

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

April 1, 2019

Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

No April Fools jokes here - President Trump's budget proposal is not friendly to graduate education, proposing major cuts to science funding and student loans ([see our statement on his budget here](#)). While Congress isn't likely to take his proposal seriously, that doesn't mean that we're safe. Graduate and professional funding has been used as a bargaining chip in the past, and it's very possible that both programs and funding may get cut this year during the negotiations. We need you to contact your legislators and make the point clear: **We are not a bargaining chip**. Find out more about what you need to do in our [Call to Action](#) - and more about what's happened the last two weeks below.

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.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Net Price Calculators

[A new study has revealed](#) that some universities not abiding by the federal regulation that requires Net Price Calculators on their websites. This regulation applies to institutions whose students are eligible to take out Pell Grants and is designed to help prospective students determine the cost of attending. However, some schools are providing inaccurate or misleading information, or asks students to estimate their own costs.

Borrower Defense to Repayment

After spending much of the last two years fighting the Obama-era student loan regulations, the Department of Education (DE) lost that fight and has announced [new guidelines to implement the regulations](#). These guidelines give colleges 60 days to stop settling student complaints about federal student loans through arbitration, as well as apply the more lenient loan discharge standards to those disbursed after July 1, 2017.

Admissions Investigation

[The DE has begun investigating the eight universities](#) that have been implicated in the college admissions cheating and bribery scandal. They have been ordered to turn over documents, including marketing and admissions materials. Meanwhile, [many institutions are doing their own internal investigation](#), with some having begun rescinding admissions to students who may have been accepted as part of this scheme.

Student Loans

The student loan crisis has gotten to the point where [state lawmakers are attempting to address the issue](#). So far, nearly 200 bills have been introduced, most of them proposing loan forgiveness programs and others creating tax credits or deductions for loans or tuition.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

Executive Order

In response to an act of violence at the [University of Berkeley between two non-students](#), President Trump has signed an [executive order](#) directing federal agencies to ensure that existing free speech regulations on institutions of higher education are followed. Additionally, it ordered the DE to [publish program-level data on student outcomes](#), including earnings, debt, and default rates and to submit

policy recommendations by January on risk-sharing proposals for schools that accept student loan dollars. Secretary DeVos [issued a statement in support of the order](#).

While the order doesn't implement new guidelines, some have argued that that's part of the problem: [precisely how agencies should monitor and enforce this is unclarified](#), leaving administrators without guidance on which speech in which forms might cause them to lose access to billions of dollars in grants. Others have pushed back against the order, saying that free speech is central to university's missions, and that this order is a ["solution in search of a problem."](#) Even some conservatives have expressed disappointment with the order, citing a preference to avoid increased regulations and micromanaging from the federal level. However, [on campus conservative groups seem more optimistic](#) about this executive order, as they frequently report feeling silenced in spaces.

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

LEGISLATION

Appropriations

In addition to working on the spending caps for upcoming fiscal years, the Senate Budget Committee has begun releasing more information about their proposed budget for FY2020. A [Chairman's Mark](#) (press release) has been issued saying that the budget will call for a \$538 billion in deficit reduction over the next five years. The [Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget](#) has applauded the plan as one that is both realistic and fiscally responsible.

Meanwhile, [appropriators have begun planning their bills](#). The heads of several agencies have appeared before House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees. [Secretary DeVos was questioned](#) on her proposed defunding of the Special Olympics, on her replacing Acting Inspector General Sandra Bruce, changes to Title IX, slow responses to requests from the Department, and the proposed elimination of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. The committee [expressed concern](#) over the proposed changes of several higher education rules, rulemaking that may hinder HEA negotiations moving forward. Secretary DeVos made it clear that she had no interest in delaying the rulemaking.

The Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF), [France Cordova, appeared](#) before the House Appropriations Commerce-Justice-Science Subcommittee, where there was wide concern over the proposed cuts to science funding, a sentiment that also was heard in the House and Senate Energy-Water Subcommittees that fund the Department of Energy.

Early signs point to a pairing of the Defense and Education/HHS/Labor funding bills to help ensure that education receives the President's support. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) has announced he would like all of the spending bills passed by June 30th. **Now is the time to make your voice heard regarding support for science and education funding.**

Higher Education Act

The White House has issued their [priorities for the Higher Education Act](#), with emphasis on workforce development, simplify loan repayment, expanding Pell grants to include short-term programs, and improving the transparency of student outcomes. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chairman of the Senate HELP Committee, supports the proposal, but Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), the ranking member of HELP, has pointed out the contradiction between [claiming to help students](#) while also proposing capping federal loans for students in the same document.

Other Higher Education Legislation

[The PROTECT Students Act](#) has been proposed by Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) to curb predatory behavior in for-profit colleges, hence it's full name, "Preventing Risky Operations from Threatening the Education and Career Trajectories of Students Act of 2019". It [proposes](#) a more restrictive amount of federal dollars that for-profit colleges can take in as profit as well as codifies restrictions in line with President Obama's "Borrowers Defense to Repayment" program that the DE has opposed under Secretary DeVos.

Two other pieces of legislation, the [Understanding the True Cost of College Act](#), and the [Know Before you Owe Federal Student Loan Act](#), were proposed by a bipartisan group of Senators (Chuck Grassley [R-IA], Tina Smith [D-MN], and Joni Ernst [R-IA]) to help ensure that borrowers have access to appropriate financial aid information. Senators Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Pat Toomey (R-PA) introduced the [Classrooms to Careers Act](#) that would expand the Federal Work Study program to better align with their field of study (and grad students would be eligible).

To Watch:

[College Transparency Act \(S.800\)](#): Would require the federal government to release postsecondary data, including enrollment, completion, and post-college success. [Statement by Senator Bill Cassidy \(R-LA\)](#) (Bipartisan, companion bills in the House and Senate)

[Classroom to Careers Act \(unassigned\)](#): Would expand the type of work allowed for students in Federal Work-Study programs to include part-time and full-time arrangements in diverse work environments.

[Debt-Free College Act \(unassigned\)](#): Would match federal and state funding (one-to-one) to cover tuition, room, board, books, and supplies costs for students. Similar bills were proposed in the [House \(H.R. 1571\)](#) and [Senate \(S. 672\)](#)

[Housing for Homeless Students Act \(unassigned\)](#): Allows full-time students to be eligible for the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit

[Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act \(unassigned\)](#): Requests IHEs work with government to improve resources for vulnerable students

[Opportunities for Success Act of 2019 \(H.R. 792\)](#): Reauthorizes the Federal work-study program and includes authorization for graduate student access.

[Higher Education Dream Act of 2019 \(H.R. 1298\)](#): Expands federal financial aid opportunities to Dreamers and prevents institutions of higher education eligible to receive federal funds from discriminatory policies against students because of immigration status.

The Employer Participation in Repayment Act ([S. 460](#) and [H.R. 1043](#)): Companion legislation that allows employers to provide tax-free student loan repayment assistance (up to \$5,250 per year).

[Graduate Student Savings Act of 2019 \(H.R. 1195\)](#): Reintroduction of legislation that allows students to save fellowship funds for retirement

[Reach Act \(H.R. 662\)](#): Requires IHE to report hazing incidents in crime reports covered under Clery Act.

[Protecting JOBS Act \(S. 609\)](#): Prevents states that receive federal funding from the federal government from denying occupational licensure due to defaulting on student loans

[Student Right to Know Before You Go Act \(unassigned\)](#): Increases student and parent access to higher education programs including graduation rates, debt levels, earning potential, and more.

Hearings

There will be several hearings on the Hill this week related to higher education. We encourage you to tune in if you can:

Tuesday, April 2, 10 am: Senate HELP, “[Reauthorizing HEA: Addressing Campus Sexual Assault and Ensuring Student Safety and Rights](#)”

Wednesday, April 3, 9 am: House Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment, “[Strengthening Accountability in Higher Education to Better Serve Students and Taxpayers](#)”

Wednesday, April 3, 10 am: House Judiciary, “[H.R. 5, the Equality Act](#)” (sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination)

The “Dome Watch” App

If you want to stay on top of what’s going on in the House, be sure to download the app, “[Dome Watch](#)” (available for [iOS](#), [Android](#), and [the web](#)). [Designed for policy makers by policymakers \(specifically House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer\)](#), it’s used to track floor activity, vote breakdowns, and more. It’s the modern version of the bells that the Capitol has used for over a hundred years, and it’s open to the public. It also includes bill descriptions and caucus recommendations for each vote.

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

LITIGATION

Off-Campus Sexual Assault

The Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver is allowing a lawsuit to proceed that accuses Kansas State University of failing to investigate their sexual assaults that occurred at off-campus fraternity houses. The judge supported previous rulings that decided that since the fraternity is only open to students and is an “operation” of the University, and that the students were denied an equitable learning environment due to fear of running into their assailants on campus, the University had an obligation to respond.

IN RELATED NEWS...

CAMPUS CLIMATE

[Boston University is allowing graduate students paid vacation](#), with those on 12-month assignments receiving two weeks, and others getting prorated time off accordingly. The University’s decision comes with the recognition of the increasing stress graduate students face and the hopes that they will prioritize “self-care,” while also acknowledging that more needs to be done to help students. Other changes include providing childcare funding for graduate student parents to attend professional conferences and discounted dental health care.

RELEVANT READS

We’ve added a new section to our *Relevant Reads* - “News From You” - where we focus on stories that are happening at individual schools and graduate student organizations. If you send us news, we’ll include it here! Scroll down to see this edition’s!

[School Announces Efforts to Help Argosy Students After Closure](#)

[A Campus Is Not the Place for Free Speech](#)

[Unfairness in Campus Responses to Sexual Assault](#)

[Practical tips for overcoming the fear of failure – and success](#)

[ICYMI: The Lie at the Heart of the College Admissions Scandal](#)

[Here's how education reforms from the White House might impact you](#)

[A systemic failure: It's time to stop perpetuating elitism in higher education](#)

[5 lawsuits that could bring major change to higher ed](#)

[High Tech: Immigrants are Indispensable to U.S. Workforce](#)

[We now have evidence of the benefits of international students who stay and work](#)

[Student loan debt: The government broke it, and must fix it](#)

[Knocking Down Barriers for Student Voting](#)

[The next step for justice reform: Ending the ban on federal Pell Grants for eligible students behind ...](#)

[Higher Education Is Becoming More Inclusive Of Students With Intellectual Disabilities](#)

[Op-Ed: The Big Problem in Higher Ed Is Underfunding of Public Institutions](#)

[Few Options for Argosy Graduate Students](#)

[When Universities Shortchange Grad Students, Undergrads Suffer Too](#)

[Hunger and Homelessness Can Be Hidden Costs of Higher Education](#)

News From You

[Penn GSE develops peer support group to promote graduate student wellness](#)

[From vaccines to food deserts, meet UNC grad students pioneering award-winning research](#)

[\[MN\] Graduate School moves to increase communication between students and advisers](#)

[From the Dean of the \[Boulder\] Graduate School: Survey results on mentors, funding](#)

[\[Stanford\] Graduate students denounce soaring costs of dependent healthcare plan](#)

[Grad Assistants Strike at U Illinois-Chicago »](#)

REPORTS AND PRESENTATIONS

[The Congressional Budget Office's Work in 2018: A Report to the Congress, CBO:](#) Since 1975, CBO has produced nonpartisan analyses of budgetary and economic issues in support of the Congress. In 2018, CBO completed 947 formal cost estimates, 70 analytic reports and working papers, and many other products

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.