

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

January 14, 2019

Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

The government remains closed (at least, part of it is), as the House passes funding bills, the Senate refuses to look at them, and the President scrambles to get funding for his border wall. The Department of Education has organized its rulemaking committee (including our own Joseph Verardo) while the deadline for its proposed changes to Title IX is nearing (though Congressional Democrats are asking for an extension). Meanwhile, the new, historic Congress has begun proposing legislation to address sexual misconduct in research. This and more in our first *Letter* of the year.

To view previous editions and to subscribe to our newsletter, check out our [Legislative Letters blog](#)! If you have questions, suggestions, or are interested in contributing to the newsletter, or would like to be a part of the Legislative Concerns Committee, please contact the Director of Legislative Affairs, Kaylynne Glover, at legislative@nagps.org. To provide feedback on the newsletter, you can also follow the link at the end of the Letter to fill out a quick survey. To find out more about the ratified NAGPS [Legislative](#) and [Advocacy](#) Platforms, be sure to follow these links.

LEGISLATIVE *and* ADVOCACY UPDATES

Like Congress, your newly-elected Board of Directors have taken office and will be coming together for our In-Person Board Meeting this weekend to strategize for the year's advocacy and service. The first major event of the year will be the *2019 Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days (LAD)*, **scheduled for March 9th through 11th**, with a reception beginning on the evening of the 8th with optional meetings with Congress members on the 12th. The final details are being worked out now, so watch for an official announcement with registration details coming out in the next few days. Expect sessions on the basics of Congress, the graduate student mental health crisis, the Higher Education Act, Title IX, and more. With the announcement, we will include a link to a live document that we will continually update with the schedule, primers, leave behind, and handouts. We are also working on drafting a Graduate Student Life Brief that we will use in our advocacy efforts, and we hope to have this to you by the LAD.

[We have drafted a statement](#) on the [Department of Education's proposed changes to Title IX](#) and are preparing a comment on behalf of the Association. We strongly encourage you to submit your own comments on behalf of your own organizations. We also urge you to contact your elected representatives to let them know how these proposed changes will impact you, and [we have drafted guidance to help you do this](#). For questions or media inquiries regarding Title IX, please reach out to NAGPS Director of Social Justice Concerns James DiLoreto-Hill at sjc@nagps.org.

We hope to see you in DC soon!

THE SHUTDOWN

The partial government shutdown that began on December 22nd is still going, costing the US economy approximately [\\$1.2 billion each week](#). [The House has passed legislation to reopen the government, but the Senate refuses to take any action](#). Pressure against the President continues to mount, and sources indicate that he is [willing to declare a national emergency in order to build the border wall](#). Doing so would reopen the government, and [would likely fail in court](#), and so [some Democrats think this a valid way forward](#). In the meantime, the shutdown is affecting many services, including funding for [survivors of violence](#), [the immigration system](#), and [zoos](#), [museums](#), and [national parks](#). [The shutdown is also affecting higher education](#), including reviewing and distributing funds for research grants and the ability of the Department of Education carry out basic functions like programmatic operations and monitoring and responding to civil rights violations. [It is also affecting ongoing research](#) by limiting access to government resources, guidance on currently funded projects, and scientific conferences. For more stories on the impact of the shutdown, and to tell your own story, check out [#shutdownstories](#) on Twitter.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Agency Restructuring

The Department of Education is being reorganized, which will largely [consist of merging and consolidating offices](#).

Higher Education Overhaul

[The fifteen-person rulemaking committee to overhaul higher education rules has been announced](#), and includes our own Director of Communications, Joseph Verardo. The announced goal is to simplify education regulations and loosen accreditation requirements. Negotiations will begin today and has a [deadline of November 1st](#).

Title IX

[Congressional Democrats have requested Department of Education extends the comment period for Title IX for another 30 days](#), citing the particularly high level of interest in this issue.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

Staff Changes

[Kelvin Droegemeier has been confirmed as the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy](#), the first time that the position has been filled in 2 years.

IMMIGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT CONCERNS

Possible H1-B Changes

President Trump has announced [intentions to change the H-1B visa program](#), bringing “simplicity and certainty to your stay, including a potential path to citizenship.” The proposed change seems to be related to [highly-skilled foreign workers looking elsewhere for jobs](#), given this administration’s policies toward immigration.

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

LEGISLATION

Appropriations

Federal workers who are required to work during the shutdown [will be guaranteed back pay](#), thanks to a new bill that passed the House (411-7) and Senate (unanimous). President Trump has said that he will sign it.

A new spending bill (H.R. 268) has been introduced that would provide [Department of Education with \\$165 million in disaster aid](#) to help schools and colleges affected by disasters in 2018.

Taxations

The most recent tax overhaul included a 21% tax on nonprofits that pay their employees more than one million dollars, but it [accidentally included an exemption for public universities](#) which often pay their coaches millions of dollars a year. This will end up saving public universities a significant amount of money, and while Republicans say that they intend to fix this loophole, but it does not appear as though it will happen soon.

Sexual Misconduct

In the wake of the #MeToo movement, several federal agencies and governing bodies (including the [National Science Foundation](#), the [National Institutes of Health](#), the [National Academies](#), and the new [OSTP Director Kelvin Droegemeier](#)) have begun to crack down on sexual misconduct, and efforts to curb inappropriate behavior are beginning to take shape in legislative form as well. A bill has been introduced Reps. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) and Frank Lucas (R-OK) [to study - and help reduce - sexual harassment in STEM fields \(H.R. 36 \[116\]\)](#). Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA) also intends to reintroduce legislation ([H.R. 6161 \[114\]](#)) that requires [institutions that receive federal funds to report sexual harassment statistics to funding agencies](#), who are then required to take the reports into account when determining awards.

INVESTIGATIONS

As predicted, [House Democrats have begun investigating the current Administration](#), looking into Trump's businesses, campaign, and administration. This includes questioning [Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin](#), who was involved in President Trump's campaign, and [Michael Cohen](#), who will be testifying on February 7th before the House Oversight and Reform committee. [Secretary DeVos is also expected to be investigated](#). Even as the investigations have begun, however, Speaker Pelosi has made it clear that any [efforts toward impeachment would have to be clearly bipartisan](#).

THE NEW CONGRESS

The new session of Congress has begun, and it [makes history for several reasons](#). Among them, it has the largest [Congressional Hispanic Caucus](#) (37 members), the largest [Congressional Black Caucus](#) (55 members), and the [largest number of women](#) (120). They were sworn in on January 3rd, and [the Senate has already finished making their committee assignments](#). Things are moving slower in the House, though some progress has been made. Representative Nancy Pelosi has been elected Speaker of the House, the House education committee has changed its name back to the “[Committee on Education and Labor](#)” (and has [a brand-new website](#)), and a [new special committee has been formed to deal with the climate crisis](#).

Congressional priorities are also beginning to take shape. In the House, these include passing [gun legislation \(universal background checks\)](#), [lowering drug costs](#), [revising the tax laws](#), and [pushing back on President Trump's defense policies](#). Senate Republicans are interested in a [new healthcare bill](#), and there's talk that [reauthorizing HEA might actually happen](#). Americans, when polled, said that Congress's top priorities should be [addressing student debt and increasing funding for public schools](#).

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

THE SUPREME COURT

Supreme Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg has recently undergone major medical procedures and, for the first time, missed opening arguments. [The White House has begun preparing to possibly replace Justice Ginsburg](#) in the event that she can no longer serve on the Supreme Court.

IN RELATED NEWS...

RELEVANT READS

[Student Loan Outlook For 2019](#)

[Report Documents Food Insecurity Among College Students](#)

[What To Expect On Immigration In 2019](#)

[Trump, Congress, ESSA and More: Six Issues to Watch in 2019](#)

[The Pros and Cons of Taking Time Off Before Graduate School](#)

[Four common lies about higher education](#)

[Against Diversity Statements](#)

[Nearly 180000 Students Won't Have To Repay Loans From For-Profit Higher Ed](#)

[How higher ed will be a battleground for immigration debates in 2019](#)

[Overhauling the Rules for Higher Ed](#)

[9 higher ed trends to watch in 2019](#)

[Is This Higher Education's Golden Age?](#)

[Report Documents Food Insecurity Among College Students](#)

[In 2019, All But One State Legislature Is Controlled By One Party](#)

[Two Years In, Turnover in Trump's Cabinet is Still Historically High](#)

[New CRLT Resource: Supporting Students Facing Mental Health Challenges](#)

[77 \(and counting\) very real direct effects of the partial government shutdown](#)

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

[2018 Status Report on Engineering Education, APLU](#): Thanks to funding from the National Science Foundation, this APLU report examines trends in engineering degrees conferred at national and institutional levels to determine areas of growth among various groups, changes in racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in engineering, and which colleges and universities graduate a larger number of underrepresented groups in specific engineering disciplines.

[FOOD INSECURITY: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits, GAO](#): Many college students may not have enough to eat—but nobody knows exactly how many. Studies show a range of estimates, but none of the 31 we reviewed provided a national estimate. We also looked at student use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Of the 3.3 million students who were potentially eligible in 2016, less than half said they participated.

[CBO: Fixing the Debt Could Increase Average Income by \\$6,000 Per Person, CRFB](#): While some recent commentators have suggested Americans stop worrying about our debt, evidence shows there is a significant upside to addressing our unsustainable fiscal situation. Recently, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that restoring the debt-to-GDP ratio to its historic average in three decades could increase per-person income that year by \$6,000, a 6.5 percent increase. Relying on pro-growth policies to fix the debt could increase income even further.

[Monthly Budget Review for December 2018, CBO](#): The federal budget deficit was \$317 billion for the first quarter of fiscal year 2019, CBO estimates, \$92 billion more than the deficit recorded during the same period last year.

[Permanent Employment-Based Immigration and the Per-country Ceiling, CRS](#): This report reviews the employment-based immigration process by examining six pools of pending petitions and applications, representing prospective employment-based immigrants and any accompanying family members at different stages of the LPR process. While four of these pools represent administrative processing queues, two result from the INA's numerical limitations on employment-based immigration and the per-country ceiling.

[Structure and belonging: Pathways to success for underrepresented minority and women PhD students in STEM fields, PLOSOne](#): The advancement of underrepresented minority and women PhD students to elite postdoctoral and faculty positions in the STEM fields continues to lag that of majority males, despite decades of efforts to mitigate bias and increase opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds.... Women and minority students who perceived that they were well-prepared for their graduate courses and accepted by their colleagues (faculty and fellow students), and who experienced well-articulated and structured PhD programs, were most likely to publish at rates comparable to their male majority peers. Women PhD students experienced significantly higher levels of distress than their male peers, both majority and minority, while both women and minority student distress levels were mitigated by clearly-articulated expectations, perceiving that they were well-prepared for graduate level courses, and feeling accepted by their colleagues.

FEEDBACK FOR LEGISLATIVE LETTERS

Our *Letter* is still new, and we would really appreciate your thoughts on it - after all, it's for you! So please follow [this link](#) to fill out a quick survey so that we can best meet your needs.