Congress left today for its annual August recess, after a busy four days of trying to complete as much as possible before the break. When Congress returns September 8, November elections will dominate the scene, leaving the legislative agenda uncertain. The Federal Update will resume in September.

The Campus Accountability and Safety Act

On July 30, 2014, Senator McCaskill (D-MO), alongside Senators Gillibrand (D-NY), Heller (R-NV), Blumenthal (D-CT), Grassley (R-IA), Ayotte (R-NH), Warner (D-VA), and Rubio (R-FL) introduced The Campus Accountability and Safety Act (CASA) to make changes to the Clery Act and add other obligations for colleges and universities addressing sexual violence on campus.

Over the past several months Senator McCaskill and her colleagues have held several hearings and roundtable discussions on this topic, issuing an unprecedented questionnaire to hundreds of campuses, and issued a report on the results of that survey.

- Confidential Advisors, and those responsible for investigating and participating in disciplinary proceedings, will be required to have specialized training so that they have a firm understanding of the nature of sex crimes and their effect on survivors.

- All students will be surveyed yearly about their experience with sexual violence to get an accurate picture of this problem. This new annual survey will be standardized and anonymous, with the results published online so that parents and high school students can make an informed choice when comparing universities. This survey will be created by the Department of Education via a new online website. Schools would not have to create a new survey.

- The Department of Education will also be required to publish the names of all schools with pending investigations, final resolutions, and voluntary resolution agreements related to Title IX.

- Athletic Departments are no longer allowed to investigate sexual assault under any circumstances.

- Schools are now required to enter into memorandum of understanding with state and local law enforcement on information related to campus crime.

- Schools that don’t comply with the certain requirements under the bill may face a penalty of up to 1% of the institution’s operating budget. Previously, the only allowable penalty was the loss of all financial aid which is not practical and has never been done. The bill increases penalties for Clery Act violations to up to $150,000 per violation from the current penalty of $35,000.
Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Rep. Tom Reed (R-NY) along with a bipartisan group introduced a companion bill in the House. SUNY OFR will be following this legislation closely and update you as this bill moves through Congress.

Veterans In-State Tuition Bill

Both the House and Senate this week voted overwhelmingly to approve a $16.3-billion compromise bill to overhaul the Veterans Affairs (VA) Department and speed up veterans' access to healthcare. It now awaits President Obama’s’ signature.

The bill includes a provision requiring public institutions to charge all veterans and their dependents, regardless of their actual residence, no more than the in-state tuition rate for a period of three years post-discharge, in order for those institutions to remain eligible for Post-9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill benefits. The provision will be effective July 2015.

New York Farm Day

On July 29, Senator Gillibrand hosted the 13th annual "New York Farm Day" in Washington, D.C. The annual showcase of New York food and beverage products, started by former NY Senator Hillary Clinton, gives members of Congress and their staff a chance to sample the state's farm products, wine, beer and seafood. Students and faculty from SUNY Cobleskill and Morrisville State College participated in the event this year.

Transatlantic Dialogue

Higher education leaders representing ACE, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and the European University Association (EUA) met in Toronto for the 14th biennial Transatlantic Dialogue. Meetings addressed the challenges in higher education that are shared among the three associations. The discussion focused on reputation, public opinion, and accountability. The ACE delegation included President Anne Kress from Monroe Community College, and President Carol Long from SUNY Geneseo. The Transatlantic Dialogue is part of a wider partnership between ACE, AUCC and EUA. The three organizations collaborate closely in a number of areas, including programming and advocacy.

White House College Success Event

The White House summoned officials from higher education, K-12 and business in 10 cities to a meeting Thursday at the Department of Education (ED). The event, organized by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, brought together superintendents, school district representatives, higher education officials, and business and community leaders from various districts to discuss ways to collaborate to increase college access and success. The event comes following the White House College Summit, held earlier this year. Chancellor Zimpher along with representatives from Albany attended the event.

Other cities/counties included Baltimore, Maryland; Camden, New Jersey; Denver, Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Providence, Rhode Island; the Rio Grande Valley and McAllen, Texas, Riverside County, California; and Spartanburg County, South Carolina.