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**ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ON STUDENT FINANCIAL
ASSISTANCE**



**ADVISORY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS
WIN BIPARTISAN SUPPORT IN THE SENATE**

Washington, D.C.—Last Thursday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee unanimously passed the Higher Education Amendments of 2005 (S.1614). This bipartisan legislation, sponsored by committee chairman **Michael Enzi (R-WY)** and ranking member **Edward Kennedy (D-MA)**, makes several changes to reduce the barriers to college facing students and includes key recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance. The bill also expands the role and responsibilities of the Advisory Committee by adding important new charges.

A National Access and Persistence Partnership. Included in the Senate bill is the Advisory Committee's major reauthorization recommendation, delivered to Congress in 2003, to leverage Federal funds in order to encourage States to create public-private partnerships designed to increase access and persistence for low-income students. Such partnerships would bring together various stakeholders in the State dedicated to improving college access and success, including colleges, philanthropic organizations, private corporations, and early intervention or mentoring programs. Grants for Access and Persistence (GAP), as this partnership program is called in S.1614, was originally included in the ACCESS Act (S.1029) introduced by **Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)** and co-sponsored by **Senators Kennedy, Susan Collins (R-ME), and Patty Murray (D-WA)**. GAP would replace the Special Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (Special LEAP) program authorized under the LEAP program, in which States receive Federal matching funds to provide grant aid for financially needy students. Under GAP, the Federal government would provide a larger share of the matching grants to States than under Special LEAP in order to achieve the following objectives (as written in S.1614):

- "Provide coordination and cohesion among Federal, State, and local governmental and private efforts that provide financial assistance to help low-income students attend an institution of higher education;
- Provide need-based grants for access and persistence to eligible low-income students;
- Provide early notification to low-income students of the student's eligibility for financial aid; and
- Encourage increased participation in early information, and intervention, mentoring, or outreach programs."

GAP is modeled after State partnership programs, such as Indiana's 21st Century Scholars program, that have been proven effective and provide low-income students with adequate grant aid to access four-year colleges. GAP is designed to work with and enhance existing public and private programs.

Title IV Deregulation Initiative. The Senate bill also expands the Advisory Committee's role and responsibilities to include oversight of an expert panel that would evaluate and streamline institutional regulations governing Federal financial aid, an initiative of **Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN)**. S.1614 charges the Advisory Committee to "conduct a review and analysis of the regulations issued under this title." According to S.1614, the Advisory Committee shall convene at least two expert panels to determine "whether the regulation is duplicative, is no longer necessary, is inconsistent with other Federal requirements, or is overly burdensome."

Innovative Pathways Study. The Senate bill also charges the Advisory Committee with a new study to examine innovative ways to reduce financial barriers and increase bachelor degree attainment rates of low-income students. Called “The Study of Innovative Pathways to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment,” the Advisory Committee is asked to examine new or existing programs, including dual enrollment programs and early college high schools, that allow high school students to receive college credit and community college programs designed to increase the number of students who earn bachelor’s degrees.

As written in S.1614, the main objectives of this study are to examine:

- “The impact of such programs on baccalaureate degree attainment rates;
- The degree to which a student’s total cost of attaining a baccalaureate degree can be reduced by such programs;
- The ways in which non-traditional students can be specifically targeted by such programs; and
- The cost-effectiveness for the Federal Government, States, and institutions of higher education to implement such programs.”

Recommendations based on the findings of this study will be delivered in a final report to Congress and the Secretary of Education three years after the HEA reauthorization bill is enacted into law.

Student Aid Simplification. The Senate bill also incorporates most of the recommendations from the Advisory Committee’s 2005 report *The Student Aid Gauntlet*, including allowing more low-income families to qualify for the maximum Pell Grant through the automatic zero Expected Family Contribution (EFC) and implementing a simplified paper ‘EZ FAFSA’ for such students. The legislation would also reduce the work penalty for dependent students and simplify the financial aid process for all families by creating streamlined web-based forms and an earlier application cycle. Many of the same recommendations received bipartisan backing from the House Committee on Education and the Workforce with passage of their version of the HEA reauthorization bill (H.R. 609) in July. The *Gauntlet* report was a product of a one-year study requested by Congress in 2004 to investigate ways to simplify student aid forms and processes for American families.

“I am pleased that both the House and Senate committees have now passed HEA legislation that would implement most of the recommendations that the Advisory Committee made to Congress last year and have trusted us to deliver two new important studies in the future,” said **Mr. Clare M. Cotton, Advisory Committee chairman.**

The Advisory Committee will continue to provide assistance to Congress in resolving the differences between the House and Senate versions of the HEA reauthorization bill as they work to meet reconciliation instructions, consider the bills on the House and Senate floors, and finally move to conference. For additional information about HEA reauthorization, the Simplification Study, or the Advisory Committee’s reauthorization recommendations, please contact:

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An independent committee created by Congress to advise on higher education and student aid policy