

Access & Persistence



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

FALL 2006

September Hearing
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Persistence

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ACSFA
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The Committee's twentieth anniversary year may prove to be one of its most important, and will certainly be one of its busiest. At the September hearing, the Committee released its new report on how financial barriers created by rising college prices and insufficient need-based grant aid lower bachelor's degree attainment, entitled *Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America's Global Competitiveness*. Higher education policy leaders have lauded the report's findings as a guide for shaping higher education policy and practice in the future. College presidents, policymakers, representatives of community colleges, early access programs, and financial aid administrators alike spoke at the Committee's fall hearing about the critical importance of working together to address the report's findings and increase need-based grant aid. The pending Higher Education Act reauthorization provides an important opportunity to leverage this will into policies that stem the bachelor's degree losses estimated in the report.

The fall hearing also set in motion the Committee's major studies for the next year: the College Textbook Cost Study and two parts of the Innovative Pathways Study. Congressman David Wu addressed the Committee, panelists, and audience during the session that launched the textbook study, which the Committee is conducting at the request of Representatives Wu and Howard P. "Buck" McKeon. The purpose of this study is three-fold: to investigate further the problem of rising textbook prices; to determine the impact of rising textbook prices on students' ability to afford a postsecondary education; and to make recommendations to Congress, the Secretary, and other stakeholders on what can be done to make textbooks more affordable for students. In an effort to hear from a broad range of stakeholders, three field hearings will be held, the first in Chicago, Illinois on December 18, 2006—a hearing announcement and panelist list can be found in the pages that follow.

The Committee's Innovative Pathways to Baccalaureate Degree Study (IP Study) is also well under way. This year, the Committee will work to complete two reports as part of the umbrella IP Study: the Feasibility of Federal Expected Family Contribution (EFC) Simplification Study and the Early Financial Aid Information Study. Recent activities related to each of these are also detailed in this issue.

The textbook report will be submitted to Congress by May 2007, and the IP Study reports will be completed next September. Each of these reports will be discussed at the Committee's fall 2007 hearing in Washington DC. We look forward to serving the incoming 110th Congress in its work to reauthorize the Higher Education Act and all future efforts to reduce barriers to college for low- and moderate-income students. ♦

ADVISORY COMMITTEE HEARING ON NEXT STEPS IN IMPROVING COLLEGE ACCESS & PERSISTENCE



KEYNOTE ADDRESS U.S. Representative David Wu

Representative David Wu addressed the Advisory Committee and hearing participants during the second session on the Study of College Textbook Costs. He provided an overview of the textbook market today, a classic example of the “broken market” theory in economics: students have no price options and are compelled to purchase a product that others select. Given the problem, there are several possible solutions: one, live with the problem as it is; two, encourage stakeholders to make voluntary changes; or, three, enact new government regulations. The last is the most severe; however, if the market does not heal itself, public pressure to take action will be tremendous. All stakeholders must move toward positive solutions to the issues involved in textbook pricing. Since 1986, textbook costs have increased by 180 percent, tuition has increased by 240 percent, but the general rate of inflation has increased by only 72 percent. To cope with this mounting problem, Congressman Wu urged all stakeholders to avoid

intrusive legislative and regulatory actions by finding ways to work together. The price of college textbooks should not be a barrier to college access.

Session I : *Mortgaging Our Future*

Session one panelists provided commentary on the Advisory Committee’s report, *Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America’s Global Competitiveness*.

Dr. Arnold Mitchem, President of the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), commented on the report’s likely impact on the federally funded TRIO and other early intervention programs. He stressed the need for a multi-party access and persistence partnership, led by the federal government. *Mortgaging Our Future* defends the interests of low-income students, minorities, and the disabled by quantifying the issue of baccalaureate degree attainment. Two key problems addressed in the report, inadequate need-based grant aid and other financial barriers, can trump the good work of early intervention programs.

Ms. Sarita Brown, President of *Excelencia* in Education, Inc., spoke about the problems Latino and other minority students face in overcoming financial barriers to college. *Excelencia* recently partnered with the Institute for Higher Education Policy to produce *How Latino Students Pay for College*. This joint report found that Latino

students, while applying for aid in equal measure to their peers, are actually receiving less financial aid. The recommendations in *Mortgaging Our Future* overlap with these findings, the most important of which are to increase need-based grant aid; reduce barriers to transfer, which affect low-income Latinos disproportionately; and strengthen early intervention programs.

Dr. William Kirwan, Chancellor of the University System of Maryland, said that *Mortgaging Our Future* presents graphic evidence of the risk of creating a permanent underclass, which would affect America’s global competitiveness. To avoid this, the U.S. must improve K-12 education, invest in higher education, and invest in more need-based student aid. Over the last decade, need-based aid has increased by 56 percent, the rate of inflation, while merit-based aid has increased by 240 percent. The University System of Maryland recently conducted a study that determined its lowest-income students were graduating with 25 percent more debt than the average student; as a result, the University has implemented a plan to shift institutional resources so that these students graduate with 25 percent less debt.

Dr. David Warren, President of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), noted that *Mortgaging Our Future* reflects the concerns

of a season of reports on issues of global competitiveness, and it can be regarded as a prism through which to view all of them because it connects financial barriers with challenges to competitiveness. If we cannot remove financial barriers to college for academically qualified but needy students, then global competitiveness efforts will decline, and the benefits of education will be denied to millions of students. The partnership of government, institutions, and community interests that emerged from the Higher Education Act of 1965 needs to be remade.

Mr. David Baime, Vice President for Government Relations at the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), stated that community colleges take seriously preparing students for eventual baccalaureate degree completion because that degree is more economically viable than an associate's degree. As *Mortgaging Our Future* states, among low-income students who complete Trigonometry and aspire to a baccalaureate degree, only 19 percent who start at a community college attain the degree, while 69 percent of those who begin at a four-year college do so. Transfer students need increased institutional aid in order to reduce barriers to their ability to transfer from a two- to a four-year college.

Dr. A. Dallas Martin, Jr., President of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), remarked that President Bush, in his State of the Union address, noted that the preservation of global competitiveness is essential to American interests. If the educational attainment of the workforce declines, that will negatively affect competitiveness by decreasing income, which decreases the tax base. The Advisory Committee's central recommendation, that stakeholders must work together to solve the problem, is crucial. Collective resources must be used to reduce the net price of college by expanding need-based aid.

The presentations were followed by a discussion among panelists and Advisory Committee members. Issues discussed included mechanisms to address problems with the student aid partnership, the role of the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) program, the dissemination of the findings of *Mortgaging Our Future*, the capitalization of higher education, the relation-

ship of the business community to the partnership, and K-16 alignment issues.

Session II: Study of College Textbook Costs

The second hearing session was devoted to the development of a study plan for the Advisory Committee's congressionally requested Study of College Textbook Costs.

Dr. James V. Koch, Professor of Economics and President Emeritus, Department of Economics, Old Dominion University, presented his proposed study plan, describing the "price inelastic" system characteristic of the American textbook market, as well as problems relative to the various stakeholders: students, faculty, institutions, bookstores, and publishers. He outlined four possible next steps for the Advisory Committee. First, the

Committee should sponsor a series of regional hearings. Second, a set of pilot projects could be launched. Third, the Advisory Committee might suggest that Congress request the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the legal and economic issues of re-importation bans. Fourth, the Committee could explore the cost/benefit issues of tying institutional eligibility for

federal aid to the adoption of market innovations.

Ms. Debra Prescott, Senior Analyst for the General Accounting Office (GAO), and lead author of the GAO report *College Textbooks: Enhanced Offerings Appear to Drive Recent Price Increases*, questioned whether widespread savings on textbook prices could be achieved: the supply of used books is limited, unbundling supplementals might increase the cost of each item, and rental systems can be costly. The economics of the textbook market are complicated, and altering them can produce unintended consequences. The Advisory Committee needs to undertake a more systematic study of the market prior to holding regional hearings.

Ms. Valerie Lewis, Commissioner of Higher Education for the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, provided information on findings from Connecticut's 2005 study of textbook costs, which had been prompted

"If we cannot remove the financial barriers to higher education for academically able but needy students, the national interests of this republic will be eroded . . . we will deny the benefits of an educated citizenry to millions upon millions of students."

David Warren, NAICU

by students, and the variety of solutions proposed. States can adjust aid programs to cover textbook costs, as well as eliminate sales tax. Institutions can work with faculty and students on awareness issues, such as multi-year book use and advance lists for courses. Bookstores can work with faculty on timelines and bundling practices, disclose ISBNs, and provide used books. Publishers can work with faculty on pricing, edition changes, bundling, and customization options. In Connecticut, financial aid credit for books is available, there is no sales tax on textbooks, and the state has implemented a disclosure law requiring publishers to provide faculty with textbook prices and revision histories.

Ms. Patricia Scott Schroeder, former U.S. Representative from Colorado, and President and CEO of the Association of American Publishers (AAP), stated four specific concerns with Dr. Koch's report. One, the average cost figure used, \$900 to \$1,000, includes costs other than textbooks; the actual average cost is \$650. Two, studies show that technology-based learning tools provided by publishers substantially increase course passing rates. Three, examination of re-importation policies should not be encouraged as that would affect international pricing agreements in other industries. Four, regional hearings should be held only after developing recommendations to avoid finger-pointing. Potential solutions include eliminating sales tax, using custom textbooks, and developing e-books.

Mr. Richard Hershman, Director of Government Relations for the National Association of College Stores (NACS), said that Dr. Koch's report presents an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the textbook industry, bookstores, and factors that impact costs. Faculty were not included in the GAO study; thus, the Advisory Committee should analyze their role. Regional hearings should not be held while the study is underway because of potential finger-pointing. Research in three areas should be conducted: average student course materials costs, costs associated with supplemental materials, and payment methods such as credit cards that present potential access barriers.

Luke Swarthout, Higher Education Advocate for U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), spoke on behalf

of the Student PIRG Campus Program, finding two points of disagreement with the report: publishers do not reveal price or lower cost options to faculty unless asked, and faculty, not bookstores, exercise control over purchasing, including bundling practices. Student PIRGs support regional hearings, rental programs, broader dissemination of Creative Commons textbooks, promotion of used book forums, development of purchasing guidelines for faculty, and adoption of policies similar to Connecticut's disclosure law. Legislative action should not be taken off the table, and an investigation of the re-importation ban should be considered.

Congressional staff present then provided response.

Mr. Brad Thomas, Professional Staff Member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, present on behalf of Representative Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, stated that the proper role of Congress at this juncture is to listen to feedback from students and the Advisory Committee.

Mr. Brian Branton, Legislative Director for Representative David Wu, said the Advisory Committee should conduct the study to seek greater awareness of the issues and the stakeholders affected.

Ms. Beth Osborne, Legislative Assistant to Representative Jay Inslee, commented that Representative Inslee appreciates the diligence of students who brought this to his attention.

The session concluded with a question and answer period. Issues discussed included the viability of proposed solutions, the need for additional analysis and information, and the economic problems involved.

Session III: Simplification of EFC Determination

Session three panelists provided commentary on the design for the Feasibility of Federal Expected Family Contribution (EFC) Simplification Study.

Dr. Sandy Baum, Professor of Economics at Skidmore College and Senior Analyst for The College Board,

"Today, fewer and fewer students can afford a two-year or a four-year education. We do not want the price of textbooks and other materials to become an additional hurdle, an additional burden to access to higher education."

Representative David Wu

presented her draft study design. The EFC study will review previous analyses; identify and evaluate alternative EFC models; and outline implementation, legislative, and regulatory issues. FAFSA data from the Department of Education will be used, including a stratified random sample of 500,000 2003-04 FAFSA filers with detailed demographic and program information. Study methodology will analyze available student characteristics for potential redistribution effects, eligibility variations, and problems associated with the use of fewer data elements. The feasibility of using IRS data and constructing a look-up table will also be considered.

Ms. Laurie Wolf, Executive Dean for Student Services at Des Moines Area Community College, recommended revising the EFC formula because it is outdated according to current technological standards. For example, if a data match with the IRS or other agency databases were implemented, up to 34 questions could be eliminated from the FAFSA. Processing time is also not up to current standards; students expect an electronic filing process to take 24 to 48 hours, but it actually takes six to eight weeks.

Mr. George Chin, Director of Student Financial Assistance at the City University of New York (CUNY), said that the study is a timely one. The main question should be to determine who would benefit most from simplification, as it has had little impact on the poor. Because the tax code is skewed toward sheltering income, IRS data may or may not be useful. The Advisory Committee should consider whether it is simplifying the form or the formula, and may want to consider the impact of funding a negative EFC for the poorest Pell Grant recipients.

Mr. Joe Paul Case, Director of Financial Aid at Amherst College, based his response on his 1991 proposal to simplify the EFC, which would target financial aid to those students with the greatest need, such as those who qualify for a Pell Grant. Radical simplification of EFC could focus on the informational needs of the federal government in determining Pell Grant eligibility. The condensed form could be used by other providers on its own, or supplemented with additional data tailored to their individual needs. Most importantly, simplification

of EFC must take into account any possibility of redistribution effects.

A discussion period for panelists and Advisory Committee members followed the presentations. Issues considered included continued use of a single form, the need to further analyze student data, concerns about possible redistribution effects, and the effect of the tax code on EFC calculation.

Session IV: Public Comment and Discussion

The last session of the hearing was designed to solicit comments from the education community regarding the design and/or content of the studies presented at the hearing. Below is a list of the individuals and organizations that participated.

“Maybe someone’s going to wake up someday and put enough money in . . . but, in the meantime, if we are talking about a zero sum game and the possible dislocation of money . . . if we’re going to err, let’s err on the side of the poor.”

George Chin, CUNY

Ms. Melanie Amrhein, President of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP), commented on *Mortgaging Our Future* and the EFC study, noting state concerns with regard to EFC changes and voicing support for partnerships.

Mr. Mark Kantrowitz, Publisher of FinAid, provided a response on the EFC feasibility study, inviting the Committee to study FinAid’s quick EFC calculator.

Ms. Lauren J. Asher, Associate Director of The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS), offered feedback on the EFC feasibility study in terms of an IRS match and form simplification.

Mr. Travis Reese, State Chair of the Minnesota State University Student Association (MSUSA), commented on the textbook study and the need for students to play a role in regional hearings.

Mr. Stephen Hochheiser, Director, Academic Reseller Management, Thomson Learning, provided a response to the textbook study, noting the potential of custom textbooks to reduce costs. ♦

A more detailed summary of the hearing can be accessed on the Advisory Committee’s website at www.ed.gov/ACSFA.

UPDATE: INNOVATIVE PATHWAYS STUDIES

Last April, the Advisory Committee launched the Innovative Pathways to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment Study (IP Study), a congressionally requested three-year study. As part of the IP Study, the Committee will produce reports designed to encourage federal, state, and institutional policymakers to embrace strategies that, over time, have the promise of narrowing income-related gaps in baccalaureate degree completion. As a whole, the reports will focus on ways to eliminate major structural barriers—academic, institutional, and financial—facing low- and moderate-income students and families from middle school through college. The first two studies have progressed extensively as indicated by the updates below.

Feasibility of Federal EFC Simplification Study

The study on the Feasibility of Federal EFC Simplification will determine the extent to which the expected family contribution (EFC) formula for federal student aid programs can be simplified without significant adverse effects. In response to policymakers' concerns, the Committee is addressing three research questions:

- Can data elements be eliminated without significant adverse effects on program cost, integrity, and distribution of funds?
- Can any of the remaining data elements in the resulting simplified formula be derived from alternative sources (e.g., IRS data)?
- How would such changes affect the distribution of campus-based, state, and institutional need-based aid and associated application forms and processes?

The Advisory Committee has commenced examination of the data set and is determining redistribution and program cost effects of several reduced data element models on a sample of over 500,000 FAFSA filers from the 2003-04 application year. After this first stage of the study is complete, the Committee will consult broadly with the financial aid community to determine the most promising approaches to EFC simplification and assess the likely effects on the distribution of state and institutional aid.

Early Financial Aid Information Study

The Early Financial Aid Information Study's purpose is to identify promising practices of existing programs that provide low- and moderate-income students with accurate and timely financial aid information. To accomplish this, the study will answer three questions:

- What types of financial aid information are needed by students and parents to make sound decisions about investing in higher education?
- When should each component of information be delivered and to whom?
- What delivery mechanisms can be used to convey early financial aid information effectively?

The Advisory Committee has completed a comprehensive list of information students and parents would benefit from knowing, and is now determining the appropriate delivery timeline for that information. To supplement the Committee's knowledge, staff will consult with a workgroup of expert practitioners in the spring. These experts will assist with examining programs and promising practices from multiple sectors of the early financial aid information community in order to construct a general model for effectively disseminating financial aid information to students and parents. ♦

COLLEGE TEXTBOOK COST STUDY FIELD HEARING: CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

In June 2006, U.S. Representatives Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) and David Wu (D-OR) asked the Advisory Committee to conduct a study on the cost of college textbooks. As a part of the study, the Advisory Committee will host three field hearings to ensure that a broad range of perspectives and solutions for making textbooks more affordable is heard. The first hearing is scheduled for Monday, December 18, 2006, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Student Services Building, Conference Room B/C, 1200 W. Harrison Street. Information gathered from the hearings will be used to inform recommendations in the final report, due to Congress by May 2007. Register at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/registration/edlite-index.html>.

<p>SESSION I Congressionally Requested Study to Make College Textbooks More Affordable</p> <p>9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.</p>	<p>Mr. Robert Carlock Vice President of Finance & Administration Rend Lake College</p> <p>Ms. Ashley Dearborne Student Wilbur Wright College</p> <p>Mr. Tom Doran Co-Founder/CEO Freeload Press</p> <p>Ms. Bonnie Elmore Assistant Manager Textbook Services Southern Illinois University Edwardsville</p> <p>Ms. Emily Kissane Policy Analyst Minnesota Office of Higher Education</p>	<p>Ms. Carolyn Kruse Director & Senior Academic Librarian College Library University of Wisconsin, Madison</p> <p>Dr. Cheryl Maplethorpe Director, Financial Aid Division Minnesota Office of Higher Education</p> <p>Dr. Craig Martin Ecological Plant Physiology Professor & Chair University of Kansas</p> <p>Dr. Nancy Mergler Senior Vice President & Provost University of Oklahoma, Norman</p> <p>Mr. Donald Sevener Director of External Relations Illinois Board of Higher Education</p>
<p>This session will feature presentations by stakeholders who are working to make textbooks more affordable in a variety of ways.</p>		
<p>SESSION II Roundtable Discussion and Public Comment</p> <p>11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Mr. Matthew DeRosa Student Board Member Illinois Board of Higher Education</p> <p>Mr. Scott Formo President Minnesota State College Student Association</p> <p>Mr. Nathan Lustig Co-Owner ExchangeHut.com</p>	<p>Mr. Barry Major President Used Textbook Association</p> <p>Mr. Trevor Montgomery President, Students for Access & Affordability in Higher Education University of Illinois, Chicago</p> <p>Mr. Edward Stanford President McGraw-Hill Higher Education</p>
<p>This session will be devoted to a roundtable discussion among Committee members, panelists, and members of the public who wish to provide comment, and will cover issues from the previous session.</p>		
<p>SESSION III <i>Mortgaging Our Future: How Financial Barriers to College Undercut America's Global Competitiveness</i></p> <p>1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.</p>	<p>Dr. Z. Clara Brennan President St. Augustine College</p> <p>Mr. Larry Matejka Executive Director Illinois Student Assistance Commission</p> <p>Mr. Alan Robertson Vice President for Administration & Financial Affairs Chicago State University</p>	<p>Dr. Steve Timmermans President Trinity Christian College</p> <p>Mr. David W. Tretter President The Federation of Illinois Independent Colleges & Universities</p> <p>Dr. Jerry Weber President Kankakee Community College</p>
<p>This session will include a panel discussion on the Advisory Committee's recently released report on the impact of financial barriers on bachelor's degree attainment. The report can be accessed at: http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/acsfa/mof.pdf.</p>		

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MEET AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER



Ms. Judith N. Flink
Chairperson, ACSFA
Executive Director, University Student
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The University of Illinois

Ms. Judith N. Flink was appointed to the Advisory Committee by the Speaker of the House of Representatives in November 1999, and reappointed in November 2005 to serve a term that expires in 2008. She was elected Chairperson in

September 2006, after ably serving as Vice Chairperson for the past three years. Judith Flink has been with the University of Illinois for over 20 years. She is the Executive Director of University Student Financial Services and Cashier Operations. She is responsible for the University operational activities of Receivables, Loan Management, Collection Operations, Cashiers, Receivables Accounting, and A/R Systems. She is a board member of the Post Secondary Education Standards Council (PESC), past President of the Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations (COHEAO), and was appointed to the Advisory Council on the Education of Children with Disabilities by Governor Blagojevich of Illinois. She has provided congressional and Committee testimony related to reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and has given presentations on student financial services. Ms. Flink holds a BS in Business/Management from Northeastern Illinois University and an MA in Management/Human Resources from National-Louis University. She is married and has three wonderful children. ♦

ACSFA Announcements

On September 15, 2006, Advisory Committee members unanimously elected **Ms. Judith N. Flink** and **Dr. Claude O. Pressnell, Jr.** the new Chairperson and Vice Chairperson, respectively, of the Committee. Also, members paid special tribute to **Mr. Clare Cotton** for his distinguished service as Chairperson for the past three years.

Ms. Jodut Hashmi joined the ACSFA staff as a Policy Research Intern. Prior to joining the Advisory Committee, Ms. Hashmi served as a Teach for America corps member from 2004 to 2006 in St. Louis, Missouri, where she was a seventh grade mathematics teacher in an under-resourced middle school. She received her BS in Policy Analysis and Management from Cornell University in 2004.

Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, reappointed **Mr. Darryl Marshall** to serve another three-year term on September 19, 2006. On September 28, 2006, the Speaker Pro Tempore of the House of Representatives reappointed **Mr. Robert Shireman** to serve a three-year term.

The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (Advisory Committee) is a Federal advisory committee chartered by Congress, operating under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA); 5 U.S.C., App. 2. The Advisory Committee provides advice to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education on student financial aid policy. The findings and recommendations of the Advisory Committee do not represent the views of the Agency, and this document does not represent information approved or disseminated by the Department of Education.

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