

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

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Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "T

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the government has been making decision to combat the effects of the virus and more. As of April 4th, [there have been over almost 301,000 cases with over 8,100 deaths](#). Secretary Betsy DeVos has temporarily ended student loan interest and has been working on her soon to be released Title IX changes. While President Trump and the CDC make announcements regarding COVID-19, Attorney General William Barr has voiced his opinion in a Transgender Athlete Case. The House and Senate passed the CARES Act which is the largest stimulus package ever approved by the US government but has limited effects on student loans.

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THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

With the coronavirus impacting the country, [President Trump and Secretary DeVos](#) announced on March 20th that all federal student loans will have their interest rates set to 0% for at least 60 days (ending May 12th at the earliest). The current administration has also [stopped seizing wages, tax refunds, and Social Security benefits on](#) people who default on their federal student loans. However, the Education Department is planning on placing a [6 month pause](#) on federal student loan payments by April 10, and will retroactively be implemented to March 13th.

Title IX

On March 26th, [Secretary DeVos](#) announced that the Office for Civil Rights is requiring major changes at Pennsylvania State University after the school did not address or protect students from Jerry Sandusky. The university must provide remedies for the survivors whose complaints were not handled correctly.

[Two-hundred and nine groups have urged federal officials to pause work on rewriting Title IX regulations during the coronavirus pandemic.](#) They argue that schools do not currently have the resources to review and implement new regulations and it would be an unnecessary stress. These regulations would: ensure notice, access to evidence, live hearings, and the ability to have a lawyer/ advocate cross-examine adverse witnesses for the accused, which are currently not in the Title IX process; more narrowly define the definition of sexual harassment; and does not hold schools accountable for failing to act unless there was “actual knowledge” of the harassment instead of the previous standard of “reasonable should know”. Supporters of the change argue that schools have known the new regulations were coming and should have been preparing for it.

THE WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

Federal Budget

The [U.S. Geological Survey](#) and [Department of Energy Applied Energy Research & Development](#) budgets were released at the end of March, and both had significant decreases. The U.S. Geological Survey was cut 24% (\$971 million), while the Trump Administration proposed eliminating the DOE Applied Energy R&D. Congress ignore the request to cut the DOE Applied Energy R&D last year.

Attorney General Barr Voices Opinion on Transgender Athletes Federal Case

Attorney General Barr has signed a statement of interest regarding a federal civil rights case. The [Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference](#) allows athletes to compete based on their gender identity instead of the sex they were born. However, female athletes have argued this puts them at a disadvantage when competing against other female athletes that were born male. Attorney Barr agrees with these students. While the current case is focused on high school athletics, it may have reaching consequences.

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

LEGISLATION

On March 25th, the [Senate reached a deal for a stimulus package](#) amid the COVID-19 pandemic (CARES Act, [S. 3548](#)). It will put around \$2 trillion into the economy by providing tax rebates, expanded unemployment

benefits, and business tax-relief provisions. [Healthcare relating to COVID-19 is also covered](#). It will also give a one-time check of \$1,200 for individuals who make less than \$75 thousand per year and emergency funding for transit and education. The House passed it on March 27, and it was sent to President Trump and [signed](#) that day. However, many noticed that the actual bill [does nothing for student loan borrowers](#) past what had been previously discussed by Trump and DeVos. It does however supply [funding to universities and organizations researching the coronavirus](#).

Also, Sen. Cory Booker [D-NJ], Doug Jones [D-AL], and Rep. Alma Adams [D-NC] and others have requested that Secretary DeVos [allows under resourced colleges and universities, particularly minority serving institutions, the flexibility to use designated federal funding for COVID-19 responses](#). Sens. Booker and Jones also have pressed for [\\$1.5 billion in emergency funding](#) for the same groups of school in the third supplemental appropriation package.

IN RELATED NEWS...

GRADUATE SCHOOL AND CAMPUS CLIMATE

Many universities are [suspending research](#) during the threat of coronavirus, except for the labs studying the virus. Many researchers are shifting their focus to analyzing data at home, reading, and writing. Some universities are also offering testing for COVID-19, in order to help hospitals.

OPPORTUNITIES AND WEBINARS

Join us for our **Virtual Advocacy Summit and Legislative Action Days!** Although the in-person Advocacy Summit in Washington D.C. was cancelled due to Covid-19. The virtual Advocacy Summit will include slide decks and recording of the presentations initially scheduled for the spring 2020 LAD and a virtual forum on Saturday, April 11 at 1 PM EST/ 10 AM PST ([Zoom link for event](#)). Presentations will be focused on the issues currently on the radar of the NAGPS and its membership include research funding, graduate worker employment environments, mental health, deterring sexual assault and gender crimes on college campuses, international student visa concerns, and open access. The forum will be a place for everyone to discuss areas of concern at their universities or in general.

The presentations and information are designed to prepare attendees for meetings with their representatives in the Capitol. The issues facing graduate and professional education has never been more important. NAGPS encourages scheduling meetings with representatives virtually to advocate for the needs of graduate and professional education in a time of such uncertainty. Congress will not act on these issues until we make our voices heard in Washington. Your story is powerful and collectively we can have an impact.

RELEVANT READS

Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

[Higher education should be diversified, accessible, and affordable](#)

The State of Higher Education

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/03/23/obstacles-completing-clinical-education-hours-risk-delaying-graduation-nurses>

[Coronavirus pandemic makes the perfect case for shortening medical education](#)

[As Times and Students Change, Faculty Change, Too?](#)

[Could the social distancing of COVID-19 revolutionize online learning and higher education?](#)

Career Advice

[Academic Advising Amid Social Distancing](#)

[At-Home Networking Strategies](#)

[Careers in a Changing Era: How Higher Ed Can Fight the Skills Gap and Prepare Students for a Dynamic World of Work](#)

[How to Prepare for an Effective Virtual Interview](#)

Higher Education Policy

[Virtual Thesis Defense](#)

[How a Pandemic Could Change Higher Education](#)