CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

Congress remained out of session this week for the two-week April recess. Both chambers are scheduled to reconvene on Monday, May 2.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

AAU THANKS PRESIDENT FOR SUPPORTING RESEARCH AND PELL GRANTS IN FINAL FY11 BUDGET  NEW

AAU President Robert Berdahl sent a letter to President Obama on April 20 thanking him for his leadership and efforts to sustain strong federal investments in scientific research and student aid in the final FY11 spending measure. The letter expresses particular appreciation that the Pell Grant maximum award was preserved at $5,550. The letter says, “We are deeply grateful for your efforts to prevent the spending cuts that were proposed in H.R. 1 that would have caused significant harm to low-income college students, scientific research, and the nation’s future competitiveness and security.”

The letter adds, “Thank you for insisting that fiscal responsibility and long-term economic security are not to be found by reducing federal investments that help build a better America.”
HOUSE DEAR COLLEAGUE LETTER URGES FY10 FUNDING FOR NEH IN FY12

A group of 67 House Democrats sent a letter to appropriators on April 20 urging them to provide $167.5 million for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in FY12, the same as the enacted FY10 level. (The final FY11 level is $154.7 million.)

The letter calls for strong NEH funding because, “investment in the humanities advances critical U.S. interests by fostering a globally competitive workforce, strengthening civic engagement, preserving our cultural heritage, and protecting our national security.”

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

GROUP OF 137 PRESIDENTS PLEDGES GREATER EFFORTS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  UPDATED

A group of 137 university presidents and chancellors has signed a letter to Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke pledging to make specific, expanded efforts to advance regional and national economic growth. The letter was spearheaded by University of Michigan President Mary Sue Coleman, who is co-chair of the Secretary’s National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Along with individual institutions, AAU, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities signed the letter. (NOTE: Another university president agreed to sign the letter after it was published earlier this week, raising the total number of universities participating to 137.)

STATE DEPARTMENT PROPOSES IMPROVEMENTS IN ITAR REGULATIONS

The U.S. State Department published a proposed rule in the Federal Register on April 13 that would narrow the definition of “defense services” under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), so that the definition no longer captures certain forms of assistance or services that do not warrant ITAR control. These changes to parts 120 and 124 of the ITAR have been proposed by the Department of State as a part of the President’s Export Control Reform effort. (See Federal Register Vol. 76, No. 71, April 13, 2011, p. 20590.)

Among other elements, this policy revision would exclude data available solely in the public domain from being considered a defense service. Under current rules, when universities provide training or other assistance related to the design, development, manufacture or modification of defense articles on the U.S. munitions list (such as space satellites) they must seek export licenses under ITAR in order to offer such services to foreign individuals, even if the information concerns data available in the public domain. AAU’s initial review of the proposed changes is positive, but staff is still examining their full implications.

ASSOCIATIONS COMMENT ON PROPOSED STUDENT HEALTH PLAN REGULATIONS
A group of 10 higher education associations, including AAU, submitted comments to the Department of Health and Human Services on April 12 regarding proposed rules on student health insurance coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) approved last year.

The associations’ letter, led by the American Council on Education, thanks the Department for creating a framework for colleges and universities to “continue to offer affordable, high-quality student health plans that comply with the consumer protections created by ACA,” and notes that the new rules are in part a response to the associations’ request last August for guidance.

The associations’ comments urge that the final regulations clarify the definition of a student health plan, provide guidance for self-funded plans, and allow students and their dependents to be eligible for the ACA’s tax credits.

**FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WEBSITE EASES SEARCH FOR REGULATIONS** *NEW*

The federal government has created a website, Regulations.gov, which enables visitors to find regulations from nearly 300 federal agencies and to easily search for and submit comments on proposed rules. The site features a “What’s Hot” section with some of the most viewed regulations, as well as pages on “Newly Posted Regulations” and “Regulations with Comment Periods Closing Soon.”