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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

The House and Senate are in recess. Both chambers are scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, November 13, following the elections.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

AAU, COGR COMMENT ON PROPOSED FAR RULE   NEW

AAU and the Council on Governmental Relations submitted comments yesterday on proposed changes in the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) regarding the basic safeguarding of contractor information systems. The associations request that the rule exempt contracts for fundamental research, except in unusual circumstances, and that the scope of information subject to the rule be limited to what is a deliverable under the contract and/or a contract requirement.

OTHER

NACUBO SURVEYS CAMPUSES ON STUDENT DEBIT AND PREPAID CARDS   NEW

The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) has released the results of a survey it conducted over the summer about debit and prepaid card services that campuses provide to their students, as well as the nature of campus relationships with banks associated with those cards. Colleges and universities link debit cards to student identification cards and use them to disburse student financial aid dollars.
As summarized in the NACUBO report, “Student Refunds and Personal Banking at Colleges and Universities”:

“NACUBO’s survey demonstrates that electronic transactions can be faster, safer, and provide cost savings. Most schools are already making the effort to negotiate good terms for students and use a competitive bidding process, be it for processing credit balance refunds or arranging campus-card affiliated personal banking choices. However, NACUBO also recognizes that there is room for improvement.”

NACUBO is developing a set of campus best practices to be released later this fall.

The survey was conducted, in part, in response to a report issued last May by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), “The Campus Debit Card Trap,” which was highly critical of business arrangements between financial institutions and colleges and universities. Subsequently, a group of Senators, led by Richard Durbin (D-IL), sent a letter to several higher education associations, including AAU, urging transparency in campus debit card contracts and assurance that when campuses negotiate such contracts with financial companies they ensure that student fees are reasonable and appropriate and are not deducted from students’ disbursed financial aid awards.

In response to the Senators’ inquiry, AAU and six other higher education associations sent a letter to the broader higher education community in August describing the Senators’ concerns and stressing the importance of institutions following fair and sound practices and ensuring that students’ interests are protected. The letter added that the associations were taking steps to better understand the use of debit cards on campus, including through the campus survey then being conducted by NACUBO.

AAU RECEIVES MAJOR GRANT FOR ITS STEM UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION INITIATIVE NEW

AAU announced on October 18 that the association has received a $4.7 million grant from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust to help conduct AAU’s five-year initiative to improve the quality of undergraduate teaching and learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at member institutions.

The Helmsley Trust grant will help build AAU’s internal capacity to lead the effort and provide resources directly to member universities chosen to participate as demonstration sites. Working with its members, AAU is developing a framework for effective STEM teaching and learning, and will select a set of up to eight AAU universities to serve as the demonstration sites to implement and test the framework.

As explained by AAU President Hunter Rawlings:

“A great deal of research has been conducted on the most effective methods of teaching specific STEM subjects, much of it at AAU universities, and many of the results are compelling. The AAU initiative will disseminate these methods among AAU universities, some of which are already leading the way in bringing about change. To be clear, this is
not a study. It is a practical effort to bring about real change, and we are greatly encouraged by the receptivity to this initiative at our universities.”

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