

UC Board of Regents' budget awaits approval by state government

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A budget plan that has been approved by the University of California Board of Regents is awaiting approval by the state government. The proposal calls for increases in faculty compensation and additional funding for a 2.5% student enrollment increase. It will first be reviewed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and then passed on to the state legislature. Although the budget incorporates a number of proposals, it does not include a proposal on student fees; according to a press release, the Regents will make a decision on student fees only after the governor's state budget proposal is released in January. If there is a hike in student fees for the 2007-2008 academic year, the university will return 33% of its income from undergraduate fees to financial aid programs. It will also increase assistance to disadvantaged middle-income students who typically do not qualify for financial aid. The plan proposes a 45% return-to-aid for graduate academic students and a 33% return-to-aid for professional school students.

Negotiated rulemaking ready to roll

Proposed regulations for student financial aid programs will be discussed at a negotiated rulemaking event to take place December 12th through 14th. Authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, this negotiated rulemaking meeting will cover a number of broad issues, including "School Issues," "Lender and GA Issues," "Title IV Loan Issues," and "Perkins Loan Issues." Each issue to be discussed must meet certain criteria: it must be addressable through regulations; it must have an identifiable solution; there must be a reasonable expectation that a consensus can be reached; and any proposed provisions are expected to be cost-neutral. Once the agenda is finalized by the committee, it is expected to be posted on the 2006-2007 negotiated rulemaking website.

GAO recommends revamping of educational system

David M. Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States, has provided three sets of recommendations for consideration by the 110th Congress. Based on information gathered by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), the recommendations are meant to "assure the quality and competitiveness of the U.S. Educational System." According to Walker and the GAO, key topics needing Congressional oversight include:

- The impact of efforts to close achievement gaps among disadvantaged populations in K-16+ education.
- The effectiveness of education programs in meeting the needs of the 21st century workforce.
- The efficiency and effectiveness of programs designed to promote access to and affordability of postsecondary education.
- The assurance of a proper balance between immigration policies-such as work and student visa programs to address the nation's need for people with skills, particularly math and science-and the nation's homeland security requirements.



Financial aid information unavailable to many students and parents

A survey conducted at the 2006 Massachusetts College Goal Sunday event demonstrated that many students wanting to pursue higher education still find financial aid information inaccessible. The data that have been released are based on more than 500 responses from attendees of the 2006 program. The survey reported that more than 95% of respondents acknowledged that they needed help with filling out the FAFSA; around 10% of attendees were non-traditional students (either adult students or GED-program students); 78% were applying for four-year programs; a paltry 22% of attendees' parents had received four-year college educations, while 55% did not have college degrees; and 67% of attendees' families had annual incomes of \$60,000 or less. The free-to-the-public, not-for-profit organization's mission is to bring together families of college-bound students and financial aid professionals from higher education institutions across Massachusetts, thus providing students and their families with assistance and information on obtaining financial aid. The third annual Massachusetts College Goal Sunday is slated to be held at 17 locations across Massachusetts on January 28, 2007.

ASU Advantage program to raise income-based eligibility requirement

The ASU Advantage program at Arizona State University has decided to increase its family income limit for eligibility for Arizona high school students. The change will enable students from families making \$25,000 or less to receive ASU Advantage grants next year. Currently, the family income limit is \$18,850. After adjustments are made based on the expected family income set by FAFSA, the scholarship, which is now in its second year, covers the remainder of the costs of tuition, board, room, books, and fees, which total approximately \$12,500 for on-campus students. According to U.S. Census figures, about 29% of families in Arizona earned less than \$25,000 in 1999. The increase in the ASU Advantage program's family income limit will enable the university to help a larger proportion of its students.