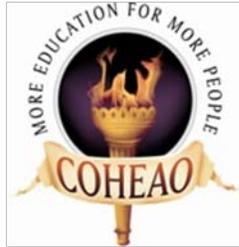


The



Torch

January 17, 2014

A bi-weekly report from the Coalition of Higher Education Assistance Organizations

COHEAO News

- **[A Message from the COHEAO President:](#)**

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- **[Congress Passes FY 2014 Spending Agreement](#)**

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Attachments

- [COHEAO Commercial Members](#)
- [Board of Directors](#)
- [Special Attachment: HELP Committee Hearing Summary, “Strengthening Federal Access Programs to Meet 21st Century Needs: A Look at TRIO & GEAR UP”](#)

A Message from the COHEAO President:

[Editor's note: With this issue of The Torch, we are reviving the tradition of the COHEAO President providing a greeting and some comments as an opening to the publication. We hope you enjoy it. As always, comments are most welcome on The Torch or anything else COHEAO is doing!]

Welcome to 2014, the beginning of spring semester and the exciting challenges that come with our ever-changing and increasingly regulated industry. As we strive to stay ahead of the game by creating better processes, strategic plans, new habits and resolutions for the New Year, I find myself looking forward to a very rewarding and long-standing habit of mine that seems to come at a time when I need it most - The COHEAO Annual Conference. Where else can I become so energized through networking opportunities and feel so empowered by the ability to gather with colleagues, discuss the most pressing issues on our campuses today, and spend an entire afternoon on Capitol Hill sharing the challenges and concerns of our industry with our Congressional Leaders. Perhaps it's the allure of the high quality sessions and speakers, or hearing the inside perspective directly from our Congressional Representatives that is so unique; of course the venue always proves to be one of the best! Regardless, I am very excited that, soon, many of us will be gathering in Pentagon City for the COHEAO Annual Conference to begin the New Year with a Spark and proudly participate in our mission of More Education for More People! For those of you attending, I wish you safe travels and I look forward to seeing each of you there!

If you aren't able to join us at the annual conference this year, I encourage you to reach out to any member of the COHEAO board and share the issues you feel will be the most challenging for you in 2014. We will do our best to bring your concerns to Capitol Hill or address your needs in one of our webinars! Our goal in 2014 is to represent the needs of our membership in every way possible!

With best regards for a productive and successful new year!
Maria Livolsi
COHEAO President

COHEAO Annual Conference: Still Time to Register ***Remarks from Members of Congress, CFPB, ED Highlight Agenda***

If you have yet to do so, there is still time to register for the COHEAO Annual Conference. The conference will be held at the Ritz-Carlton Pentagon City, VA which is a very short metro or cab ride to Washington, DC.

Several exciting new speakers will highlight the conference program. Representative Tim Bishop (D-NY), a long-time supporter of the Perkins Loan Program, will provide a luncheon address on Monday, January 28. Representative Luke Messer (R-IN), an up and coming member of the House Republican Caucus serving on the Education and the Workforce Committee, will provide remarks on the afternoon of January 28.

In addition to insights from these leaders on the Education and the Workforce Committee, the COHEAO Annual Conference will also feature Rohit Chopra of the CFPB as well as Gail McLarnon and Brian Smith, two senior Department of Education officials charged with overseeing the Perkins Loan Program and other programs at the Office of Postsecondary Education. McLarnon and Smith are slated for the

morning of Monday, January 26 and Chopra will address the conference the morning of Wednesday, January 28.

In addition to professional development and networking opportunities throughout the week, the COHEAO Annual Conference focuses on how Washington impacts those working on student financial services. Multiple sessions will cover regulatory and legislative developments, and the conference provides attendees with the opportunity to visit Capitol Hill and advocate directly on issues affecting their office. New to visiting with your legislators? The COHEAO Annual Conference offers advocacy training and mentors to help guide you around the halls of Congress.

Though legislation and regulation are featured aspects of the conference, they are most definitely not the only focus. In addition to “Washington-based” sessions, the draft program currently includes sessions on financial literacy and cohort default management, credit reporting, backroom outsourcing, the use of student workers, and more.

COHEAO was able to hold the line on conference prices, maintaining the same registration rates from the 2012 Annual Conference. For COHEAO members (both commercial and institutional), the regular rate is \$640. For non-members, the rates are \$740 for schools and \$1,590 for commercial organizations.

The deadline for the COHEAO room rate at the conference hotel has passed. However, rooms are still available at standard rates and there are plenty of more affordable options within walking distance of the Ritz-Carlton. If you have any questions on hotel accommodations, or the COHEAO Annual Conference generally, please contact Wes Huffman (whuffman@wpllc.net).

Congress

Congressional Education Leaders to Retire

This week, Rep. George Miller (D-CA), the long-time Democratic leader of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, announced his retirement from Congress. Elected in 1974, Miller served in the US House for 40 years.

Miller has long served as the Chairman or Ranking Minority Member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee. In his role as Chairman, he was involved in some of the most important domestic legislation of the last 20 years, including major reforms to the US health insurance system (known as “Obamacare”), which included the 2010 SAFRA legislation that converted all US student loans to Direct Lending, and “No Child Left Behind,” a major overhaul of the US K-12 education system.

Representative Rob Andrews (NJ) is next in seniority among Democrats on Education and Workforce, followed by Rep. Bobby Scott (VA). It is widely presumed that Andrews would want to step into the role of ranking minority member or chairman on the Committee after the next election, but it is too early to know if that will happen for sure. Most pundits believe Republicans will retain control of the House, so a Republican will likely be chairman.

Committee Chairman John Kline (R-MN) technically is supposed to step down at the end of the Congress due to Republicans’ three-term limit as party leader on a particular committee. Kline could seek a waiver of the term limit rule and, given that he would be in the middle of Higher Education Act

reauthorization and other major bills, would seem to have a chance of getting it. Republicans granted Rep. Paul Ryan an extra term as chairman of the Budget Committee in the current Congress.

Representative Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), a current member and former Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, also announced his retirement. McKeon presided over the most recent reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 2008, but in recent years has been largely focused on his role as Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

In addition to McKeon, came news that Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) would be retiring at the end of the session due to health reasons. Coburn, a one-time member of the HELP Committee, brought common sense to the table when it came to student loans and budgetary accounting. Coburn, who is a physician, has always spoken forcefully on budgetary issues, earning the nickname “Dr. No,” but he also has shown a pragmatic streak, which often appeared in his education work.

Congress Passes FY 2014 Spending Agreement

The House of Representatives passed an omnibus appropriations bill for FY 2014 by margin of 359-67. It passed 72-26 in the Senate. The \$1.1 trillion agreement funds all US government agencies through September 30, 2014.

Although the agreement was significantly delayed and comes in the wake of a government shutdown last October, the process was the closest the US Congress has come to its “regular order” for annual budget and appropriations matters. Optimists on Capitol Hill are hopeful it might portend a return to the standard process for budgeting and appropriations matters.

The legislation increases the maximum Pell Grant, to \$5,780. It also increases funding for Work-Study by \$49 million, SEOG by \$37 million, TRIO by \$42 million, and GEAR UP by \$15 million. Though the lack of cancellation funding is problematic for Perkins advocates, the return to regular order and the modifications to sequestration are encouraging in that it is more likely to get funding restored when to a bill with individual line items than to a “continuing resolution” that merely continues all programs at the previous year’s level.

Though Congress did not grant the President’s wish of funding Race to the Top for higher education, it did provide \$75 million for the Fund to Improve Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) to fund the President’s “First in the World” for innovation in higher education. Of that \$75 million, up to \$20 million may be set aside for minority-serving institutions (MSIs)

The Department of Education is required to produce a report on the graduation rates of Pell Grant recipients. The legislation acknowledges the limitations of such a study, but directs the Department to make use of the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS) to provide the relevant information. The bill also provides additional funds for a study requested by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), the Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, on higher education regulations.

The bill also clarifies that the Not-for-Profit Servicers, 34 state or private, non-profit agencies specifically designated as student loan servicing entities, will be eligible to compete for contracts to service Direct Loans. It directs the Department of Education to publish a report on the metrics for evaluating student loan servicers, particularly when comparing the NFPs to the four original Title IV Servicers (TIVAS). Below is the relevant language:

This agreement provides sufficient funding to continue the servicing of student loans by NFPs. The Secretary shall continue to comply with the terms of the Department's existing contracts with NFP servicers or teams of NFP servicers to service student loans through fiscal year 2014.

Congressional colloquies stated that the BBA permits NFPs to compete with TIVAs for additional accounts. This agreement directs the Secretary to develop a plan that streamlines the metrics by which NFP servicers and the TIVAs are measured to ensure consistency among and demonstrated effectiveness of all servicing contracts as authorized under the HEA, in order to inform future competitions. The Secretary is directed to submit a report detailing the plan to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees as well as to the Committee on Education and the Workforce and the Committee on HELP no later than March 31, 2014, and before any new proposed metrics (or modified metrics) are announced or implemented.

The report shall also include the following information:

(1) How the Secretary will ensure consistent application of any proposed performance metrics to both the NFP servicers and the TIVAs given differing portfolios;

(2) The timeline by which the proposed metrics will be implemented and the evaluation process by which all existing servicers will be measured in accordance with these new metrics in order to move forward on a competitive basis;

(3) The anticipated challenges in moving servicers to one set of metrics and recommended solutions to those challenges; and

(4) The impact of the plan on borrowers and the steps the Secretary will take to ensure any new metrics will be implemented with minimum disruption or negative effect to borrowers.

HELP Committee Examines TRIO & GEAR-UP

On Thursday, January 16, the Senate HELP Committee convened a hearing, "Strengthening Federal Access Programs to Meet 21st Century Needs: A Look at TRIO and GEAR UP." As the title might indicate, the hearing featured testimony from TRIO and GEAR UP program administrators, experts, and advocates as well as a couple of outside experts.

The hearing focused almost exclusively on access and success issues and it was largely void of monologues on the ills of proprietary colleges or even student debt generally. It provided little in the way of breaking news and was greatly overshadowed by the White House event with college presidents on college access, but there were several items of note in terms of HEA reauthorization.

Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Lamar Alexander (R-TN) asked the witnesses about specific proposals discussed in previous Committee hearings, most notably a "One Grant/One Loan" proposal with early notification put forward as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Reimagining Aid Delivery and Design (RADD) Project.

HCM Strategists, an organization promoting the "One Grant/One Loan/One Tax Credit," has been presenting their proposal as a win-win for students and taxpayers, arguing it would produce better results at a fraction of the current amount spent on student aid. However, this panel indicated early notification and simplification may be helpful, but strongly pushed back on the notion that "One

Grant/One Loan/One Tax Credit” with early notification would be some sort of “silver bullet” for college access and success.

A full summary is included with today’s edition as a special attachment.

Harkin and Carper Write DoD on Potential Misinformation in Tuition Assistance Program

Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Carper (D-DE) wrote to the Department of Defense (DOD) requesting that it take steps to address inaccuracies and information gaps in the “higher education” portion of its Transition Assistance Program. This portion of the Transition Assistance Program is intended to give departing service members the skills and knowledge needed to (1) select an institution of higher education that meets their career goals, and (2) navigate the complexities of using their G.I. Bill benefits and federal student aid to finance their postsecondary education.

In August 2011, President Obama directed DOD, Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Education Department (ED) to design a “reverse boot camp” —a program to help make the transition back to civilian life easier for our veterans, known as the Transition Assistance Program.

The press release announcing the letter states: “Committee staff reviewed a video from the program’s education portion and found inaccuracies in its descriptions of the VA funded GI Bill benefit and the information provided on school accreditation and costs. Moreover, the Committee found that the education portion offered too little information to help service members and veterans make an informed decision about what degree to pursue or school to attend. Further exacerbating the shortcomings of the education class is the fact that service members can skip the course if they do not have immediate plans to go back to school.”

Additional information, including the full text of the letter, is available online:

<http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=4fec324-5bff-405f-9d87-dc407d105320&groups=Chair>

White House and Administration

White House Convenes Gathering of College Presidents

The White House hosted more than 80 college presidents and other leaders in higher education to discuss issues of college costs, postsecondary education as the critical tool for economic mobility, and other issues. College and university presidents have been largely critical of the President’s plan to create a rating system for institutions of higher education, but Administration officials and conference participants described the meeting and the proposal as separate issues and focused on voluntary commitments to improve “college opportunity.”

By and large, the conference program steered clear of any controversial issues in higher education. A passing reference from President Obama was the only mention of the ratings system, and the tone of the event was described as “conciliatory” in the higher education trade press. The colleges among the White House invitees skewed slightly toward the highly selective, though the daylong event did address many broader issues and there were several community colleges and state systems in attendance.

The President and First Lady both spoke at the event. The President thanked the attendees, highlighted specific pledges, and told the story of Troy, a student who benefitted greatly from the assistance of the National College Advising Corps. In a speech peppered with stirring personal anecdotes and reflection on her own experience as a minority student of modest means at an Ivy League institution, Mrs. Obama spoke to the need to ensure all students have opportunities to maximize their potential.

In order to attend, colleges and organizations had to make pledges to improve the opportunities available to low-income students. The commitments were both “small-bore” and “sweeping,” in the words of Secretary Duncan. The document of commitments made by event participants is available online: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/files/2014/01/commitments.pdf>

ED Plans Jan. 22 “Technical Symposium” on Ratings System

The Education Department confirmed this week it will be hosting a “technical symposium” on its ratings system for higher education. The symposium will last the full-day on January 22 at the Department of Education’s downtown Washington, DC offices (1990 K Street, NW, 8th Floor).

Invited participants have been requested to make a formal presentation on the Department’s request for information, which was published in December. That request is available online:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2013/12/17/obama-administration-seeks-input-how-develop-ratings>

Inside Higher Ed reported the following as confirmed participants in the event:

- Braden Hosch, State University of New York at Stony Brook
- Brandon Busteded, Gallup
- Christine Keller, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
- Dana Mukamel, University of California at Irvine
- David Figlio, Northwestern University
- Don Hossler, Indiana University
- Hans L’Orange, State Higher Education Executive Officers association
- John Pryor, University of California at Los Angeles
- Kevin Carey, New America Foundation
- Patrick Kelly, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
- Patrick Perry, California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office
- Robert Kelchen, Seton Hall University
- Robert Morse, *U.S. News & World Report*
- Roger Benjamin, Council for Aid to Education
- Russell Poulin, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education’s Cooperative for Educational Technologies
- Sarah Turner, University of Virginia
- Sean Corcoran, New York University
- Tod Massa, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
- Tom Bailey, Columbia University

At “Datapalooza,” ED Announces Plans to Open FAFSA to Web Developers

At its “Datapalooza” event this week, the Department of Education announced it would be opening up the FAFSA to web developers. Additional information from *Inside Higher Ed* is below:

The department is also eyeing the development of a FAFSA Application Program Interface, a set of web protocols that would allow developers to build third-party services and applications that work with the complicated form, which is currently available only through the government’s website, FAFSA.gov.

Officials will soon issue a formal request for information and feedback on how the department might develop feeds (known as application programming interfaces, or APIs) of “key education data, programs and frequently used forms,” including the FAFSA, the department said.

James H. Shelton, the department’s assistant deputy secretary for innovation and improvement, told attendees that a FAFSA API would be useful in expanding the way students, families and others use the form. For instance, he said, the department has talked with KIPP charter schools, for instance, about how they might be able to submit all of their students’ FAFSA forms at once.

The announcement came at a symposium Wednesday where Obama administration officials highlighted companies, nonprofit and academic groups that have used government data to build products and services aimed at helping students prepare for, apply to, and select a college. The Datapalooza event on Wednesday attracted more than 500 entrepreneurs, software developers and education technology experts.

Additional information from the White House is available online: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/fact-sheet-education-datapalooza-promote-innovation-improving-college-access-aff>

Full coverage from *Inside Higher Ed* is available

online: <http://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2014/01/16/us-release-more-fafsa-data-may-open-form-web-developers#ixzz2qhC6DZhC>

Industry

New America Foundation Scrutinizes Parent PLUS Loans

An event and report last week from the New America Foundation drew attention to the policy issues of the Parent PLUS loan program. The left-leaning think tank released a report, “The Parent Trap: Parent PLUS Loans and Intergenerational Borrowing” which presented new data, a primer, and recommendations for reforming the program. It states the following:

More far-reaching reforms are needed to ensure that the Parent PLUS loan program is correctly targeted to families who can afford to pay the debt back. Policymakers should consider one of the following three options:

- **Add an “Ability to Pay” metric to the Parent PLUS credit check.** *In addition to a backward-looking credit check, adding an “Ability to Pay” metric would be able to better capture whether parents have the resources to pay back the loan. This would help ensure parents aren’t over-borrowing to send their children to college.*

- **Cap Parent PLUS loans.** *Instead of allowing parents to borrow up to the full COA, the loans should be capped to prevent over-borrowing and to remove the incentive for institutions to increase revenue by raising their COA and funding the increase through Parent PLUS.*
- **End the Parent PLUS loan program and increase dependent student loan limits.** *Many parents who take out federal PLUS loans would not be able to secure a loan in the private market. The government should not be in the business of lending loans to low-income parents as a de facto extension of the student loan program. To compensate for the loss of the program, policymakers should increase dependent student loan limits.*

The report refers to previous New America recommendations to establish a cumulative Stafford Loan limit for undergraduate students at \$40,000—both dependent and independent. This loan limit recommendation was offered along with many others in the organization’s proposals to the Gates Foundation on reforming the entire federal student aid system.

“Parent Trap” includes other elements, such as specific examples of the presentation of PLUS as “financial aid” in award letters and data showing higher usages of PLUS loans at for-profit institutions than might be expected. The event also illustrated the controversy over the Department of Education’s 2013 decision to tighten enforcement of the law prohibiting the making of a loan to borrowers with a recent adverse credit incident. It also highlighted the importance of Parent PLUS to a wide array of institutions.

The briefing featured a presentation reviewing the basics of Parent PLUS and the 2011 changes to adverse credit history requirements followed by a panel discussion. The panel included Fishman; Cheryl Smith, Senior Vice President for Public Policy & Government Affairs at United Negro College Fund; Steve Gunderson, President and CEO of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities; and Kevin Fudge, an Education/Financial Aid Advisor at American Student Assistance.

The panelists did find some general areas of agreement, particularly on the need for more data. The political left and right, reform-minded and traditional higher education representatives, and even institutions in the crosshairs, have all publicly agreed on the need for more data on PLUS Loans. It remains to be seen if the Department is willing or able to produce it.

The panel also agreed reforms to PLUS should be viewed in conjunction with other changes to the aid and loan programs, ideally via HEA reauthorization. Libby Nelson of *Politico*, the panel’s moderator, said that despite the apparent consensus on a holistic approach, reforms to PLUS were set to happen within a relative silo in the near future via negotiated rulemaking. When the discussion turned to immediate reforms it quickly became highly contentious, particularly among Gunderson and Fudge.

ASA’s Fudge played the role of consumer advocate, recalling stories of counseling students and parents with excessive debts in PLUS loans. He said families often were not best served by for-profit colleges with attractive marketing as well as by some private non-profits. Gunderson suggested Fudge’s comments, along with the report’s recommendations, would greatly restrict opportunity for low-income students. He also pointed to the federal government’s “profits” as the real problem with student lending and called for IBR for Parent PLUS along with lower interest rates.

Smith did not engage Fudge’s comments nearly as directly as Gunderson, but did offer similar statements in subtler tones. The UNCF representative expressed concerns with over-borrowing, indicated historically black colleges and universities and others are emphasizing financial literacy and

indicated she looked forward to the Department providing more data on Parent PLUS via the upcoming negotiated rulemaking process. Smith said some level of underwriting was necessary, but argued the earlier standards were more than sufficient, the government makes more than enough in “profits” on PLUS loans, and that terms should be more forgiving.

During the question and answer session, David Bergeron, a former Department of Education official now with the Center for American Progress, suggested the repayment data everyone is seeking may not be as useful as it seems. Bergeron reminded the panel that the ECASLA law of 2008 changed the repayment terms of Parent PLUS Loans, shifting from requiring repayment to commence soon after disbursement to permitting a delay in repayment until the student graduates or withdraws from school. He indicated this shift would severely impact the usefulness of such data.

Additional information from the New America Foundation, including the report, a presentation from Ben Miller on Parent PLUS, and a video replay of the event is available online:

http://newamerica.net/events/2013/parent_plus_or_minus

Becky Timmons to Step Down at ACE

Last week brought news that Becky Timmons, a longtime lobbyist at the American Council on Education (ACE) and a fixture of Washington higher education policy community, will be stepping down at the end of the month. Timmons worked at ACE for 40 years, with many of those serving as the higher education umbrella group’s lead federal lobbyist.

On the announcement of her retirement, Timmons sat down with Doug Lederman, a former editor for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and one of the founders of *Inside Higher Ed*. The interview is a glowing review of Timmons’ career which is well-deserved.

The full piece—“40 Years of Lobbying ‘Fun’”—is available online:

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/08/higher-ed-lobbyist-retires-after-four-decades>

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More Education for More People**



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HEARING BRIEF

**Senate HELP Committee,
Strengthening Federal
Access Programs to Meet
21st Century Needs: A
Look at TRIO & GEAR UP™**

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On Thursday, January 16, the Senate HELP Committee convened a hearing, “Strengthening Federal Access Programs to Meet 21st Century Needs: A Look at TRIO and GEAR UP.” As the title might indicate, the hearing featured testimony from TRIO and GEAR UP program administrators, experts, and advocates as well as a couple of outside experts.

The hearing focused almost exclusively on access and success issues and it was largely void of monologues on the ills of proprietary colleges or even student debt generally. It provided little in the way of breaking news and was greatly overshadowed by the White House event with college presidents on college access, but there were several items of note in terms of HEA reauthorization.

Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Ranking Member Lamar Alexander (R-TN) asked the witnesses about specific proposals discussed in previous Committee hearings, most notably a “One Grant/One Loan” proposal with early notification put forward as part of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Reimagining Aid Delivery and Design (RADD) Project.

HCM Strategists, the main organization behind “One Grant/One Loan/One Tax Credit” has been presenting their proposal as a win-win for students and taxpayers, arguing it would produce better results at a fraction of the current amount spent on student aid. However, this panel indicated early notification and simplification may be helpful, but strongly pushed back on the notion that “One Grant/One Loan/One Tax Credit” with early notification would be some sort of “silver bullet” for college access and success.

Witnesses & Testimony

A list of the hearing witnesses included below. Their testimony is provided via hyperlink.

- [Ms. Maureen Hoyler , President of the Council for Opportunity in Education, Washington, DC](#)
- [Mr. Scott Giles , President and CEO of Vermont Student Assistance Corporation & Member of the Board of Directors of the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, Shelburne, VT](#)
- [Mr. Cornelius Griggs , Senior Project Manager & Lead Estimator of the Walsh Group, Chicago, IL](#)
- [Ms. Tallie Sertich , Director of Climb Upward Bound, Hibbing Community College, Hibbing, MN](#)
- [Dr. Weiya Liang , Director of GEAR UP, Washington Student Achievement Council, Olympia, WA](#)
- [Dr. Douglas N. Harris , Associate Professor of Economics and University Endowed Chair in Public Education, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA](#)
- [Dr. Ron Haskins , Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the Center on Children and Families and Budgeting for National Priorities Project, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC](#)

There were very few surprises in the witness testimony. Hoyler offered some insights from CoE members on strengthening TRIO, Giles reviewed VSAC's work with both programs and offered some recommendations, Griggs gave extremely useful insights from the perspective of a program participant, and Harris and Haskins both indicated the programs were in need of major reforms. In particular, Haskins compared TRIO and GEAR-UP Programs to Head-Start, suggesting that while there was undoubtedly great work going on at the individual program level, the available research evidence does not show the programs to be effective on a national scale.

Questions & Answers

Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) opened the questioning by noting that policymakers “tend to focus on success stories,” but also wondered “what about the others?” He then pointed to the make-up of today's college students, stating more than half are not campus-based and are over the age of 25, and asked how can TRIO and GEAR UP be used to support these students?

CoE's Hoyler pushed back on the idea that TRIO is focused solely on access. Though access programs for four-year, traditional institutions garner the most attention, Hoyler asserted that roughly half of program funds are used for retention. At another point in the hearing, Giles mentioned the GEAR-UP partnership programs which are often focused on retention and also pointed to his organization's “seventh year” GEAR-UP program, which provides services

through the first year of postsecondary education. Sertich and Liang noted that many community college and non-traditional students have benefitted from TRIO and GEAR UP. The two program administrators also indicated that support services may be even more necessary for online programs. Harris said the changing demographics in higher education point to a need to revamp the programs or, at minimum, better coordination. According to Brookings' Haskins, academic preparation is the key factor at play.

Following Harkin, **Ranking Member Lamar Alexander (R-TN)** began his questions by reviewing the recommendation put forward at the previous hearing featuring multiple RADD recommendations: 1) Simplification of FAFSA; 2) Prior prior year (Junior Year) notification on award eligibility; 3) Leverage social media for early outreach; and 4) One Grant/One Loan. Alexander noted the supporters of these plans have indicated they would cost the government less money and provide better assistance for students. He then asked this panel of witnesses if they agreed with these sentiments.

The panel of witnesses agreed that simplification and early notification may be beneficial to students, but, in the words of Harris, "it is not going to change the world." Haskins, a long-time Washington veteran, indicated simplifying the Title IV system was a "great idea," but also noted that it was one that has been proposed by every Administration in recent memory to little avail. He suggested there must be some level of disadvantage to drastic simplification of the Title IV system or "we would have done it already." Liang also noted that some financial aid offices believe a certain level of complexity is needed to most equitably provide aid and suggested complexity was not nearly as big of an issue as "messaging," meaning many low-income students have lost their aspirations for higher education before they even know about the FAFSA and its complexity.

Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) spoke later in the hearing and reviewed the exchanges between the witnesses and the Chairman and Ranking Member, asking again about "One Grant/One Loan." Again, the witnesses said simplicity and early notification could be effective tools, but are only one of many tools that educators will need to increase postsecondary attainment. Burr acknowledged the role of the "human touch" aspect in this process and asked about the role of high school counselors.

The witnesses spoke to a joint responsibility among K-12 and higher education. Harris indicated the situation with college counseling among high schools has been "abysmal," but it is improving thanks to the efforts of schools, non-profit organizations and individual counselors. Haskins painted a less optimistic picture, stating low-income students often start behind and attend under-resourced schools where the situation becomes even worse. Hoyler spoke to the role of the business community, noting the support the GE Foundation has provided CoE.

Senator Al Franken (D-MN) used most of his question time to discuss non-cognitive traits and skills. He opened by discussing "character," which he acknowledged could be a "loaded term" for both sides in a political context; however, he indicated that character was very important to success. Franken specifically mentioned recent books from Paul Tough, an author and contributor for the *New York Times Magazine*, on the importance of non-cognitive capabilities,

such as resiliency, and asked if TRIO and GEAR UP programs were supporting the development of these skills.

Sertich, the Upward Bound Coordinator from Minnesota, replied that non-cognitive skills were very much a part of both programs. She pointed to the mentoring aspect of TRIO, as well as the assertiveness training her office provides so students “can be advocates for themselves.” Hoyler echoed these sentiments, pointing to the use of peer groups in both programs.

At one point, **Chairman Harkin** interceded to promote early learning initiatives. According to the Chairman, universal early learning for all kids, regardless of income, would help greatly with all aspects of education. **Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)** simply said “amen” to Harkin’s statement before noting she had to return to the floor.

Following that exchange, **Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)** offered questions on homeless and foster youth in higher education, an issue that has long been of great importance to Murray. Griggs discussed his experiences with TRIO and how much assistance it provided him. All panelists agreed the issue of foster and homeless youth access is an important one and said they would work with Baldwin and Murray on their legislation to address this issue.

Before she began her questions, however, Baldwin noted her appreciation for the McNair programs within TRIO. Baldwin described Rep. Gwyn Moore (D-WI) of Milwaukee as “perhaps the most famous success story” within TRIO. She also mentioned a member of her staff was a McNair Scholar and touted the work of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Marquette with their McNair Scholars. In preparation for the hearing, Baldwin said her office polled Wisconsin stakeholders and said that more support for Advanced Placement classes as well as stronger minority teacher recruitment were two common themes.

Stating he was concerned the hearing might spread “mythology,” **Sen. Chris Murphy (D-CT)** pushed back on Haskins’ statement on the efficacy of Head Start. He also asked if TRIO and GEAR-UP could be better used to incent more services from low-income students from institutions of higher education.

Hoyler responded it was up to governors and college presidents to make enrolling and graduating low-income students a priority. If these leaders consider the issue a priority, many of these issues will be addressed. If not, they won’t. Later in the hearing, Hoyler said that 40% of institutions provide for services for their TRIO students. **Chairman Harkin** asked about why the remaining 60% did not provide for such services. Hoyler replied, “That’s a good question,” and Harkin indicated his staff would be looking into this matter.

Harris also had an interesting response to questions on the role of institutions of higher education, noting the basic attendance structure of postsecondary education does not lend itself to easily tracking students. However, he noted some schools were taking a proactive approach, pointing to the efforts of Des Moines Community College to develop a call-center for contacting students identified as “at risk” for dropping out. He noted that call centers are a relatively inexpensive solution for institutions to try to keep these students engaged.

Asking the final questions of the hearing, **Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)** was the first to specifically bring up the issue of student debt. Stating “all of these pieces intersect,” Warren asked how TRIO and GEAR UP could be brought to a larger scale, noting that even under the utmost optimal circumstances the programs would assist about 800,000 students.

In response to the question on scale, Hoyer said she had concerns with the cohort model of GEAR UP. She indicated it was difficult for a program to serve some students, but not others. Hoyer later clarified the issue was a lack of funding for both programs, a sentiment echoed by the other advocates and program administrators. Warren said she appreciated the real issue was a need for more funding, but she also seized on Hoyer’s comments, and said the Committee may need to look at program allocations in order to help the most students.

Additional Information

Additional information on this hearing, including an archived webcast and all the witness’ testimonies, is available online: <http://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=abddb7d5-5056-a032-5280-c0b1dd6a8c4e>