CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE  NEW

The House met today in regular session; the Senate met briefly in pro forma session, with no legislative action. Both chambers will be on Thanksgiving break next week.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS BEGIN “FISCAL CLIFF” NEGOTIATIONS  NEW

President Obama and House and Senate leaders met privately today in their first post-election, face-to-face meeting to discuss the possibilities for a deal to address the “fiscal cliff,” the deep, automatic cuts in domestic and defense spending and the expiration of the Bush-era tax cuts that are scheduled to occur at the end of the year. After the meeting, all four congressional leaders expressed confidence they could avert the fiscal cliff, the publication reported. With the President traveling overseas, talks among congressional leaders and staff will continue through the Thanksgiving recess, with the expectation that the leaders will meet again with the President the following week.

A White House press statement said: “The President and the leadership had a constructive meeting and agreed to do everything possible to find a solution that averts the so-called “fiscal cliff,” and to work together to find a balanced approach to reduce our deficit that includes both revenues and cuts in spending and encourages our long-term economic and job growth.”

A variety of organizations and interests have urged policymakers to reach a major deal that avoids the year-end sequester. This includes the higher education associations and a number of universities—some of which joined with local government and business leaders to request a comprehensive budget agreement.
IIE survey shows record number of international students studying in U.S.  

On November 12, the Institute of International Education (IIE) released its annual report on international students and study abroad, which found that a record number of international students are studying in the U.S. The 2012 Open Doors Report shows that in Academic Year 2011-12, a record 765,000 foreign students were studying in the U.S., an increase of six percent over the previous year. An IIE official noted at the briefing that higher education is one of the nation’s biggest exports.

While the number of U.S. students studying abroad also rose in 2011-12, to about 174,000, it was a smaller increase of one percent. Most Americans still head to Europe to study, but large numbers are attending institutions in Southeast Asia and South America.

China remains the leading place of origin for students coming to the U.S., followed by India and South Korea. One-fourth of all Chinese students studying abroad are doing so in the U.S. While most international students in the U.S. are studying at the graduate level, there has been a marked increase in the number of Chinese students studying at the undergraduate level. Undergraduates now make up more than 38 percent of the Chinese student total.

The survey also found that 66 percent of all international students are attending five percent of U.S. universities, with the largest number of individuals attending institutions in California, New York, and Texas.

Another focus of the briefing was IIE’s “Project Atlas,” an initiative to standardize international student data across many nations in order to provide a global snapshot of study abroad worldwide. IIE representatives praised the Department of State for working with U.S. institutions to enable students from nations in turmoil to continue their educations, citing Syria as the most recent example of such an effort.

Finally, IIE representatives mentioned the newly released Fall 2012 Snapshot Survey, a shorter survey of international student enrollment in U.S. colleges and universities conducted by eight higher education associations, including AAU. The survey was conducted online in October 2012 to provide a timely “snapshot” of the status of international student enrollments in the current semester. Like the more comprehensive Open Doors survey, the report shows an overall increase in international student enrollments. The snapshot survey also asked colleges and universities to provide information on related topics, such as the impact of the growing numbers of Chinese students on U.S. campuses, efforts to engage institutions in Brazil, and how they have provided help to students affected by the Arab Spring.

New report shows college completion rate is higher than previously reported
The National Student Clearinghouse has released a new report that examines the various pathways that students take to complete a college degree or certificate. The report, “Completing College: A National View of Student Attainment Rates,” shows that the six-year completion rate for first-time students nationwide is 54 percent, of which 12 percent are transfer students. Both rates are higher than other published data on college completion.

A major drawback in existing federal data on degree production and graduation rates is that they do not capture transfer students. For example, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) misses half of all students because its data is based only on first-time, full-time students. But the Clearinghouse press release states that its report is based on student-level data made available by more than 3,300 participating colleges and universities. This includes “nearly 97 percent of students attending public and private nonprofit postsecondary institutions.” All AAU member universities participate.

Among the other study findings:

- More than one in five students who completed a degree did so at an institution other than the one where they started. These students’ successful outcomes are invisible to traditional graduation rate calculations.
- Out of the full starting cohort, 3.5 percent received a degree within six years in a state different from where they started. This represents 6.5 percent of all completions.

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