing on courses and more on what to do with scientific information -- what you want the entering student to be able to do. One can arrive at competencies in many ways through interdisciplinary approaches."

The committee that formulated the report brought together medical educators from universities and colleges of different sizes across the U.S. to reach a consensus on what facets of science are important for tomorrow's doctors. The competencies include such skills as applying "knowledge of molecular, biochemical, cellular, and systems-level mechanisms ... to the prevention, diagnosis, and management of disease," as well as utilizing the concepts of physics, genetics and immune systems. For pre-med students, the competencies focus on the application of more basic skills that lead readily into the medical school program. The overarching goal of these specifications, however, is to encourage the study of the concepts underlying medicine, rather than specific facts.

While most medical schools have emphasized competencies for years, said Robert J. Alpern, dean of Yale's School of Medicine and co-chair of the committee that produced

the report, the report holds special significance for pre-med programs that are often too rigid and focused. The updated competencies for pre-meds put less emphasis on fields like organic chemistry and calculus that now dominate pre-med curriculum, focusing more on biochemistry, statistics and database mathematics. The report also clarifies more specifically what types of biology are most important.

"To tell you the truth, the biggest change will be that science education will become much more interesting," Alpern said. The report "is basically giving the freedom to colleges to make it interesting. One of the things that led to this committee meeting was a report from the [National Research Council] saying that pre-med requirements were forcing students to take these classes that they didn't want to take. That's a concern, that a small number of students are going into the sciences. We need a curriculum that attracts students."

But revising the way students learn also involves revising the way they are evaluated. Last year, an AAMC committee began the process of comprehensively reviewing the Medical College Admissions Test, which has long been criticized for its undue emphasis on memorization. The committee will pass its suggestions on to the MCAT Review Board in 2012.

The idea of a shift toward competency-based learning has been circulating around medical schools -- and all of higher education -- for quite some time. In 2001, Richard Voorhees, associate vice president for instruction and student services for the Community Colleges of Colorado System, released a report detailing the spread of competency-based learning, citing it as a revolution in higher education. The focus on overarching goals in any type of education, he said, requires "bundling and unbundling" to find the "optimal combination of skills and knowledge needed to perform a specific task."

For example, Alverno College, a Catholic woman's college in Milwaukee, is considered a leader in this type of learning. It outlines eight social, educational and behavioral goals for its students, termed Alverno's Eight Abilities, which it seeks to instill in all its students. The college grades students through a system called "Student Assessment-As-Learning," wherein undergraduates are evaluated based on the process of learning and the goals they achieve through a combination of peer review, outside assessment, and faculty oversight.

In medicine specifically, Jo Shapiro, chief of otolaryngology at Brigham and Women's Hospital and a professor at Harvard Medical School, has long touted the need for mandating competencies in medical education. In 2003, she was a key figure in implementing the Outcome Project of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, which similarly sought to introduce competency-based assessment to medical residencies. The switch -- the effects of which are still being felt -- has introduced a 360 degree review to the residency programs. Before competencies were introduced, the program director usually signed off on the requirements, often with only the knowledge that residents had completed their training, not full confidence that they had learned the necessary medical tools. Now, residency programs, with the guidance of the ACGME, require full-scale assessments from people as diverse as nursing staff and respiratory specialists.

The new report from the AAMC and Howard Hughes represents the latest step in spreading competency-based learning through the medical education system. Alpern,

who has already presented the report to a number of college deans, said he had received a lot of positive feedback.

"What can I say other than 'Thank God,' " said David Muller, chair of medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine, in reference to the pre-med competencies. "The current requirements ... are almost exactly the same as 100 years ago.... We are basically making students learn information that is outdated in terms of its direct application to medical knowledge or medical research."

Muller added that Mount Sinai began a program 20 years ago to admit humanities students early in their college careers, who had no pre-med background, with the understanding that they would not take typical pre-med courses. Historically, he said, these students have always done just as well as or better than the students who enroll after going through the normal pre-med curriculum.

Implementation of these competencies, he says, is realistic as long as the MCAT undergoes fundamental changes and some other form of assessment of these competencies takes its place.

"The MCAT is such an important filter. You can't get in unless you take the MCAT and you can't take the MCAT without the [current] requirements," he said. "You either have to change the hoops [one jumps through to get in] or get rid of the hoops."

Shapiro of Brigham and Women's sees the competencies introduced in the report as a set of guidelines that is hard to argue with, and believes that most of them will stand the test of debate. Mobilizing a broad-scale change of the education system is about persuading people of its necessity.

"First you have to create the burning platform of 'we have to change this and here's why,' " she said. "You have to convince people the paradigm shift is worthy."

Like Muller, Shapiro believes that the next step will be finding ways to assess this new curricular focus, an arguably more difficult task. After that, she said, the pieces should begin to fall into place.

On the other hand, Tim Austin, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the College of the Holy Cross, who has been outspoken on the need for pre-med curriculum reform, sees full implementation of these competencies as a lofty goal. As someone who works directly on designing the pre-med curriculum, he understands the importance of scientific competencies, along with social and behavioral competencies achieved by taking liberal arts courses. However, he thinks that entirely shifting the direction of pre-med education would take a massive amount of money and time.

"I simply want to be realistic about the massive scope of the changes that the committee proposes," Austin said in an e-mail. "The report outlines an intriguing approach to rethinking premedical education and it deserves careful consideration. The question is where the discussion should go from here."

Austin postulated that a possible next step could be to identify pilot undergrad programs to implement the curriculum reform and give them enough grant money to implement the program. Even then, everyone would need to get behind these changes, including

MCAT administrators, to persuade medical school applicants to forgo the current requirements.

Alpern, on the other hand, sees a reform of the current MCAT as a possible first step.

This is the start of what promises to be a vigorous conversation among medical educators about how to educate the next generation of doctors. Aschenbrener said she hopes to hear feedback about which competencies make sense, which should change, and which should evolve with further advances in medicine.

"That's why we felt we should outline competencies," Alpern said. "We wanted to take a 10,000 foot look at it and not be too detailed."

June 4, 2009

Appropriators Question Duncan About Proposals on Pell Grants and Loans

By SARA HEBEL, Washington

Appropriators in Congress questioned Education Secretary Arne Duncan on Wednesday about the administration's budget priorities, pressing him to defend the White House's proposals to overhaul the federal student-loan system and make Pell Grants an entitlement.

The education secretary received a mostly warm reception as he testified separately before the Democratic-led appropriations subcommittees of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that oversee education spending. President Obama's plan for the 2010 fiscal year calls for providing the Education Department a total of \$46.7-billion, about 3 percent more than the agency currently receives.

Mr. Duncan reiterated his arguments for ending the bank-based, guaranteed-student-loan program and switching all federal loans to direct lending. He touted the plan as one that would make the student-loan program "more efficient" to operate and that would generate at least \$4-billion a year that the federal government could use to expand the Pell Grant program "without going back to taxpayers and asking them for an additional dollar."

The education secretary also repeated several times that the department is placing an emphasis on giving money to programs, states, and institutions that do a good job of helping students complete degrees. "The goal is not just access," he said. "It's attainment."

Questions About Lending

In the Senate hearing, Mr. Duncan fielded a series of pointed questions about the plan to move to 100-percent direct lending. Sen. Arlen Specter, a Democrat from Pennsylvania, asked whether the \$500-million the president has requested to support the federal student-loan program would be enough to pay for the kinds of borrower services, like financial-literacy programs, that private and nonprofit lenders have provided under the current system.

Mr. Specter also wanted to know what would happen to the jobs of the many people employed by nonprofit lenders like the one in his home state, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.

Mr. Duncan responded that the department wants to enhance the services borrowers receive. He called the \$500-million "a starting point" but one that he considers a "significant investment" toward that end.

He also told Mr. Specter that private-sector companies and agencies would do all of the servicing of the student loans issued under the president's plan. Mr. Duncan argued that those entities would benefit from having an increased market share of the loan-servicing business. "I am hoping job loss will be minimal," he added.

Sen. Tom Harkin, a Democrat from Iowa and the subcommittee's chairman, had a different concern. He asked Mr. Duncan how the department would select the lenders it would use to service federal loans. A company like Sallie Mae, the nation's largest student lender, would have an advantage over others because its size would allow it to undercut everyone else on how much it would charge for loan servicing, Mr. Harkin argued.

The education secretary assured him that the department would consider other factors, too, when making its choices. "It's got to be cost and the ability to help these students," Mr. Duncan said.

Opposition to Pell Proposal

Appropriators in both chambers told Mr. Duncan they had concerns about the president's proposal to make financing of the Pell Grant program mandatory.

Under the plan, Congress would retain a role in setting annual spending levels for the need-based grants, but legislators wouldn't have as much discretion as they do now. The president proposes to automatically increase the maximum Pell award each year by a rate equal to that of the Consumer Price Index plus a percentage point, rather than allowing appropriators to continue to set the maximum amount each year. Congress, though, could choose to provide additional Pell aid if it wanted.

Mr. Harkin was the first to question the idea on Wednesday. "There may be a little bit of concern on this committee and others" about the plan, he told Mr. Duncan.

The education secretary said the plan would help ease the minds of families and students who worry about whether they can afford college. By automatically increasing Pell Grants each year, Mr. Duncan said, students would be able to know at a young age that the aid will be available for them.

Mr. Harkin suggested that there might be other ways to provide early assurances and incentives, such as by guaranteeing aid to students who keep their grades above a certain level. But the senator said he was open to discussing the administration's idea further, adding that he doesn't have a "closed mind" on the topic.

Hours later, in the House subcommittee's hearing, Rep. David R. Obey, a Democrat from Wisconsin and the panel's chairman, said he was "dubious about the wisdom" of creating a new entitlement program "in the midst of trying to convince people that we're financially responsible."

"We're all friends here, but I have to be honest and lay out my misgivings," he told Mr. Duncan.

He warned that indexing the maximum award to a measure of inflation could "have a perverse reverse effect by putting a ceiling on the maximum award."

The education secretary responded that he appreciated Congress's "commitment" to the Pell program but added that "even with your dedication, the maximum grant has not kept up with the average cost of attending college."

Later, Rep. Dennis R. Rehberg, a Republican from Montana, suggested that the president spend the increased money on the TRIO college-preparatory program, rather than Pell Grants, arguing that it would be a "more holistic approach to helping students move forward so they can compete when they get to college."

Improvements Sought for Job Training

On another topic discussed in the Senate hearing, Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat from Washington, applauded the goal President Obama set in his speech to a joint session of Congress this year to have all Americans complete at least one year of postsecondary training.

But she told Mr. Duncan that she wants to make sure the career-oriented training students receive in high schools and colleges aligns with business needs. She said she often hears complaints from businesses in her state that the skills students come to them with don't match with job requirements. She asked whether the Education Department would encourage local partnerships among employers, schools, and colleges to improve job training.

Mr. Duncan told Ms. Murray that he shares her concerns. Employers, he said, do need to be involved in shaping the curriculum in high schools and community colleges. "We have to tie education to the real world," he said.

Kelly Field contributed to this article.

June 2, 2009

Forty-Nine States and Territories Join Common Core State Standards Initiative

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) yesterday announced that 49 states and territories have joined the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a state-led process to develop a common core of state standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K–12.

These standards will be research- and evidence-based, internationally benchmarked, aligned with college and work expectations and include rigorous content and skills.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is being jointly led by the NGA Center and CCSSO in partnership with Achieve, Inc; ACT and the College Board. It builds directly on recent efforts of leading organizations and states that have focused on developing college- and career-ready standards and ensures that these standards can be internationally benchmarked to top-performing countries around the world.

The goal is to have a common core of state standards that states can voluntarily adopt. States may choose to include additional standards beyond the common core as long as the common core represents at least 85 percent of the state's standards in English language arts and mathematics.

The NGA Center and CCSSO are coordinating the process to develop these standards and have created an expert validation committee to provide an independent review of the common core state standards, as well as the grade-by-grade standards. This committee will be composed of nationally and internationally recognized and trusted education experts who are neutral to—and independent of—the process.

The college and career ready standards are expected to be completed in July 2009. The grade-by-grade standards work is expected to be completed in December 2009.

The 49 states and territories that have signed on to the initiative are:

Alabama	Indiana	Nebraska	Puerto Rico
Arizona	Iowa	Nevada	Rhode Island
Arkansas	Kansas	New Hampshire	South Dakota
California	Kentucky	New Jersey	Tennessee
Colorado	Louisiana	New Mexico	Utah
Connecticut	Maine	New York	Vermont
Delaware	Maryland	North Carolina	Virgin Islands
District of Columbia	Massachusetts	North Dakota	Virginia
Florida	Michigan	Ohio	Washington
Georgia	Minnesota	Oklahoma	West Virginia
Hawaii	Mississippi	Oregon	Wisconsin
Idaho	Montana	Pennsylvania	Wyoming
Illinois			