
FEDERAL RELATIONS

Higher Education Act

With Congressional talks over next year's spending package having just begun, as I meet with the staff of the House and Senate authorizing and appropriations bill, we are all zeroing in on a stronger Pell Grant as a key demand for this funding cycle. While we want major new investments in the primary form of grant-based aid for low-income college students, the expectation is of only modest gains to happen before an update to the Higher Education Act (HEA), the law overseeing federal financial aid. There will not be a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act this Congress, which ends January 3, 2019. This reauthorization is now more than nine years overdue.

We hope to build on successful efforts to raise the maximum value of the Pell Grant in the spending bill passed by Congress in March, which boosted the maximum grant award by three percent to \$6,095. As the Labor/HHS/Education bill moves forward in the appropriations process, a process that is much more ambitious and maybe faster, a similar increase is possible this year. Nevertheless, longer-term goals for the program, such as significantly increasing the purchasing power of the grant or even pegging its maximum value to inflation, are viewed as more likely objectives for a comprehensive bill like HEA. Likewise, work-force training proponents view Pell eligibility for short-term programs -- a top priority of business groups -- as better suited for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, although they also would welcome the change in a spending deal.

A February budget deal lifted broad spending caps that had been in place for close to a decade gives Congress more wiggle room for priorities like boosting the Pell Grant. However, after automatic annual increases to the program expired last year, we will have to fight for another increase for the program in each appropriations cycle. Boosting the grant each year is critical for students because otherwise inflation will erode the value of the grant over time.

During a hearing last month on Pell grants, it was reported that the grant covers the lowest proportion of college expenses in its 50-year history. Along with others, I have been advocating that the Pell grant keep up with inflation, is year-round and oppose efforts to reduce or rescind the grant. Originally, the Pell grant covered 79 percent of the cost of attending a four-year public college. In the current academic year, it covered only 18 percent of the cost.

Chinese Visas

The current administration is considering visa restrictions as part of a package of measures intended to punish China for allegedly violating American intellectual property laws and pressuring U.S. companies to transfer technology. The White House is considering limiting the number of study and work visas for Chinese citizens and ending a program that allows frequent travelers to the U.S. to get visas that last 10 years.

It is unclear if the potential visa restrictions will become policy and just how broad they would be. However, it is clear that restrictions on visas for Chinese citizens could have negative effects on U.S. colleges and universities.

China sends by far the most international students to the United States, accounting for close to a third of international students on U.S. campuses, and American colleges depend heavily on Chinese students for both the tuition revenue and the academic talent they bring. China is also the largest source country for visiting scholars to American universities, and legions of scholars originally from China have earned their Ph.Ds. in the U.S. and stayed to pursue their careers.

The new worries about potential restrictions for Chinese student visas build on widespread concerns about falling international enrollments at U.S. universities, which declined by 2.2 percent at the undergraduate level and 5.5 percent at the graduate level from fall 2016 to fall 2017, according to an analysis of student visa data by the National Science Foundation (NSF).

According to the NSF, Chinese citizens on temporary visas earned about 10 percent of all doctoral degrees awarded by American universities in 2016, and that the vast majority of Chinese doctoral graduates earned degrees in science and engineering fields. Just over 80 percent of Chinese citizens on temporary visas say they plan to stay in the U.S. after earning their doctorates (even if existing visa policies don't always make that easy).

The mere fact that restrictions on visas for Chinese citizens are being considered -- and reported on by reputable publications -- could have an impact on international student choices, even if they never become policy. Along with my colleagues with the URC, we will monitor this situation closely.

STATE RELATIONS

Revenue Estimating Conference - Budget Update

On May 16th, the heads of the House and Senate Fiscal Agencies along with the State Treasurer, held the May Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference where the final revenue figures were determined for the coming fiscal year's budget. The conference determined that revenues were higher than expected in the January conference.

For the current fiscal year, the conference increased the revenue estimate for the General Fund (GF) by \$155.9 million to \$10.46 billion. For the School Aid Fund (SAF), the conference raised the estimate by \$159.5 million to \$13.244 billion.

For the coming fiscal, the conference raised the estimate by \$72 million to \$10.41 billion for the GF. For the SAF, the conference raised the estimate by \$110.4 million to \$13.574 billion.

Legislative leaders (and the Governor) said in various media reports that they would like to use the excess funding for road improvements, school safety, paying down debt and depositing some in the Budget Stabilization Fund. The State Treasurer, however, was quick to point out that some of the new revenue is one-time revenue and that should only be used for one-time expenses - not ongoing expenses.

We are advocating for the Senate's version of the budget (something for which all universities are pushing) and for the House language that creates a task force to review the metrics.

We are told that legislative leadership and the Governor's office are meeting to set targets and could have them completed next week.

Call to Action

In late April, the Division of Government & Community Affairs sent out a "Call to Action" to our e-mail distribution list regarding the higher education budget. We are asked that they contact their local lawmakers (House and Senate) to support the Senate version of the budget (three percent increase) with the House's language that would create a task force to examine the performance funding metrics.

Statistics from the Call to Action:

- Total emails sent: 218,217
- Total emails opened: 22,174 (10.16%)
- Total action emails sent: 349 (.16%)

MSU Settlement - House Law & Justice Committee

It was announced on May 16th that Michigan State University had settled with the more than 300 survivors of the Larry Nassar scandal. That \$500 million settlement might have come with an agreement for the survivors to drop their support for some of the sexual assault legislation that is being discussed in the state legislature.

Some have said that the legislation that would get rid of governmental immunity in certain situations may not proceed any further. While this has not been finalized, there is talk that the bill will not move from the House Law and Justice Committee. There could be votes taken in the committee next week on the various bills. We will continue to monitor this bill and any others that might be introduced in the future.

House Law & Justice Committee

For several weeks during the months of April and May, the House Law & Justice Committee took testimony on a number of House and Senate bills that address sexual assault and the Larry Nassar scandal at MSU. The committee has taken a deliberative approach to these bills and have incorporated some changes that the universities and other groups have requested. At one of the hearings, Dan Hurley of MASU, along with the Title IX Officers of Eastern Michigan and University of Michigan, testified and explained Title IX and how the process works on our campuses.

At this time, none of the bills have moved out of the committee, but we expect additional changes to the bills and movement within the next couple of weeks.

Clinical Limited Licenses and LARA

The Division of Government & Community Affairs has been working with the Perinatology Research Branch (PRB) on a licensing issue they are having with the State for some of their foreign physicians studying at WSU.

As you may know, the PRB, for the past several years, has had Clinical Limited Academic Licenses for our visiting Research Associates (physicians) from foreign countries. This is to enable them to see patients and subsequently greater assist in our research during their two-year fellowship here. We have not had an issue until now.

We believe we have provided the necessary documentation (the same as in the past) to the State, but they have yet to grant the limited licenses. After going back and forth with the folks at the PRB and the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA), we initiated a conference call and we hope the issue will be resolved.

Autism Funding in DHHS

There are a couple of autism funding initiatives in the Department of Health and Human Services budget that we are tracking due to potential cuts.

The first is a University Autism line that is currently funded at \$500,000 a year. Six universities receive funding under this line - WSU, MSU, WMU, EMU, OU and CMU. The other is the general funding line for Autism services for those who qualify for Medicaid.

The House's DHHS budget recommends funding for the University Autism line at \$250,000 for the coming fiscal year, the same as the Governor recommended; however, they cut the Medicaid Autism line by \$13.8 million general fund.

The Senate eliminates the funding for the University Autism line but increases funding for the Medicaid Autism line by \$42.6 million general fund.

We are working with our Autism folks on campus and our university partners to try and get the best possible funding outcome for both lines.

WSU/Tenet Communication

We have been keeping the appropriate lawmakers informed about our contract situation between the University and Tenet.

OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY

Call to Action - Support for Wayne State in the State Budget

On Friday, April 27, we sent an Advocacy@Wayne email out all students, staff (teaching and non-teaching), and alumni asking them to contact their legislators to support WSU as state budget negotiations continue.

This email indicated that, while we prefer the Senate's version of the budget (Senate Bill 857) with an increase of \$1.6 million for Wayne State next year, we also urged them to include a portion of the House's budget (House Bill 5579) which contains language that creates a task force made up of lawmakers and universities that would review the state's performance funding metrics next year.

With this correspondence, more than 200,000 emails were successfully sent, with an open rate above 10% and approximately 350 emails sent to legislators from our constituents.

We are currently working with the software provider, Cision, to dive deeper into analytics around which University constituencies are opening and engaging with our calls to action. We are also working with the Department of Marketing and Communications on assessing best practices for these emails so we can begin implementing strategies to improve our open and action rates.

Karmanos

The Karmanos Cancer Institute recently established an Office of Community Outreach and Engagement and an advisory group to guide some of the work of the office. I am participating as a member of the advisory group in order to connect the Division of Government and Community Affairs with their work, which includes both advocacy and community engagement. Some of the projects include Detroit HealthLink for Equity in Cancer Care, the Community Research Registry, and the new Cancer Center Support Grant.

Road Warrior Tour

Planning is in full swing for the second annual WSU Road Warrior Tour, a five day, four night bicycle tour where President Wilson and others from the University will visit rural areas across Michigan to build connections with the University. This year, President Wilson, a long-distance cyclist, will cover more than 500 miles visiting the cities of Marshall, Holland, Owosso, and Imlay City. On the tour, he will visit members of the community, listen to and learn from people outside of Detroit, and share exciting information about a thriving, premier university just a “bike ride” away.