

Access & Persistence



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



WINTER/ SPRING 2008

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Over the last several months, both chambers of Congress have moved steadily toward completion of HEA reauthorization and plan to complete a conference bill by the end of May. Although multiple differences exist between the House and Senate bills, both contain provisions that respond to Advisory Committee recommendations from *The Student Aid Gauntlet* (2005). Both would make improvements to the financial aid application process to help low-income students, including creating a simpler paper FAFSA, simplifying FAFSA on the Web, and paving the way to allow all students to apply for financial aid earlier. In addition, each bill contains slightly different provisions on issuing early financial aid estimates and simplifying the FAFSA for low-income students.

Negotiated rulemaking on the loan programs is finished. Sessions have taken place over the past several months and have focused on the new public service loan forgiveness and income-based repayment plans (IBR). In terms of public service loan forgiveness, major issues have included who qualifies and how the Department will verify ten-year service completion. The IBR discussion has included the timing of subsidized interest payment during partial economic hardship and the minimum payment for a student at or under 150 percent of the poverty line. Updates on both reauthorization and negotiated rulemaking are included in this issue.

Despite student benefits enacted in recent legislation, the subprime credit crisis has cast a shadow over the availability of student aid. The Advisory Committee plans a one-day hearing on issues related to college access and the nation's current economic uncertainty on June 13, 2008 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Representatives from the higher education community will discuss the effects of economic uncertainty on student aid, the impact of demographic trends, and the effects on institutional financing, state appropriations, and charitable giving. Panelists will also assess proposed legislative solutions to stem potential college access problems.

The Advisory Committee's most recent hearing, a symposium on community colleges, was held in December 2007 in Washington DC. A summary is included in this issue. Community colleges serve as an entry point to higher education for a substantial number of low- and moderate-income students intending to transfer and obtain a bachelor's degree. Panelists discussed institutional, state, and national strategies to enable enrollment, ensure persistence, and facilitate transfer for these students.

This issue of *Access & Persistence* also contains a tribute to former Executive Officer Hope Gray, who recently retired from the Advisory Committee. We will miss her, but wish her well in her future endeavors. Finally, as always, the Committee stands ready to assist Congress with its technical assistance needs regarding student financial aid and college access. ♦

DECEMBER HEARING SUMMARY: COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYMPOSIUM

On December 10, 2007, the Advisory Committee held a one-day symposium to gather information on and commentary relative to issues affecting community colleges, particularly topics related to enrollment, persistence, and transfer between two- and four-year institutions. As the cost of college continues to rise, more students are turning to community colleges for the first two years of their education; however, this pathway is compromised for college-qualified low- and moderate-income students who enroll with the intention of transferring to obtain a bachelor's degree. The Advisory Committee's report *Mortgaging Our Future* (2006) shows that among this cohort of 1992 high school graduates, only 20 percent had attained a bachelor's degree by 2000.

Increasing the rate of bachelor's degree attainment among this cohort is critical: if these low- and moderate-income students could obtain these degrees at rates similar to middle-income students who start at a four-year college, the economy would gain two million more bachelor's degrees over the course of a decade. In the interest of determining barriers that prevent low- and moderate-income students from obtaining bachelor's degrees, the symposium highlighted efforts at the community college level to increase enrollment, persistence, and transfer. Research shows that in all three areas, a set of common barriers—academic, social, informational, complexity, and financial—impede students in their efforts. In order to explore how the five barriers impact each transition point, the symposium was divided into four sessions, the first three of which examined each topic in detail—enabling enrollment, ensuring persistence, and facilitating transfer—and a fourth devoted to public comment.

Session One: Enabling Enrollment

The session opened with remarks by guest speaker Ms. Moira Lenehan-Razzuri, Legislative Assistant to Congressman Rubén Hinojosa, member of the U.S. House Education and Labor Committee. Congressman Hinojosa understands the value of community colleges, and the House Committee has been working on legislation that addresses many of the five barriers identified by the Advisory Committee. The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-84) increases student aid and invests in minority-serving institutions, emphasizing articulation and transfer. The College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137), recently reported out of committee, contains many other provisions that recognize the importance of community colleges to the nation's students.

Ms. Melissa Gregory, College Director of Student Financial Aid, Montgomery College, discussed the actions of her multi-campus community college in providing outreach

activities to low-income students. A 2001 state report on access and affordability revealed that half of Maryland's Pell-eligible students were enrolled at community colleges, but only received eight percent of state need-based grants. The state has addressed this inequity by creating grant programs that favor the constituencies that attend community colleges. Community colleges themselves have used outreach activities to heighten awareness of the state grant's March 1st application deadline, which is too early for typical community college enrollments. As a result, on-time applications and state grant support have increased.

Ms. Linda Michalowski, Vice Chancellor, Student Services and Special Programs, California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office, explained the details of the system's two-part financial aid awareness and enrollment initiative. For the first part, the state legislature has provided funds that enable campuses to hire additional financial aid officers and staff. The second part consists of a statewide awareness campaign called *I Can Afford College*, designed to reach low-income students, both traditional-aged college students and low-wage earner adults. The campaign uses television and radio announcements to disseminate information on financial aid available through state and federal sources, assuring

students that they can afford to attend. Aid applications and awards have increased.

Mr. Christian Campagnuolo, Assistant Vice President, Marketing and Media Relations, Valencia Community College, spoke on the segmented marketing approach he has taken to increase enrollment at Valencia. The college has re-examined its population and developed five different demographic groupings based on such factors as age, time since high school graduation, aptitude, and enrollment and transfer status. The new prospective enrollments website, as well as advertising and outreach activities, are based on the concept “Education Is In.” The website is interactive and separate from the college’s main site. As a result of these efforts, enrollments have increased above the central Florida average.

Ms. Kerin Hilker-Balkissoon, Director, *Pathway to the Baccalaureate Program*, Northern Virginia Community College (NoVA), detailed the efforts of the program’s multi-institutional consortium to increase the access and success of at-risk students in higher education. The three-part program focuses equally on transition, retention, and transfer, working with a broad student population. Some unique features of the *Pathway* program that address enrollment barriers include placement testing workshops, a one-stop student services model, and an alternate needs assessment process for students who do not meet the criteria for completing a FAFSA.

Session Two: Ensuring Persistence

Dr. Thomas Bailey, Director, Community College Research Center (CCRC), Teachers College, Columbia University, discussed his research on “student success” courses and the role they play in persistence. Student success courses teach study skills, coping mechanisms, and other matters related to making the transition to college. Dr. Bailey is currently involved in two studies that have shown links between student success courses and persistence, both a quantitative study of students in Florida and a qualitative study. CCRC is in the midst of developing further follow-up analysis for the initial positive findings of the two studies.

Dr. Lashawn Richburg-Hayes, Senior Research Associate, Young Adults and Postsecondary Education, MDRC, presented the results of the Louisiana *Opening Doors* demonstration program, which ran from 2003-05 and was stopped due to the effects of Hurricane Katrina. The program offered an incentive scholarship based not on merit, but on achievement benchmarks related to registration and passing exams. Scholarships were disbursed directly to students to use as needed. The study found that additional financial assistance increased credit accumulation and persistence at community colleges. MDRC is in the process of replicating the Louisiana study in New York in order to test the findings.

Mr. David Prince, Assistant Director, Research and Analysis, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, described the *Student Achievement Initiative*, a new incentive program being piloted in Washington State to increase student persistence levels. The initiative will reward colleges for meeting benchmarks in key areas related to persistence with the goal of increasing educational attainment for state residents. In service of this goal, a “tipping point” for attainment has been identified for working-age adults: a year’s worth of college-level credit plus a credential. Metrics will be collected by data systems currently in development.

Mr. Richard Kazis, Senior Vice President, Jobs for the Future, spoke about the work of *Achieving the Dream* in assisting states with creating policy that effectively promotes student persistence. Fifteen states are currently involved in defining metrics to assess their student populations. These states are also creating new or improving existing data systems. Projects are linked to each state’s need, for example, creating longitudinal databases or linking unconnected state-level systems. The eventual goal is to use the data for improvement.

Dr. Angela Oriano-Darnall, Project Coordinator, Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), reviewed the benefits to community colleges of using CCSSE data to determine areas for improvement. CCSSE is a national survey tracking the engagement of students at participating colleges, and it establishes five data benchmarks that allow colleges to compare themselves to like institutions: active and collaborative learning, student effort, academic challenge, student-faculty interaction, and support for learners. CCSSE is currently partnering with the Advisory Committee for the 2008 survey in developing five additional questions on student financial aid to be added to the existing survey.

Session Three: Facilitating Transfer

Prior to the panelist testimony, the Honorable Diane Auer Jones, Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education, spoke on behalf of Margaret Spellings, U.S. Secretary of Education. Ms. Jones noted that she had seen first-hand the importance of community colleges through her work teaching at a Baltimore community college, as well as examining transfer and articulation policies at Maryland four-year colleges. Transfer of credit is at the top of Secretary Spellings' priority list because the difficulties in navigating transfer of credit not only cost the student and taxpayer money, but also represent a barrier that may be impacting success rates. The Department looks forward to creating new programs and opportunities that facilitate and foster growth in the areas of articulation and transfer.

Dr. Margarita Benitez, Senior Associate, National Articulation and Transfer Network (NATN), described the goals and programs of NATN. These include efforts to help institutions better align their course requirements, provide students and advisors with more information about transfer guidelines, and improve the transition from two- to four-year institutions. Transfer students are not always considered when priorities are set and resources allocated because their earned associate's degrees are not counted in attainment and graduation measures. In addition, transfer students must often duplicate coursework at the four-year institution. NATN works to resolve those inequities through its varied projects, including a public website devoted to transfer and the *Win-Win* program that helps those students close to attaining a degree complete their program.

Ms. Shonda Gray, Director, Transfer Center *Connect Program*, Morgan State University (MSU), discussed MSU's efforts to ease enrollment and transfer for under-prepared students. The *Connect Program* is an alternative for students initially ineligible for admission to MSU; these students may enroll at a partner community college in order to prepare. Enrollment in the program includes access to MSU services and events; program liaisons and advising; and administrative help with applications, requirements, and financial aid. Transfer paperwork and

related processes are handled by the *Connect Program* office to ensure that complexity barriers are reduced. The program has been in existence for two years and will soon have data available on transfer and success rates.

Mr. James Applegate, Vice President, Academic Affairs, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, presented strategies that Kentucky has developed to boost transfer rates between two- and four-year colleges as part of the state's goal to double the number of bachelor's degree recipients. Kentucky is offering incentive scholarships to community college students who show intent to transfer to a four-year college. In addition, the state provides financial incentives to institutions to graduate and transfer more students. To reach its goal, Kentucky has redesigned developmental education, established adult-learner focused campuses, developed statewide curricular alignment in education and business programs, and implemented a set of transfer indicators for use with data tracking systems.

Ms. Jane Oates, Executive Director, New Jersey Commission on Higher Education, discussed New Jersey's statewide transfer legislation, the result of 18 years of in-state conversation about the high numbers of in-state transfers within the public higher education system. The recently enacted law requires public four-year colleges and universities within the state to accept all coursework from a student seeking to transfer with an associate's degree from a New Jersey community college. Annual reporting on outcomes for transfer students will be required. The law assures that coursework will be accepted upon transfer; however, it does not guarantee admission to a four-year college, which depends on the strength of the student. To resolve any disputes, the state has implemented an appeals process. Future work includes noncredit course alignment.

Mr. David K. Moldoff, Founder and CEO, AcademyOne, explained how his company is using technology to help institutions and state systems address challenges associated with transfer between two- and four-year colleges. A basic metaphor for understanding these problems is international travel: in order to transfer, students need a passport, or a portable student credentials record; diplomatic relations, or a method of comparing curricula and courses; and common protocols and language, or a transparency server that would bridge institutional IT systems. AcademyOne has been working on these technological standards, and these types of systems, if implemented, would save funds for students, states, and institutions.

Session Four:
Public Comment and Discussion

Mr. Guy Gibbs, Interim Director of Financial Aid and Support Services, Northern Virginia Community College (NoVA), described the FAFSA Online tutorial produced by NoVA, developed because administrators determined that the information provided by the U.S. Department of Education was insufficient for most students. It can be accessed from the main NoVA website and has a link to the official FAFSA website.

Ms. Deborah Cochrane, Research Analyst, The Institute for College Access and Success, discussed findings from The Institute's recent report, *Green Lights and Red Tape*. The report analyzes the financial challenges students face in community colleges, specifically those in California, and describes steps taken to alleviate those problems.

Ms. Amy-Ellen Duke, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy, detailed state and institutional

policies that impact persistence for low-income working adults who attend community colleges. She also emphasized the need for increased federal investment in building workforce skills, particularly supporting student success and making developmental education more effective and efficient.

Mr. John Emerson, Postsecondary Education Advisor, Casey Family Programs, explained the social and academic support needs of students from foster care who enter community colleges. He described how certain provisions of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 that were initially recommended by the Advisory Committee in *The Student Aid Gauntlet* (2005) address the special circumstances of foster care youth.

Dr. Clifford Adelman, Senior Associate, Institute for Higher Education Policy, discussed how the financial, academic, and social barriers that affect students may differ based on the dependency status of the student. Various cohorts, such as traditional-aged, adult, and military students, move toward transfer and degree completion differently; thus, there is a need for enhanced data tracking to count part-time and transfer students. ♦

A detailed proceedings document will be available soon on the Advisory Committee's website at www.ed.gov/ACSEFA.

Save the Date:

Ensuring Access to College Amid Economic Uncertainty

A Roundtable Discussion

June 13, 2008

Vanderbilt University

Nashville, Tennessee

A public hearing of the Advisory Committee
on Student Financial Assistance

Registration details available soon at www.ed.gov/ACSEFA

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

The Senate passed its reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, S.1642, during the summer of 2007, and the House passed its final bill, H.R. 4137, on February 7, 2008. Work is underway to prepare a conference bill. Advisory Committee recommendations are included in both bills that would increase access for students by creating a simpler form for low-income students; increasing the use of technology in completing the form; streamlining and simplifying FAFSA on the Web; and making need analysis more transparent, consistent, and fair. Both bills also expand existing simplification by encouraging states to use simplified financial aid application forms, thereby benefiting more students. The two versions of legislation also suggest different methods for creating a system of early financial aid information to provide students with accurate and timely information. Additional Committee recommendations

addressed in varying ways in both bills include proposals to: allow students to apply for financial aid earlier, and to make the FAFSA more relevant and understandable by asking the Secretary to consider data element reduction (House) and making the form both consumer-friendly and accessible to persons with disabilities (Senate). The Committee's recommendation to create a national partnership for access is also included in both bills.

Major differences that legislators must resolve include changes that increase the reporting requirements for colleges, included in both bills, and a state maintenance-of-effort provision included only in the House bill. Under the latter provision, states that significantly cut higher education funding may risk a reduction in or elimination of federal LEAP funding. The Senate bill also calls for a pilot of "prior-prior year" information in calculating federal financial aid, while the House version paves the way for the conversion to proceed largely untested. The date of the Advisory Committee's reauthorization is also up for discussion. Congress has passed another extension of the current law that expires on April 30. Aides have suggested a fifth extension may be necessary if all details are not completed.

During four negotiated rulemaking sessions in January, February, March, and April, the Department and nonfederal negotiators worked through provisions of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRAA). Specifically, negotiators discussed the public service loan forgiveness program, income-based repayment, economic hardship deferment, and other loan deferments for active-duty military service members. The Department clarified that individuals must provide evidence of work for an eligible public service employer while making 120 eligible payments after October 1, 2007, in order to qualify for public service loan forgiveness. Employment may be consecutive or nonconsecutive. For income-based repayment, it was resolved that married borrowers must file taxes separately in order to claim the full benefit. The Department also noted its plans to discontinue a specific economic hardship deferment option due to financial constraints. In terms of military deferments, negotiators sought to achieve parity between various benefits for veterans and active duty service members. Lastly, negotiators discussed the definition of an eligible not-for-profit lender.

Negotiated Rulemaking for the College Cost Reduction and Access Act

Another focal issue concerned federal preemption of state laws. Some nonfederal negotiators expressed concern that certain state ethics provisions regarding lenders' relationships with schools might contradict actions required to carry out new federal regulations related to the loan programs. Overall, a general need was recognized to work through technicalities related to eligibility within the new programs. A separate negotiated rulemaking team discussed provisions related to the TEACH Grant, also authorized by the CCRAA. ♦

TRIBUTE TO HOPE GRAY



Ms. Hope Gray
Retired Executive Officer
Advisory Committee on Student
Financial Assistance

Hope Gray, Executive Officer of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, retired on February 1, 2008 after serving more than 36 years in the federal government.

In 1988, Hope joined the Advisory Committee as a Staff Assistant and was promoted in 1996 to Senior Administrative / Executive Officer. She is a native Washingtonian and attended the public school systems of Washington DC. Hope began her federal government career as a high school work-study student in 1965 at the Federal Aviation Administration where she served as a Clerk-Stenographer / Operations Analysis Assistant from 1966-1972.

Prior to joining the Advisory Committee, from 1981-1987, Hope served as Staff Assistant to the Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs at the White House and as a Staff Assistant to the Chairman of the White House Conference for a Drug Free America. She has held other positions with the federal government, including Administrative Assistant with the Federal Architecture Project under the National Endowment for the Arts and Staff Assistant with the White House Council on the Arts and Humanities. During her tenure in the federal government, she completed several courses of study in administrative operations, financial management, procurement laws and regulations, and Committee management sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Agriculture, General Services Administration, and private sector organizations.

Hope has made important contributions to the Advisory Committee during her tenure, and we value her commitment to its operations and success over the last twenty years. The Advisory Committee members and staff, past and present, deeply appreciate her efforts and contributions. She has brought a wealth of talent, experience, and hard work to the Committee. Because of her dedication, the Committee's operations and communications have been smooth, efficient, and effective, and budget administration has been flawless. Due to her efforts, the Committee's national office has run like a well-oiled machine.

Her short-term plans are to travel to Rome, Italy in the fall of this year and work part-time with community-based organizations that offer mentoring programs for teenagers. Hope and her husband, John, are planning to relocate to Charlotte, North Carolina in the near future to enjoy their retirement years.

Hope, we wish you much happiness in your retirement, and we hope that you will remain in contact with the Advisory Committee in the years to come. ♦

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Mr. Juan O'Connell
Advisory Committee Student Member
Systems Engineer
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Mr. Juan O'Connell, the Committee's student member, was appointed by the Secretary of Education in February 2007 to serve a term that expires in September 2009. He recently graduated from Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and holds a BS in electrical engineering. Mr. O'Connell served as the first Scholar Chapter President for the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF) at Georgia Institute of Technology.

He also served as the Director of Community Outreach for the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), taught adult reading and writing in the public schools system in Guatemala City, and worked at the Georgia Tech Library. In addition, Mr. O'Connell has been a tutor in mathematics, specifically, pre-calculus, at the Berkshire Community College Tutoring Center and taught reading and writing to more than 30 illiterate adults at the El Canchon Public School in Guatemala. He has numerous achievements such as the John C. Schafer Memorial Scholarship, Robert O. Arnold Scholarship, NACME Scholarship, Phi Theta Kappa Induction, and is a former member of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. Mr. O'Connell completed studies at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and a 10-week summer program at Shanghai Jiatong University. Juan O'Connell currently works as a systems engineer for ABB Inc. in the power generation systems division in Duluth, Georgia. He works with distributed controls systems offering automation solutions for power plants. ♦

ACSFA Announcements

On **June 13, 2008**, the Advisory Committee will hold a national roundtable discussion at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee focused on ways to ensure access to college for low- and moderate- income students amid economic uncertainty. A detailed agenda and complete list of participants will be available in May. For more information and registration details, please contact **Zakiya Smith** at zakiya.smith@ed.gov.

The Advisory Committee's most recent report, *Transition Matters: Community College to a Bachelor's Degree*, will be released in late April. The full report consists of the complete proceedings of the Committee's December 2007 community college symposium, as well as a detailed analysis of the barriers that face community college students who aspire to a bachelor's degree. An abbreviated version will also be available. Please contact **Julie Johnson** at julie.johnson@ed.gov for more information.

The Advisory Committee congratulates staff member **Tracy D. Jones**, who has recently been promoted to Senior Administrative Officer. Ms. Jones joined the staff in 1992 as an Administrative Assistant. Prior to her work at the Committee, Ms. Jones was a Program Assistant for the National Science Foundation.

The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (Advisory Committee) is a Federal advisory committee chartered by Congress, operating under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA); 5 U.S.C., App. 2. The Advisory Committee provides advice to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education on student financial aid policy. The findings and recommendations of the Advisory Committee do not represent the views of the Agency, and this document does not represent information approved or disseminated by the Department of Education.

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