White House College Summit

On December 4, the White House hosted its second College Opportunity Summit, which convened about 600 individuals and organizations, including federal officials, college presidents, nonprofit administrators and other education leaders to discuss and commit to strategies to improve college graduation rates. Chancellor Nancy Zimpher, SUNY Fredonia President Virginia Horvath, and University at Albany President Robert Jones attended the event. See release here.

Participants were asked to commit to new action in one of four areas: building networks of colleges around promoting completion, creating K-16 partnerships around college readiness, investing in high school counselors as part of the First Lady Michelle Obama’s Reach Higher initiative, and increasing the number of college graduates in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Chancellor Zimpher participated in a panel discussion in the morning with Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julian Castro, on the role of cradle-to-career partnerships between K-12 and higher education in meeting those goals, and in her role as chair of the National Association of System Heads (NASH). President Obama stated “The National Association of System Heads (SUNY is part of the goal), for example, has organized 14 state systems of colleges and universities behind one big goal, and that is to produce 350,000 more graduates by 2025.”

The President also announced two new programs, including $30 million for AmeriCorps to create opportunities for corps members to advise, mentor, and support low-income students who want to attend college, and a $10 million investment to support research on improving college completion.

Information about the summit, including a summary of new commitments and progress toward commitments made at the January event, are available here.

FY 2015 Appropriations

House Republican leaders are finalizing a two-step plan to fund the federal government for the remainder of FY 2015, with a final vote expected sometime next week.

First the House voted to disapprove of President Obama’s executive action on immigration, which passed yesterday by a vote of 219-197. Next, House Republicans will move ahead on a “CRomnibus”. The bill would be an 11-bill omnibus through the end of the fiscal year but be a CR just through March for the Homeland Security, which is responsible for carrying out the President’s immigration actions.

The bill is expected to be filed Monday December 8, but that might slip until December 9. If so, that would mean the House wouldn’t vote until December 11, which would almost certainly require a 1-2
day CR to allow time for the Senate to act. While several conservatives are saying they will not support the plan, it is not clear how many Democrats would either.

In terms of the Labor-HHS-ED bill, negotiations are still going on, but staff is relatively optimistic if there is indeed an omnibus, that the bill will be included. Another issue being discussed is a proposal to take $2 billion from the Pell surplus, and redirect a portion for other uses. While the maximum award would not be reduced next year, the proposal, if accepted, would inevitably lead to yet another Pell shortfall within the next couple of years. ACE recently sent a letter, expressing strong opposition to this plan. Reported policy riders on gainful employment and the college rating system are unlikely to be included.

**Tax Extenders**

The House passed, H.R. 5771, the Tax Increase Prevention Act, by a vote of 378-46. The bill retroactively extends all of the tax extenders for one year, including deduction for tuition and fees, IRA charitable rollover, and the R&D tax credit. Under the bill, taxpayers would be able to claim these long-standing tax benefits on their 2014 tax returns, but would expire again December 31, leaving the matter for the new Congress to manage. The bill is not paid for and would increase the deficit by $41.6 billion over ten years.

**Teacher Preparation Proposed Rules**

The Dept. of ED officially published its long-awaited proposed regulations for parts of Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The proposed regulations put forth requirements for how states and institutions report on the quality of programs that prepare teachers, as well as what accountability measures are tied to that reporting. The goal of Title II of HEA and the associated regulations are to improve the quality of preparation aspiring teachers receive. There will be a 60-day comment period that will close on February 2, 2015. SUNY OFR is analyzing the regulations and will be submitting comments in the future.

ED expects to issue the final rule by September 2015, with first year of data collection 2016-2017 school year, the data would be on piloted report cards in 2018, and states would rate programs first in April 2019, and underperforming programs will first be at risk of losing eligibility for TEACH grants in 2020.

The proposed regulations would require programs to track data on their graduates that includes job placement and the performance of students those graduates eventually teach. Programs would have to earn ratings of effective or higher for at least two of three years to qualify for TEACH grants, which provide up to $4,000 annually for individual students to put toward their teacher training. The proposal would require states to report annually on the performance of teacher preparation programs – including alternative certification programs – based on a combination of:

- Employment outcomes: New teacher placement and three-year retention rates in high-need schools and in all schools.
- New teacher and employer feedback: Surveys on the effectiveness of preparation.
- Student learning outcomes: Impact of new teachers as measured by student growth, teacher evaluation, or both.
- Assurance of specialized accreditation or evidence that a program produces high-quality candidates.