



West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Higher Education
News Clippings

Week of August 9, 2009

August 9, 2009

Colleges hopeful of increased enrollment

By The Associated Press

With prospective college students compelled by the recession to place an even greater emphasis on the cost of education, West Virginia schools say they're in a good position to see enrollment gains.

Early signs, from applications to the number of students showing up to summer orientation sessions, are promising. The full picture, though, won't be clear until fall, when tuition bills start arriving and people decide what they can truly afford right now.

West Virginia University expects about 600 fewer freshmen this year than last year's record class of 5,100, but that seems anomalous for now. Across the state, schools from small private colleges to other large public universities anticipate enrollment growth, although with some caution.

"Applications to our institutions statewide are up slightly, with the emphasis on 'slightly,'" Higher Education Policy Commission Chancellor Brian Noland said.

While both Marshall and WVU approved tuition and fee hikes this year, Noland said higher education in West Virginia is still significantly less expensive than in other states, which gives schools here an advantage in the current economy.

"We are seeing more students applying to our institutions, because we're a low-cost set of institutions," he said. "Around the country, you're seeing more students declining private schools in favor of public institutions or low-cost privates."

It's not totally clear yet what the economy's effect will be on college admissions. Public universities stand to gain, but may lose students to even less expensive community colleges.

A survey released in June by the National Association for College Admission Counseling showed applications are up at more than 70 percent of public universities. But more than half the private colleges surveyed also reported application increases.

Even with deposits in place, it won't be until the fall, when students actually show up and tuition bills go out, that schools will be able to conduct a reliable head count. Noland estimates it will be four to six weeks before most West Virginia schools have a firm grip on their enrollment this year.

Until then, most schools can only watch the early signs, although those signs are cause for some optimism. At Marshall, applications, admissions and attendance at summer orientation are all up over last year.

Director of Recruitment Beth Wolfe said the school is forecasting a 5 percent increase in last year's incoming class of 1,686.

But the school knows that could change as families face the reality of college bills.

"The reality is, when the bill arrives in the mail, that may be the point where the impact of the economy is felt," she said.

Smaller schools, too, both public and private, are also looking to possible jumps in attendance this fall.

At West Virginia Wesleyan College, a combination of a tuition freeze and an aggressive development of scholarships have helped enhance the value-for-money side of the education available, according to spokesman Robert Skinner.

"So far, we've not seen the adverse conditions of the economy affecting our enrollment," he said.

The private college expects this year's entering class to be 475 or so, up by between 30 and 40 from last year.

More college students seeking financial aid

CHRISTIAN ALEXANDERSEN, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- With nearly 40,000 more West Virginians out of work than a year ago, parents and children are desperately looking for ways to fund college educations.

High school grads are increasingly turning to scholarships and financial aid in an effort to ensure they can attend college. Marshall University officials report a 10 percent increase in financial aid requests for the soon-to-start school year.

Luckily for cash-strapped students and their parents, Marshall hasn't cut funding for its merit-based scholarships, and state and federal scholarships remain intact for the 2009-2010 school year, according to Kathy Bialk, Marshall's director of student financial assistance.

While part of the increase in applications for financial aid could be attributed to a larger-than-expected freshman class size, Bialk said the poor economy has students grasping for financial aid through loans and scholarships.

Across the country, at least a dozen states are reducing award sizes, eliminating grants and tightening eligibility guidelines because of a lack of money. At the same time, the number of students seeking aid is rising sharply as more people seek a college education and need help paying the tuition bill because they or their parents lost jobs and savings during the recession.

In West Virginia, the Legislature this year voted to cap the PROMISE Scholarship at \$4,750 a year. It does allow for larger awards if state revenues improve or the number of recipients decline. The program provides West Virginia high school graduates meeting certain academic requirements a full tuition scholarship to a public college or university in West Virginia.

The cap did not affect the 2009 high school graduating class or current college students, but will affect students beginning college in 2010.

Jack Toney, director of the state Financial Aid Program, said that while PROMISE has been capped, the Legislature has approved more funds to be added to the program -- allowing about 9,000 total students to receive funds.

The Legislature also has approved additional funds for the West Virginia Higher Education Grant program. Administered by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, the program provides assistance to students with financial need, Toney said. Students who qualify may be eligible to receive up to 75 percent of their tuition costs at a state institution or the dollar equivalent at a private college.

Toney said the program has seen a big increase in the number of questions from students and parents.

"Most of our inquiries are from parents who want to know what their options are for educational financing," Toney said. "The downturn in the economy has had a big impact in the number of financial aid applications statewide."

On the federal level, Pell Grant Program amounts have increased over the past year for prospective Marshall students, Bialk said. The program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduates.

For students in need of more financial assistance, Marshall provides a variety of scholarships for both in- and out-of-state students. Those include the Erma Byrd Scholars program, John Marshall Scholars program, Presidential Scholarship and A. Michael Perry Scholarship.

Unfortunately the most prized scholarship that is offered at the university, the Society of Yeager Scholars, has taken a dramatic hit. The scholarship provides an estimated \$90,000 worth of tuition, semester stipends, room and board, two trips to study abroad and a new laptop computer.

"Because of the economy and since our endowments were hit so hard, we're only able to choose six kids, compared to 12 kids last year," said Sharlee Henry, Yeager and Honors program assistant. "Our board of directors wanted to make sure we had enough money to afford the scholarships we offer."

Bob Galardi, director of major gifts for the Society of Yeager Scholars, said everyone, from alumni to major contributors, has had to penny-pinch due to the sluggish economy. When the program first began in the late 1980s, 20 scholarships were awarded. Over time the Society of Yeager Scholars has had to limit the number of scholarships it awards.

"These six young people don't know how lucky they are," Galardi said.

But Galardi is looking on the positive side of things. Donations are up 33 percent over last year and the program is receiving great support from alumni.

Galardi said he's happy that the Society of Yeager Scholars program has committed to continue to fund the education of so many great students, many of whom are from West Virginia. He hopes more Yeager scholarship will be available next year, Galardi said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.



August 11, 2009

3rd HSC chancellor candidate aims to make a difference WVU: No date set to make hiring decision

BY CASSIE SHANER The Dominion Post

West Virginia is a good place to make a difference, Dr. Sharon Turner said Monday.

"It's small enough that if you're able to come in and assemble the right team and bring the team together to make enhancements, not only is it better for the institution, but it's better for the people of the state, who are looking to the university in this day and age to solve some of the difficult problems in their quality of life," Turner said.

A Charleston native, Turner said West Virginia is a lot like Kentucky, where she serves as dean of the University of Kentucky's College of Dentistry. But Turner — one of three finalists for WVU's health sciences chancellor position — said she's ready to tackle a bigger challenge after nearly 11 years as a dean.

Turner took questions from a crowd of about 100 people during a 30-minute forum at WVU's Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center (HSC) on Monday. A second forum, intended for the main campus and Morgantown community, was at the Erickson Alumni Center.

Turner was the final candidate to visit campus. Dr. Christopher Colenda, dean of medicine and vice president for clinical affairs at Texas A&M Health Science Center, and Dr. Peter Amenta, dean of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, participated in forums last week.

Turner, who's also served as dean of the Oregon Health & Science University School of Dentistry, said she learned a lot about leadership when she took over as director of the then-"dysfunctional" dental faculty practice at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill's School of Dentistry in 1989.

"I learned a lot about leading people and bringing people together to align interests to get things done," Turner said. "The final result of that is that you have a better situation for everybody and one that's more productive."

Turner described her leadership style as analytical and open. She said accountability is important, but expectations should be established through a collaborative process.

"I like to hear from all members of the team," Turner said. "Sometimes it's the least likely person that you may think may bring an idea to the table that sparks other people."

Responding to a question from Elliot Shulman, associate professor and interim director of pediatric dentistry for WVU's School of Dentistry, Turner said her inclusive nature helped her deal with budget cuts during her tenure at Oregon. Students, faculty

and staff worked together to communicate their concerns to legislators, but Turner was still forced to cut the school's bachelor's degree program in dental hygiene.

"It was probably one of the hardest things I ever had to do as an administrator, but it was based on a criteria-based examination and the dental hygienists were involved in it," Turner said.

Mitch Finkel, professor and associate chair of cardiology at the WVU School of Medicine, asked Turner to discuss her involvement in the integration of the physician practice plan and hospital at UK.

Turner said she served on an executive committee that re-evaluated the two entities' roles — as well as their finances, academics and facilities — as part of the merger. UK officials then worked to repair relationships and create a network of facilities that meet community needs.

Turner said integration and cooperation helped the two entities join forces to achieve a common goal. She also learned the value of integration in education during a postdoctoral fellowship at UNC's Dental Research Center in 1981.

"I saw how it could expand my approach to patient care, but I also saw how beneficial it was to the patient instead of having silos to have people who communicated with each other and each contributed their expertise to the team so that the outcome was better care for the patient," Turner said.

Mike Ryan, a graduate student in exercise physiology said Turner was well-spoken, and he liked the way she responded to many of the questions during Monday's forum.

"I liked how she talked towards the end about integration and combining WVU with other facilities throughout the state," Ryan said.

Brian Watkins, an employee in the HSC finance department, said he was more impressed by Turner's answers than either of the two previous finalists.

"She had examples to give," Watkins said. "This is what we did in Kentucky, and these were the results.' "

Jennifer Summers, an administrative associate for the WVU School of Dentistry, said she was impressed by Turner's accomplishments. She wasn't sure if Turner was the best candidate for the chancellor position, but said she's definitely a good candidate.

"It was good to see a woman and someone from dentistry," Summers said. "Usually they're from medicine."

WVU President James Clements will decide who gets the job based on feedback from the forums and other meetings, but university spokeswoman Becky Lofstead said she wasn't sure when that announcement would be made.

Charleston Daily Mail

DAILYMAIL.COM

August 11, 2009

Research Trust Fund boosts WVU's work by \$6.5M

The Associated Press

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) - West Virginia University got a \$6.5 million boost to its research efforts during the first year of the state's Research Trust Fund.

A new report says that's how much donations and matches totaled for the inaugural year of the fund, also known as the Bucks for Brains program.

WVU President James Clements said Friday the trust fund is not only a boost to research, but also an investment in the future of West Virginia.

The state created the fund with an initial appropriation of \$50 million and a focus on economic development, job growth and health care.

Marshall University can also tap into the fund as a way of doubling private gifts.



August 15, 2009

WVU set to open new honors dorm this month

By Davin White, Staff writer

MORGANTOWN, W.Va. -- In a sign of solid growth on campus, West Virginia University is set to open this month its second new residence hall in three years.

Honors Hall, at the corner of Grant Avenue and Second Street in Morgantown's Sunnyside neighborhood, will house up to 362 students from WVU's Honors College. The building cost more than \$21 million to construct.

John Sommers, a project manager for WVU facilities and services, toured the residence hall late last month.

Most rooms are styled as suites, with two adjoining rooms where up to four students share one bathroom. Doors to each room are unlocked using PIN numbers, and students will have wireless Internet access inside and out, Sommers said.

On each floor, students have a commons area with a TV, he said. Keith Garbutt, who is dean of the Honors College, will have his office inside the hall.

In 2006, Lincoln Hall opened on WVU's Evansdale campus with the idea to blend some dorm life with academics, where students can take part in social and cultural activities with resident faculty leaders and other students. WVU describes the "residential college" idea as a small but diverse learning community. Faculty members also teach seminars and serve as mentors.

In addition to its residence college concept, Sommers said Lincoln Hall inspired construction at Honors Hall as well.

"We tried to take lessons learned from that one and improve this one," he said.

For instance, he said designers tried to be a "little more gracious" in terms of the space in Honors Hall.

In the spacious multimedia room on the first floor, Sommers expects the Honors College will host lectures and seminars. Movies will be shown from a projector.

"I envisioned this room was going to be 'movie night,'" he said. "They have the capability of doing a lot more than that."

In December 2007, former WVU president Mike Garrison said Honors College was a way to attract the brightest students to WVU. He also praised Morgantown's Sunnyside Up partnership, and urged city leaders to step up enforcement against substandard housing in the Sunnyside area, which has long been criticized for its dilapidated student housing.

August 15, 2009

WVU Reports \$110,000 in Lobbying Expenses

Story by Walt Williams

West Virginia University has spent \$110,000 so far this year lobbying Congress in an effort to obtain funding for university programs concerning clean water and transportation, according to lobbying disclosure forms filed with the U.S. Senate.

WVU has not filed disclosure forms with Congress in recent years, making it a rarity among major universities. Many universities spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year lobbying Congress.

But WVU does have a legislative affairs coordinator whose job it is track legislation and coordinate the university's work in Washington, D.C., university spokesman Dan Kim wrote in an e-mail request for an interview. He wrote changes in federal reporting requirements that in 2008 require WVU to report that person's activities as lobbying.

Kim didn't explain why WVU hadn't reported those activities before when many other large public universities report such expenditures on a regular basis. He had not responded to follow-up questions as of press time Aug. 12.

Mary Bowman, WVU's legislative coordinator, currently is the university's registered lobbyist. Disclosure forms show she lobbied on legislation appropriating funding for clean water projects, as well as surface transportation projects.

She reported \$40,000 in spending during the first quarter of this year and \$70,000 during the second quarter.

While some may view the amounts spent as being substantial, WVU's expenses pale in comparison in lobbying expenditures at some other universities. For example, the University of Colorado reported spending more than \$500,000 so far this year.

Still, WVU has reported more expenditures than many other universities, and some, such as Marshall University, have not reported doing any lobbying at all.

Kim wrote the amount on the disclosure forms include the coordinator's salary, leasing office space in Washington, D.C., support provided to Bowman to complete her duties, travel officials related to congressional relations and hosting or participation in various events.

"It is through these kinds of efforts that we are able to provide advice and be a resource to our Congressional delegation in the (Capitol)," Kim wrote. "We have the ability to provide expertise in the areas of energy, health care and national security, among other issues."

\$25M OK'd for MU expansion

CHRISTIAN ALEXANDERSEN, The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- A project that will provide several of Marshall University's departments with a new home has received a \$25 million boost from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission.

The commission approved the funding Friday at its meeting in Charleston. According to a statement from Marshall President Stephen Kopp, the new facility is expected to house the university's College of Information Technology and Engineering, the departments of Mathematics and Computational Sciences and a Modeling and Digital Imaging Resource facility.

The complex is also expected to house the new West Virginia High School S.T.E.M. Academy, which will be a fully operational high school for grades 9 through 12. The Tri-State model school, a multi-state, multi-agency effort, will be for students demonstrating outstanding capabilities in science, technology, engineering and math.

The complex will also house Marshall's engineering and bioengineering research laboratories.

Marshall Chief of Staff Bill Bissett said early plans indicate the complex will be built between the Arthur Weisberg Family Engineering Laboratories building and the Robert C. Byrd Biotechnology Science Center. Bissett said the university hopes to secure additional funding for the complex.

"This construction was part of President Kopp's strategic vision for some time now," Bissett said. "In these difficult economic times, the support from everyone involved is greatly appreciated."

Bissett added, "Our goal is to take not only our engineering program, but also our research-based and high-tech programs at Marshall University to the next level."

The complex is still in its initial planning stages, but Bissett said he plans to release more information about the project soon.

Sen. Bob Plymale, D-Wayne, said in a prepared release that funding for the project was the result of bonding legislation passed in the legislature's first special session in June. The funds must still be approved by Gov. Joe Manchin, Kopp said.

\$25 million for MU engineering

HUNTINGTON - Senator Robert Plymale, D-Wayne, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, announces Marshall University will receive \$25 million for the construction of a second engineering facility.

"I've been dedicated to restoring the engineering program at Marshall University since I was first elected to the Legislature 17 years ago," Plymale said. "And six years ago we took the first legislative step to combine the proud tradition of engineering at Marshall with the technology of today. This \$25 million represents an investment that will give us a competitive advantage in the future as we rebuild infrastructure and recruit new businesses to the state."

Funding for the project is the result of bonding legislation passed in the first special session in June and will allow Marshall University to move forward with the second phase of planned construction of a new applied engineering facility. Phase I began with the Arthur Weisberg Family Engineering Laboratories building, which was dedicated on August 16, 2008. The additional construction calls for approximately 130,000 square feet to house primarily the College of Information Technology & Engineering (CITE). It will be a hub for teaching, learning, and research unique to the region. The new facility will also support West Virginia's efforts to create innovative new methods designed to improve infrastructure and enhance economic growth and development in areas such as manufacturing.

"Despite limited physical space, Dean Betsy Dulin and CITE's outstanding faculty and staff have the fastest growing enrollment on Marshall's campus," Plymale said. "This new building will complement the Weisberg Engineering Laboratories, create a comprehensive state-of-the-art learning environment for students and faculty, and fill the increasing need for skilled engineers."

August 12, 2009

MU president's statement on engineering funds

President Stephen J. Kopp's statement regarding the announcement of \$25 million for an Applied Engineering Complex at Marshall University's Huntington Campus:

HUNTINGTON - "On behalf of Marshall University, I thank the West Virginia Legislature led by President Earl Ray Tomblin and Speaker Rick Thompson, along with the members of our Cabell-Wayne delegation, including Senate Education Chairman, Bob Plymale, for their continuing support of Marshall University. Last Friday, the Higher Education Policy Commission approved \$25 million in funding toward the planning and construction of our new Applied Engineering Complex. It is expected that this new facility will house Marshall's College of Information Technology and Engineering (CITE), the departments of Mathematics and Computational Sciences, a Modeling and Digital Imaging Resource Facility, the new West Virginia High School S.T.E.M. Academy (Grades 9-12), and engineering and bioengineering research laboratories. HEPC Chairman David Hendrickson and the members of the HEPC Board, as well as Chancellor Brian Noland and Secretary of Education and the Arts Kay Goodwin, were instrumental in moving approval of this project for funding consideration by Governor Joe Manchin. The Marshall University Board of Governors also has played a key role in advancing this project as well as the overall enrichment of Marshall University through their continuing support and dedication. Although these funds must still be approved by Governor Joe Manchin, this kind of collaborative spirit and effort is crucial to the future success not only of Marshall University, but also the State of West Virginia and our region."

MU gets grant from National Cancer Institute

The Herald-Dispatch

HUNTINGTON -- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Cancer Institute has awarded Marshall University a research grant for more than \$70,000.

The funds are intended to purchase ultrasound equipment used for ultrasound-guided gene delivery to help develop more effective treatment and possibly a cure for pancreatic cancer.

"This grant funding will aid in the ultimate goal of bringing this exciting new technology to the patients who need it most," said Dr. Pier Claudio, associate professor of Biochemistry and Microbiology and Department of Surgery at Marshall University.

"Given the vast possibilities of this delivery system to noninvasively combat a variety of acute disease processes, there should be multiple exciting new research opportunities stemming from this opportunity," Claudio continued. "This underscores the importance and the benefits to mankind of funding medical research."

Marshall is currently doing work in translational research, which attempts to directly apply knowledge from research to helping patients. This research gives Marshall students and faculty their first opportunity to analyze a novel gene therapy model that overcomes one of the prior biggest obstacles in this area of research, the lack of targeted gene delivery.

U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall, D-W.Va., said in a news release that providing for university research is an investment, particularly in the area of cancer.

"From personal experience, I know that cancer can strike anyone at any place or any time, and it is only through medical research that we will be able to protect our loved ones and ourselves by finding better treatments and eventually cures to various types of cancer," Rahall said.

August 13, 2009

Colleges Ask Congress for Direct Access to Completion-Rate Grants

By Jennifer Gonzalez, Washington

As legislation that includes portions of President Obama's plan to improve college-completion rates makes its way through Congress, some higher-education lobbyists are questioning the role of state governments in distributing billions of dollars to help meet that goal.

The administration has proposed spending \$2.5-billion over five years for a College Access and Completion Fund as one way to help colleges and states work toward the president's goal of the United States' having the world's highest proportion of college graduates by 2020.

Money for the fund is included in a bill (HR 3221) that passed the House education committee in July. The fund would support efforts to increase college-graduation rates and close achievement gaps, particularly for students from income and ethnic groups that are underrepresented, at both four- and two-year colleges.

The money would also help states develop data systems to track students' progress at community colleges and to measure institutions' graduation rates and their students' employment outcomes.

But rather than allow colleges to directly apply to the federal government for grants, the House bill calls for state governments to apply for the money and then distribute it.

Some college groups are urging Congress to change the way the money would be handed out. Sending it through the states, they argue, is inefficient and might end up prompting the states to cut their own spending on higher education. The legislation in the House makes clear that money from the access-and-completion program should be used to supplement state aid for colleges, and not to supplant what states would otherwise spend. But such a requirement can be hard to enforce.

Arguing for Direct Grants

In a letter to Rep. George Miller, the California Democrat who is chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, the American Council on Education expressed concern that state governments may not be the best stewards of the money, given that spending on higher education has fallen in many states over the past couple of years.

Since the beginning of the 2009 fiscal year, 32 states have cut funds for higher education, said Becky H. Timmons, assistant vice president for government relations at the American Council on Education. She said that about one-quarter of states also have reduced student aid or put in place tougher eligibility criteria for it.

"We believe the most efficient and effective way to improve persistence and college completion is to award grants directly to institutions of higher education on a competitive basis," Ms. Timmons said. "Passing funds for this purpose through the states imposes

an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy between colleges and the achievement of desired federal-policy outcomes."

Lobbyists for some private colleges, too, want them to be able to apply directly for the federal money.

Cynthia A. Littlefield, director of federal relations at the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, said private institutions are historically at a disadvantage when federal grant programs are distributed through state governments.

"We are the last group on the totem pole," she said. "There is data that shows that, especially during tough economic times, private institutions are limited in grant opportunities. States like to assist public institutions."

Ms. Littlefield pointed out that private institutions are not eligible to apply for construction money through the stimulus bill that Congress approved in February. Allowing colleges to apply directly to the federal government for the access-and-completion grants would set up an equitable platform for all institutions, she said.

But Education Department officials say states will need to play a central role if widespread improvements in college-completion rates are to be made, especially since states already provide substantial amounts of money for college operations and student aid.

"If we are going to see real change, we have to see states at the table and involved," said Robert M. Shireman, deputy under secretary of education. "We need to make sure that states are partners, because they are a big part in funding higher education."

States' Cautions on Simplification

By Doug Lederman

The push to simplify the process of applying for federal financial aid has been steadily building momentum, with federal officials (in both of the last two administrations) joining advocates for students and financial aid experts in a show of near unanimity on the idea that procedures and documents (like the Free Application for Federal Student Aid) should not be discouraging students from seeking financial help for college.

But lurking in the background, and explaining the need for the modifier "near" before "unanimity" in the previous sentence, has been the prospect that greatly limiting the amount of information that students and families must report on the FAFSA may serve the federal government's needs, but fail to give states the data they need to allocate their own grants and loans.

That idea is lurking no longer.

The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs, which represents officials who oversee the awarding of state-based financial aid, released a survey of its members on Tuesday that might be seen, at the extreme, as trying to put the brakes on the simplification runaway train; at the least, it's a call for their needs and those of their students to be considered as policies evolve.

It's not that the state officials oppose the philosophy behind simplification; far from it, says Marie Bennett, who heads the state aid association's Washington office. "We absolutely support finding good, constructive ways of simplifying the aid process, and we understand that the FAFSA is really the gateway to those processes," she said. "But what we also know is that particularly when you start dealing with changing the data elements" -- the financial and other information that is collected -- "you can really affect the processes states use to award their own aid. And that's where we get most concerned."

A bit of history is important here. For many years, until the early 1990s, many states had their own financial aid forms to supplement the federal form, because they sought specific information about applicants' financial situations that was not captured by the federal process. Throughout the 1990s, states worked closely with the federal government to incorporate into the federal form questions to solicit the data they needed -- part of what led the FAFSA to balloon to its current, oversized length.

State aid officers have no problem with many of the ideas for trimming the fat from the FAFSA form, such as most of those laid out in the Obama administration's first steps, announced by Education Secretary Arne Duncan in June, for simplifying the aid form. They also do not appear to object to the idea, which is also part of the Obama plan and essential to groups like the Institute for College Access and Success, of pre-populating the FAFSA with financial information already available from the Internal Revenue Service.

But problems emerge in the eyes of state aid officers when talk turns -- as it has in proposals from financial aid experts and a College Board-organized panel of researchers and policy makers -- to dramatically altering the types of financial information collected about aid applicants. The most aggressive simplification proposals have recommended basing the awarding of federal Pell Grants on adjusted gross income and family size, wiping out other aspects of the current federal methodology used to calculate a student's expected family contribution.

Going that direction "would have financial, administrative, statutory and regulatory consequences to state need-based financial aid programs," because almost all states use the expected family contribution to allocate their own need-based aid, the state aid group says in its survey.

Foremost among those consequences, the survey suggests, is the fear that dropping assets from the formula for allocating aid would qualify many more students with low incomes but significant wealth for state need-based aid (an assertion that not all financial aid experts endorse). In response, states would need to (1) increase the financial aid funds they make available to cover the increased number of and amount sought by aid recipients; (2) spread their existing funds among more students, reducing the amount awarded to individuals; or (3) find "alternative means" to continue to collect the information they need to "make need-based awards with the same level of precision as is used today."

The first possibility is highly unlikely given most states' budget situations, which are bad now and could get worse; the second, the NASSGAP survey report says, would conceivably lower the amount of financial aid that goes to students now, an undesirable prospect. The last prospect, of having states set up their own means of collecting the asset and other data if the federal government stopped doing so, would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and take up to two years, in some cases -- money and time states could not afford. "States don't have money to set up their own sophisticated, maintainable versions of the expected family contribution process," said NASSGAP's Bennett.

The preferable alternative -- and ultimately what the state aid officials seem to be asking for -- is that the federal government, in redesigning the FAFSA process, make full use of "smart" technology to allow aid applicants to fill out the minimum necessary federal information, but also seamlessly direct them to integrated questions that their individual states need answered. "What what we're envisioning right now is a short menu of state questions from which states could choose," said Bennett. All of the state-required information would reside in the federal database that captures FAFSA information, so that states would not have to build their own expensive technological infrastructures or processes for correcting data, she added.

"A technological solution that reduces appropriately the basic FAFSA to a minimum, but also provides a means for obtaining data needed by individual states, would be ideal," the NASSGAP report concludes.

"We just need to be at the table where the decisions are made," Bennett said of future discussions about simplifying the FAFSA and the federal financial aid process generally. "We need to be involved in analyzing and restructuring this so students don't miss out on billions in state need-based grant aid."

So far, in all their public comments, federal officials and even those pushing for the most aggressive changes in the federal financial aid formulas have seemed open to making sure states get what they need. The College Board-sponsored Rethinking Student Aid report, which called for basing federal aid on adjusted gross income and family size, specifically said that the Education Department and the IRS should work together to give states the additional financial and demographic information they need to determine whether individual applicants qualify for need-based state aid.)

And in unveiling its proposal for FAFSA simplification in June, the Obama administration said the Education Department would "work with state agencies to make it easier to answer questions that the states need but the federal government does not."

"It seems like everybody really has the same interests at heart," said Lauren Asher, president of the Institute for College Access and Success, which has promoted FAFSA simplification. "The federal programs are there to make sure people who are college qualified can actually afford to go to school and get through, and right now the current financial aid application process is more of a 'Beware of Dog' sign than a welcome mat. In making changes, there may be tradeoffs, and some of those tradeoffs may affect states, so it's very important that they be part of the conversation about what those tradeoffs might be."