Boehner Adamantly Opposed to Student Unit Record System

Prospects for replacing the current IPEDS data collection system with one based on individual student records dimmed considerably with the news that Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) is adamantly opposed to the proposal. Boehner is chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, which is the key House committee involved in reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Boehner’s opposition, which is based largely on privacy concerns, is consistent with his record of supporting student privacy rights in other education legislation that has come before his committee. “I am completely opposed to allowing the federal government to collect information specific to individual students—information that could identify individual students and endanger their privacy,” Boehner told the Week in Review.

Throughout the unit record discussions, officials of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) have emphasized that they will not go forward with the new system unless it is authorized by Congress and federal funds are provided to pay the department’s expenses for implementing it.

Given Boehner’s stance, the strong likelihood that other House Republicans will support his position, and the serious concerns expressed by a number of House Democrats, it is difficult to imagine that any higher education legislation approved by the House would include authority for the new system.

Members of the Senate have not yet gone on record with their views about the proposal. However, at a recent meeting, Senate committee staff indicated it was still very much on the table, so it is possible that the proposal could be included in the HEA reauthorization bill they plan to develop this summer. In that event, the issue would be resolved as part of the House-Senate negotiations on a final version of the reauthorization bill.

In another recent development, the Liberty Coalition has announced its opposition to the proposal. Members of the coalition span the ideological spectrum, but are united in their commitment to individual privacy. As noted in a recent Chronicle of Higher Education article (“Plan to Track Students Steps into Political Quicksand,” May 6, 2005), the unit record data issue headed the coalition’s agenda for their meeting last week. NAICU was invited to the meeting to provide background on the privacy concerns its members have raised about the proposal.
On May 5, the House Sub-committee on 21st Century Competitiveness held a hearing on “College Credit Mobility: Can Transfer of Credit Policies Be Improved?” The hearing focused on efforts underway around the country to ease problems associated with the ability of students to transfer credits from one institution to another. All four witnesses argued against federal mandates for credit transfer, and suggested positive steps that Congress might take.

Philip Day, president of the National Articulation and Transfer Network (NATN), discussed the efforts of his organizations to improve credit transfers. NATN’s mission is helping students of color identify opportunities for educational advancement and success at both two- and four-year colleges. It has begun to promote regional transfer models and organize transfer councils. A Web-based system (CollegeStepz), with a searchable database of every institution of higher education in the country, will be expanded to include comprehensive information about articulation/transfer processes.

Day said that the federal government could be helpful in assisting efforts such as those of his organization, but emphasized that this help should come in the form of encouragement “to do it on a voluntary, good faith basis, not on a mandatory basis and certainly not with burdensome reporting requirements.”

Jerome Sullivan, executive director of the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), described the complexity of the transfer review process, noting that courses must be compared on the basis of quality, comparability, and applicability. In many cases, this process involves a time-consuming individual review of a course and the qualifications of the faculty who teach it.

Noting the diversity among institutions of higher education, Sullivan urged Congress not to adopt a “one-size-fits-all” policy. He said the federal government could play a useful role by:

1. facilitating a voluntary data collection system to provide receiving institutions with more detailed information about the courses for which students wish to receive transfer credit;
2. imposing a disclosure requirement on institutions that make claims about the transferability of their credits; and
3. offering financial support for articulation agreements.

Initiatives in Ohio and Florida were also highlighted. Nancy Zimpher, president of the University of Cincinnati, described a statewide effort initiated in 1990 to ease credit transfers between institutions in Ohio. The program also coordinates with high schools to provide guidance about courses students should take to prepare themselves for college.

Theresa Kebacha, director of strategic initiatives at the Florida Department of Education, described efforts to create “seamless articulation” among institutions. These efforts include a statewide articulation agreement and common course numbering.

One disheartening aspect of the hearing: sponsors of the House Higher Education Act reauthorization bill (H.R. 609) continue to contend that the legislation “simply requires an institution to have a transfer-of-credit policy, to publish it, and to follow it.” In fact, the provisions go well beyond that, requiring institutions to make transfer-of-credit decisions “in accordance with objective criteria that the institution publicly discloses and the student completed such courses or programs at the institution’s required level of proficiency.”

In effect, the federal government would set the standards. The institution would not be able to make judgments on course quality or incorporate “subjective” requirements that it sees as important to its mission.

In response to a line of questioning from Rep. David Wu (D-Ore.) on the role of faculty in assessing the quality of courses proposed for transfer, AACRAO’s Sullivan explained that H.R. 609 does go far beyond requiring the development of and adherence to policy statements.

For more information, please contact Susan Hattan at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or susan@naicu.edu.
Deadline Nears to Choose Peer Groups for IPEDS Data Feedback Reports

Last fall, the president or CEO of each postsecondary institution in the country received a copy of an “IPEDS Data Feedback Report.” The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recently announced a change to these reports that requires institutions to act by June 15, 2005.

The data feedback project was initiated “to provide each institution a context for examining the data they submitted to IPEDS.” In each report, “figures are used to describe selected aspects of [an] institution and a comparison group of institutions.” Presidents will receive the 2005 version of their institutions’ reports in October.

One of the major complaints made about last year’s report was that institutions were assigned to comparison groups that did not match their own assessment of their peer group. To address this problem, institutions can now designate which schools to include in their comparison groups. Institutions must upload their group through the NCES web site by June 15, or the default comparison group that was used in last year’s report will be used again.

It is important for institutions to choose their own comparison groups for the report because, unlike last year, these reports will be available on NCES’s web site. Through the Executive Peer Tool—a site that is not password protected—anyone can search for an institution and download a copy of its report. Therefore, institutions will want to be sure that the groups to which they are compared truly represent their peers.

The primary IPEDS contact on your campus should have received an e-mail alert from NCES last month with detailed instructions on how to choose and upload a comparison group. If your institution did not receive this alert, or if you have any other questions about this process, contact the IPEDS Help Desk at ipedshelp@rti.org.

For more information, contact Elise Miller at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or elise@naicu.edu.

Senate Finance Committee Continues Its Focus on Nonprofit Reform

The national clamor over Social Security reform has not deterred Senate Finance Committee Chair Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) from his commitment to nonprofit governance reform. (See WIR, April 12.) Over the past two weeks, Grassley and Max Baucus (D-Mont.), the Finance Committee’s ranking Democrat, have issued more statements indicating that they are working hard to close loopholes in charitable sector laws.

Recent statements by Grassley and Baucus have focused on two areas they find particularly troubling: life insurance deals and abusive “supporting organizations.” While Baucus referred to some supporting organizations as “little more than private piggy banks for greedy individuals,” Grassley said he was “very concerned about snake oil salesmen taking advantage of tax-exempt organizations to line their own pockets with life insurance schemes.” Both were careful to differentiate between legitimate supporting organizations and those that work on the edges of the law to benefit themselves more than the charity they are purporting to help.

The Grassley-Baucus plan is to assemble a bill of nonprofit reform measures and use the savings from shutting loopholes to pay for enactment of IRA charitable rollover legislation. The current schedule is for a bill to be unveiled by mid-June at the earliest. NAICU is working closely with the Senate Finance Committee to ensure that any proposed reforms do not hurt colleges and universities.

For more information, contact Sarah Flanagan at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or sarah@naicu.edu.
The Week in Review

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President Signs New Bankruptcy Law

President Bush signed S. 256, the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act, on April 20. The House had passed the Senate-approved bill without changes on April 14.

The new law, P.L. 109-008, makes it harder for borrowers to discharge student loans, but protects assets in college savings accounts when an individual files for bankruptcy. (See WIR 3/15/05 for details.)

For more information, contact Maureen R. Budetti at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or maureen@naicu.edu.

House Education Subcommittee Gets Additional $1 Billion

On May 5, the House Appropriations Committee announced its allocation of the $843 billion spending total to its 10 subcommittees. The education subcommittee allocation is $142.5 billion, which is less than last year, but $1 billion more than the president’s request.

This increase reflects the assumption made in the FY 2006 budget resolution, passed April 28, that Congress would spend an additional $1 billion on education, especially to increase the Pell Grant maximum by $100, to $4,150.

We will have to work hard to keep this funding in student aid.

The House education appropriations subcommittee is scheduled to write its spending bill on June 7.

For more information, please contact Stephanie Giesecke at NAICU, (202) 785-8866 or stephanie@naicu.edu.

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For more information, please contact Stephanie Giesecke at NAICU, (202) 785-8866 or stephanie@naicu.edu.

For more information, contact Maureen R. Budetti at NAICU, (202) 785-8866, or maureen@naicu.edu.

Update Your NAICU Membership Information

NAICU is currently doing spring cleaning on its member contact information. Please make sure that we have accurate address, phone, fax, and e-mail information for you on the NAICU Web site.

To access your full listing, click “Member Log-in” at http://www.naicu.edu, then go to your information under either the listing by institution or by president. (If you don’t have your login name and password, we’ll e-mail it to you.)

Also, as we rely increasingly on electronic communication, now is a good time to make sure your public relations and government relations staff are on NAICU’s PRNNet and GovNet e-mail lists.

And in anticipation of the presidential moves that traditionally take place over the summer months, let us know if there is a change in leadership coming up at your institution.

For more information, please contact Roland King at NAICU, (202) 739-0475 or roland@naicu.edu.

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