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CONGRESSIONAL SCHEDULE

Both the House and Senate are out of session and will reconvene following Labor Day on Tuesday, September 5.

BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS

MEMBERS CIRCULATE “DEAR COLLEAGUE” LETTERS AGAINST DHS CENTER RESTRICTIONS  UPDATED

Members of the House and Senate are now circulating “Dear Colleague” letters aimed at eliminating a detrimental university-related provision in the Senate-passed FY07 Homeland Security appropriations bill. The provision would bar universities from participating in the Department of Homeland Security university research centers program after their first three years of involvement.

The Senate letter, sponsored by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), urges Senators to sign on to a letter to Senate Appropriations leaders urging them to drop the provision in conference with the House. The letter expresses concern that the provision would harm the ongoing work of the individual centers and their networks of collaborating academic institutions just as they are reaching their full capacity to respond to the research issues they were designated to address. The letter indicates that the seven existing centers have nearly 70 partner universities in 26 states.

The deadline for signing on to the Senate letter is early next week. Interested Senate offices are asked to contact Ryan Hunt in Senator Feinstein’s office at 202-224-3841.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

SPELLINGS COMMISSION APPROVES REVISED DRAFT REPORT; FINAL REPORT TO BE RELEASED IN MID-SEPTEMBER  UPDATED

The Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education yesterday approved a fourth draft (dated 8/9/06) of its report. The report received near unanimous approval; American Council on Education (ACE) President David Ward abstained from voting and said he would not sign the final report when it is issued in mid-September.

During the Commission discussion of the report, most members praised the six principal recommendations and said the most important one was enhancing access to higher education. Commission members agreed that implementing recommendations in the report would require much "heavy-lifting." They also agreed that the national dialogue on the future of higher education—which the Secretary had hoped to initiate with the report—should continue as efforts go forward to implement its recommendations.

Dr. Ward said he supported much of what the draft report contains on access and transparency, but that he would not sign the report because it fails to build its arguments for change and reform on the strengths of higher education. He said the report does not reflect the diversity of institutional missions within higher education, and he cautioned against one-size-fits-all solutions. He noted that the report lacks examples of best practices and fails to mention that there is much happening at institutions to address the issues identified. And even if many of the goals of the report are met, he said, an enormous investment will still be needed to improve access to higher education. Finally, Ward said the report marked the beginning of the dialogue and that by not signing the report it will enable him to contribute constructively to that continuing discussion.

The fourth draft report contains several changes from the third draft. It no longer calls on states to "require" public colleges and universities to measure student learning outcomes using assessment tools which many view as still unproven. Instead, it says "higher education institutions should measure student learning using quality-assessment data from instruments such as, for example, the Collegiate Learning Assessment . . . and the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress." The new draft also does not include the suggestion that the private lending market provide more of the loan funding for middle-class students, with the goal of freeing public funds for aiding low-income students.

The report retains its suggestion that that an “important benchmark” of the growth of college tuition should be the growth in median family income over a five-year period. It also continues to endorse a federal student unit-record information system.

A copy of the draft report approved by the Commission is available at:
http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/0809-draft.pdf
A copy of ACE President David Ward’s statement on yesterday’s meeting can be found at: http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=News_Room&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=17767.

A copy of AAU President Robert M. Berdahl’s statement on the draft report is available on the AAU Web site at: http://www.aau.edu/education/Spellings_Commission_8-10-06.pdf.

UNIVERSITIES ENCOURAGED TO APPLY FOR PRESIDENT’S HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY SERVICE HONOR ROLL

The White House is encouraging colleges and universities to apply for the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, which a press release indicates “reflects the President’s call to service and the historic civic engagement mission of our nation’s colleges and universities.”

The Honor Roll program is designed to increase public awareness of the role of higher education institutions and their students in serving their local communities and the nation through public service, and to recognize outstanding community service programs and practices. This year’s program will highlight the efforts of institutions and their students in responding to last year’s hurricanes.

The program is sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, USA Freedom Corps, the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation, and the Departments of Education and Housing & Urban Development, in cooperation with Campus Compact.

The deadline for institutions to apply for the Honor Roll is September 15, 2006; Honor Roll members and recipients will be announced at Campus Compact’s 20th anniversary celebration in Chicago on October 17.

Additional information is available at: www.nationalservice.gov/honorroll.

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