

Pell Grants and support for NIH raised

By Shaileja Mammen

The legislation approved by the House of Representatives raises the maximum Pell Grant awarded to needy, low income, undergraduate students to \$4,700. This is a significant rise. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) will also receive 2.6 percent more funding in 2008 as compared to the previous year.

The other student financial aid programs such as Perkins Loan and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants Programs will continue at the 2007 levels according to the legislation. A reduction in the funding of these programs was proposed.

The increase in Pell Grant will cost the program an additional \$2 billion. This is the largest increase in the history of the Pell Grant. This finds favor with educators, researchers, and college students.

College leaders and Congressional Democrats did not support this change in legislation. They expected reduction in other programs including Perkins Loan and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) Programs to fund the increase in Pell Grants partially.

The increase of 2.6 percent in the funding for National Institutes of Health funding will add 545 research grants. The average value of grants will also increase after two years. This funding has increased for two years consecutively.

US Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, in 2005, formed a Commission on the Future of Higher Education to generate a national dialogue on the necessity to improve higher education. The Commission gave its final report – A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of Higher Education, in September 2006.

Based on the report, subsequently, Secretary Spellings announced an action plan with an objective to improve higher education in terms of accessibility, affordability, and accountability. The students, parents, business leaders, and taxpayers are the stakeholders in higher education.

According to the action plan, five regional summits are to be convened to discuss the Commission's recommendation with the stakeholders and policy makers. These five summits will build on the national summit held in Washington, D.C. in March 2007. These summits will continue the national dialogue on higher education to advocate for a comprehensive Higher Education Act reauthorization bill to improve accessibility, affordability, and accountability of college education.

The legislation, which increased the amount of the maximum Pell grant awarded, addresses the issue of accessibility and affordability due to high and increasing cost of education.

There is still a long way to go to achieve what Secretary Spellings has set out to do.

On the Net

www.hewi.net

www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/plan/index.html

www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/final-report.pdf

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insidehighered.com/news/2007/06/08/approps