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MACOMB — State Rep. Rich Myers, R-Colchester, died Wednesday night at McDonough District Hospital after battling prostate cancer since earlier this year. He was 62.

The 94th District state representative died with his wife, Chris, and his daughter, Alison, by his side.

Myers had been in the Illinois House for 16 years and was re-elected last month.

Myers was a farmer in the Colchester area and was a Western Illinois University alumnus.

He was also an adjunct instructor in WIU’s Centennial Honors College. He taught the general honors course Inside State Government for 10 years.

“Rich Myers was a loyal Western Illinois University alumnus and was a tireless advocate for higher education in the state of Illinois,” WIU President Al Goldfarb said.

“His efforts on behalf of Western and for many west-central Illinois agencies and organizations were always greatly appreciated, as was his great integrity,” Goldfarb said.


“Rich was a gentleman, a legislative partner and a true public servant to his constituents. It is with great sadness that I mourn his passing,” he said. “Despite our political differences, Rich and I worked together well.”

Sullivan made an emotional statement Thursday morning on the floor of the Illinois Senate and asked for a moment of silence in Myers’ memory.

Macomb Mayor Mick Wisslead said Myers touched many lives in western Illinois.

“He was a real gentleman and a statesman,” Wisslead said. “The great thing was that he was able to work on both sides of the aisle, and that made things easier for the city of Macomb. He will sure be missed.”

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn also remembered Myers in a statement Thursday.

“Rich was a good man who served the people of Illinois for many years with a servant’s heart. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him,” Quinn said.

WIUM Radio reported that, in an October interview, Myers said he was up to the demands of another term in office. He said he had his good days and his bad days, but overall felt pretty good.

Myers said he was proud of his constituent service and his advocacy on behalf of local school districts and WIU.

A memorial service will be at 2 p.m. Sunday in the Grand Ballroom of the University Union at Western Illinois University. Burial will follow in Mount Auburn Cemetery in Colchester.
Macomb, Ill. — The funeral procession for Rep. Rich Myers, of Colchester, passes under a large flag displayed from the Macomb Fire Department's ladder truck Sunday afternoon. Myers, who passed away last week after a battle with cancer, was laid to rest at Mt. Auburn cemetery in Colchester after a memorial service at Western Illinois University. Speakers at the 90-minute service included Senators Bill Brady and John Sullivan.
Daughter fills father’s post at Midstate College

Meredith Bunch replaces her father R. Dale Bunch, who served for 45 years as president

By DAVE HANEY (dhaney@pjstar.com) Journal Star
Posted Dec 06, 2010 @ 11:28 PM

PEORIA — Midstate College has a new president.

The college's Board of Directors named Meredith N. Bunch as the new president and CEO of the college, effective last month.

Bunch, 38, takes over for her father, R. Dale Bunch, who served as president for 45 years and was responsible for moving the private college from downtown Peoria to its current location at Northmoor Road and Knoxville Avenue and taking it from a two-year, non-degree business training institution to a fully accredited, four-year college.

"He just decided it was time," said Meredith Bunch, who has worked at the college the past 15 years, most recently serving as vice president and chief operating officer of the college. "He will step back a little bit but he will probably still be involved."

R. Dale Bunch, 71, will remain as chairman of the Board of Directors, serving as a consultant to the college, Meredith Bunch said. R. Dale Bunch was the second president of the college since its been under the Midstate name.

Midstate is in its 122nd year of operation. The school dates to 1888, then known as Brown's Business College, offering veterans business courses in preparation for their civilian lives. It was located in the Prairie Building in Downtown from 1911 until 1998, when it moved into its current facility at 411 W. Northmoor Road.

The college now has an enrollment of about 685 and offers five bachelor's degree programs in business/administration, accounting, health services management, management information systems and real time reporting. Midstate also has eight associate's degree programs.
As Bill Studwell lay in bed, his body weak from lymphoma, all he could think about was writing the letter.

"I just need to get this done," he kept telling his daughter, who was befuddled by his sense of urgency but dutifully took dictation at his bedside.

On that hot and humid Sunday in August, Studwell, 74, was completely preoccupied by Christmas carols.

He seemed relieved as she typed the title of one particular carol in the letter, sealed the envelope and sent it to officials at Northern Illinois University.

Studwell died the next morning.

It was just a few months shy of the Christmas that was to culminate a 25-year project that sprung from Studwell's fascination with holiday music and grew into him being widely recognized as the nation's foremost expert on Christmas carols.

"In retrospect, he probably knew" his death was near, said his daughter, Laura Studwell, 32, in her Aurora home.

"He probably felt something," she said, wiping tears from her eyes. "He knew he had to make sure the tradition continued."

How it began

It all started with a humble holiday gift.

Studwell crafted a homemade Christmas present for a relative in the early 1970s, a pamphlet on "O Holy Night" based on his own research of the song's history, melody and lyrics.

His family raved at learning the little secrets of a tune they had heard hundreds of times before in church, on the radio, as background noise during holiday shopping.

And Studwell grew intrigued by the prospect of unearthing the pasts of other carols, the songs he had fallen in love with as a boy singing in his church choir in Stamford, Conn.

"The music, in addition to its artistry, conspires with other elements that affect the mind and senses — the lights, the colors, the tastes of food, even the feel of snow — to make us laugh and think, to feel warm and happy, to bind us all together," he told the Tribune a few years ago, explaining his fascination with holiday music.

He began studying every Christmas tune he could think of, often taking sabbaticals from his job as an
NIU library cataloger and library science professor to comb through history books.

In 1986, Studwell created a series called "Carol of the Year," where he would honor Christmas tunes annually and explain their origins and history in a newsletter sent out by the university. The simple project was featured in newspapers and radio programs across the country, and media came to consider Studwell the go-to carol expert each Christmas season.

The librarian gave 600 or so interviews, penned several books on Christmas music and edited dozens of others. He served as a consultant for the Disney film "A Christmas Carol," starring Jim Carrey — charged with ensuring all the music was period-appropriate.

"He loved the attention," said Laura Studwell, remembering how her dad would make everyone in the house sit silent during his phone interviews, as he would expound on the history of the Magi or why caroling door-to-door isn't as common today.

Christmas was his time of year. He would host huge holiday parties, singing classic Christmas carols in his strong, deep voice, as well as those he wrote. (His favorite original song was called "Christmas Grouch," sung to the tune of "Jingle Bells," bemoaning the hassles of shoveling snow, paying bills and other byproducts of the season.)

This year, as Laura Studwell faced her first holidays without her father, she struggled inside.

She didn't want to do Christmas. She feared she would start to cry each time she heard the carols her father spent most of his life commemorating and cherishing.

The Studwell family tradition was to put up the Christmas tree after Thanksgiving dinner and spend all night wrapping presents. But there seemed little point if Dad wouldn't be there to sneak by the tree and shake the packages near his ear like a kid, attempting to learn their contents before Christmas morning.

She didn't even want to put up the outdoor Christmas lights and decorations. Her boyfriend did so for her.

The little red and white bulbs were off the Saturday after Thanksgiving, as she suffered a particularly painful spell of missing her father.

Suddenly, she said, they flickered on.

A little unnerved, Laura Studwell shut them off and left for a yoga class.

She returned to find them twinkling once more.

"This is creepy," she thought to herself, shutting them off again.

A few hours later, the little bulbs flashed again, lighting up the snowman, little evergreens and other Christmas decorations she had been trying to ignore.

The eerie feeling subsided, replaced by a sense of calm. Her dad always had been a bit of a prankster.

"I just had this feeling my dad was there, playing with me," she said. "Like he was saying 'Cheer up. Get with the season. For me.'"
How it ended

From the beginning, Studwell had envisioned “Carol of the Year” as a 25-year series, set to end with its final song this Christmas season. As he grew sick and weak, he became fixated on naming the finale and making sure the quarter-century tradition could carry on with or without him.

It got to be all he talked about in his last weeks, his daughter remembers.

As they worked on that final letter to NIU, he scrawled out eight paragraphs on yellow legal paper, crossing out words here and there and replacing them in the margins. Laura Studwell typed and helped him conjure the appropriate dates and facts when his jaw clenched with frustration, though she privately thought his health would improve. She assumed the letter was due to her father's penchant for preplanning.

"I am requesting you do ‘Carol of the Year’ on your own, without my direct assistance," he wrote to his friend Joe King, who does public relations for NIU and helped him with the series for the last 13 years.

Two days before Thanksgiving, King spread the news via e-mail that the last song in the series was tinged with sorrow because the carol expert was gone.

"It is a natural last piece for focus, since it is frequently the final piece in carol performance sessions," Studwell explained in the letter.

King heard the song the other day while holiday shopping with his son and thought of his friend. It was bittersweet for him, knowing that Studwell wouldn’t hear it.

But as the words rang out, they were the ones the old professor had thought were just the right ones to end with: “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.”
Heartland program eyes collaboration with school districts

By Michele Steinbacher | msteinbacher@pantagraph.com
Posted: Thursday, December 2, 2010 10:45 pm

NORMAL — Heartland Community College is developing a model program designed to encourage closer collaboration with school districts to promote student success when they get to college.

“(The guided approach is) really synchronizing what happens in the K-12 schools with what happens at college once students make that transition,” said Allen Goben, Heartland president.

He said Heartland’s youth as an institution has meant its attention so far has focused primarily on building the institution itself, “but now is the right time for this” kind of initiative, he said.

On Thursday, campus leaders hosted nearly 50 area educational professionals, including more than a dozen superintendents, for a brainstorming session on how to best implement the program.

Goben announced Heartland has created an outreach team to visit kindergarten-through-12th-grade school districts. Topics covered may include ACT preparation, building dual-credit programs, college financial aid and career counseling, he said.

Superintendent Brad Hutchison of the Stanford-based Olympia school district was among those attending Thursday’s Partnership For Educational Success conference. His district was interested in exploring dual-credit offerings and ways of incorporating technology to deliver instruction.

Overall, he liked the opportunity to build collaboration between the different levels of education.

“Articulation is always a good idea,” he said.

After lunch, educators looked at a variety of topics, including ways to develop career exploration for teens, how to expand college-course offerings for teens, and how to build a cadre of community volunteers in high schools. Bringing senior citizens into the schools as volunteers is an idea explored in September at the Summit on Aging and Education at Illinois State University.

Padriac Shinville, Heartland academic support dean and one of the event’s organizers, described Thursday’s sessions as a chance to continue conversations about student success and to build on education reform goals established by the state’s P-20 Council.

The initiative’s goals include increasing college access and success, easing transition to college and reducing remediation, and promoting lifelong learning.
Kendall College dining room makes the grade in Michelin, too

Posted by Shia K. at 12/2/2010 6:25 AM CST on Chicago Business

Lost in all the Michelin restaurant news last month was mention that the Kendall College dining room also made the French dining guide's 2011 restaurant list for Chicago.

The school, under the direction of Christopher Koetke, joins just three U.S. culinary-school restaurants to be recognized by the prestigious restaurant reviewer.

It's not in star or even Bib Gourmand territory. But inclusion in the little red book reflects "the passion and dedication of the students and faculty," Mr. Koetke said in a release, adding, "we are thrilled."

The guide describes the experience this way:

"Imagine that dining out could be a sneak peek at a future Michelin-starred chef. . . . Forgive the jitters as servers-in-training deliver your meal, which you can watch being prepared through floor-to-ceiling windows onto the kitchen."

The review recommends the amuse-bouche, intermezzos and very good bread.

Kendall College is located at 900 N. North Branch St. in Chicago.
Lake Land served 20,000-plus students
spring semester

By HERB MEEKER, Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, December 4, 2010 6:00 am

MATTOON - After 40 years of offering classes, Lake Land College has reached the 20,000 student enrollment mark this year.

Based on an analysis of spring enrollment, college officials determined recently there were 20,003 students enrolled in at least one class, ranging from the main campus at Mattoon to the educational centers at Effingham, Marshall, Pana, plus commercial or extension education centers and online courses. The last previous record was 16,184 students counting one course, part-time or full-time students in 2009.

Normally, the announcement on total enrollment is made in January with the release of a state report on all colleges, but Lake Land officials decided to announce it earlier this time due to passing the landmark of 20,000 students.

"When the final numbers came in, we reached 20,003 students. This is a great day for Lake Land," said Scott Lensink, Lake Land president. "I want to thank the students who choose Lake Land and the faculty and staff for providing an outstanding educational experience for our students."

Lake Land has been experiencing a steady growth in enrollment throughout its history, but the past decade has seen a boom in the student body due to many factors, including the rising cost of four-year universities, more online course choices and the major downturn in the economy.

"As a community college we provide an excellent education for a reasonable price. Right now, many people see the value of that opportunity," said Tina Stovall, vice president for student services.

But layoffs and reduced work hours have many people seeking education to start a new career or improve their job status with their current employer. Many of the laid-off employees are called dislocated workers. And that number will undoubtedly increase in coming months with the announcement that 129 Ampad employees in Mattoon will lose their jobs during 2011.

"We do have more dislocated workers enrolled here and the loss of a job can impact the whole family. So some have made the choice to stay closer to home while taking classes with us," Stovall said.

More government assistance to dislocated worker programs has made it possible for the unemployed to enroll with community colleges like Lake Land.

Of the students enrolled 10,085 were enrolled in specific courses or short-term training or not pursuing a traditional college degree or certificate. Many of these courses and programs are offered off-campus, on-site at businesses or industries, extension centers or in high schools throughout the college district that covers much of East Central Illinois.

Less than a third of the students enrolled in traditional degree and certificate programs will seek transfer to a four-year university - 2,752 out of 9,918. Many of the degree hopefuls will seek jobs after finishing courses at Lake Land.
The most popular majors for transfer students are business, elementary education, pre-med, pre-pharmacy and pre-law. The career-bound students are majoring mostly in nursing, early childhood education and criminal justice, officials said.

The enrollment increases over the last few years have placed a challenge on the college.

In recent years Lake Land added education centers at Marshall and Pana with the cooperation of those communities.

The college has completed major renovations on the main campus at Mattoon, including a remake of the library and expanding the West Education Building to meet student needs. Green energy programs are designed to make climate control more comfortable for students and employees in older campus buildings while saving on energy use.

"We are working hard to respond to the student increase. But we have an outstanding reputation and people do well in college or work when they move beyond us," Stovall said.
Senate lacks quorum, can't consider Institute of Aviation plan

Mon, 12/06/2010 - 10:41pm | Christine Des Garennes

URBANA – A proposal to close the University of Illinois Institute of Aviation will not be considered by the university's senate until early next year.

The legislative body of faculty and students did not have enough members present Monday afternoon to formally vote on an administrative proposal to end aviation programs on campus. The senate's next regularly scheduled meeting is Feb. 28.

UI interim Chancellor Robert Easter and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Richard Wheeler have proposed phasing down the programs and eventually eliminating the bachelor's degree in aviation human factors, the professional pilot curriculum and the master's degree in human factors. Admissions activity would end in Fall 2011; current students would be allowed to complete their degrees, according to the proposal.

Their announcement, made earlier this fall, came after the Stewarding Excellence budget review committee questioned the future of the institute in its report released in the spring.

Administrators have said ending the institute's programs could save the campus $500,000 to $750,000 a year.

The proposal, sent to the senate's educational policy committee, is not only subject to approval by the senate, but also the UI Board of Trustees and eventually the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

"Over the next two months we're going to work on finding ways to continue the institution," said UI student Cole Goldenberg. A junior in the human factors degree program in the Institute of Aviation, Goldenberg said programs could be moved into another college on campus, student fees could be increased and enrollment could be increased.

In its response to the elimination proposal, the institution stated that the university "must ask itself what is the value of eliminating the Institute of Aviation." The institute also maintains that elimination of the pilot program could jeopardize over $1 million in research funding. There are also "solid examples of a strong contribution by the Institute of Aviation," to campus, it stated.

The institute dates back to 1946.
Chicago Tribune, December 6, 2010

Vote affirms MCC stance on reviews

By Lawerence Synett TribLocal reporter
Monday at 6:00 a.m.

The state Senate’s latest move to keep performance evaluations private doesn’t mean McHenry County College is out of the woods when it comes to releasing documents involving its former president.

The public access officer in the state attorney general’s office has said the review of ex-president Walt Packard should be made public, but the college is vowing to keep up its fight to not release it.

“We are very pleased with the outcome of the vote downstate,” said Patricia Stejskal, MCC’s Freedom of Information Act officer. “We’ve said all along, performance evaluations are a personal matter. Proper protocol has been followed every step of the way, and we will continue to do so.”

The Illinois Freedom of Information Act determines what documents must be released and which can remain protected. Legislators voted earlier this year to keep evaluations secret. Gov. Pat Quinn then used his amendatory veto to say only reviews of police officers should be private and all others public.

The House rejected Quinn’s changes and now the Senate has followed suit, voting 48-3 to keep the evaluations private.

Cara Smith, the AG’s public access counselor, said that despite the vote, her office is analyzing the impact the measure will have on MCC and others.

“The question when you are analyzing a change in law is whether or not it’s substantive or procedural,” she said. “The General Assembly has spoken, and we have to figure out how this changes the landscape.”

A blogger and another newspaper requested copies of Packard’s evaluations when the board of trustees would not say what led to sudden negotiations for a separation agreement with him. He was kept on at the school in a different role for more than a year at a cost of $188,000, and the school still is paying almost $1,000 per month for his health insurance.

The request for release was denied by the college as an invasion of personal privacy. In September, the public access counselor recommended the evaluations be released, but MCC has continued to refuse and has asked for a court review.

College officials maintain that releasing personnel reports would jeopardize its relationship with employees.

But Smith said performance evaluations should not be considered an invasion of privacy.

“I’d be hard-pressed to find more public information,” she said.

If she continues to recommend that the documents be made public, MCC would continue with the court review process, Stejskal said. That process could take six to nine months.

Packard stepped down in February 2009 after six years as president, but represented the college as president emeritus until June 30. At the time, college officials said he was leaving to take care of his ailing wife. MCC board chair Mary Miller, who was a trustee during Packard’s tenure, said the board believed it was time for him to leave because the college needed to move in a different direction.

The resignation agreement limits staff from saying more.
CARBONDALE - One of Southern Illinois University Carbondale's veteran administrators will be stepping down as a result of a restructuring announced by Chancellor Rita Cheng on Monday.

Larry Dietz, vice chancellor for student affairs since 2000, is no longer serving in that capacity and the departments he oversaw now have different reporting lines, according to a news release issued by the university Monday evening. Student success is the focus of the change, Cheng said, as SIUC attempts to create a "University College" model of doing business.

"The University College model has proven effective at colleges and universities throughout the country. The steps we are taking build on Saluki First Year, which is having a positive impact on our first-year students," Cheng said. "This expanded approach will help us more effectively meet the needs of our first- and second-year students and help them achieve their goal of earning a degree."

These offices once managed under the Division of Student Affairs will now report to Gary Minish, incoming provost and senior vice chancellor: New Student Programs, Career Services, Supplemental Instruction, Pre-Major Advisement, University 101, Center for Academic Success, Student Support Services, Residential Life and International Programs and Services.

Peter Gitau, current dean of students at SIUC, will have oversight of Disability Support Services, Veterans Services, Student Legal Services, Student Judicial Affairs, and Multicultural Programming. Gitau reports to Minish.

The bursar's office is now part of enrollment management.

Kevin Bame, vice chancellor for administration and finance, will have oversight of University Housing, Recreational Sports and Services, Student Health Center, Counseling Center, Rainbow's End, Student Center and Student Development.

SIUC spokesman Rod Sievers said the campus will realize some cost-savings long term but stressed finances weren't the primary reason for the restructuring.

"Dr. Dietz remains an employee in the university and his role will be determined in the coming year," Sievers said, adding there will be no immediate change to Dietz's salary.

Dietz issued the following statement Monday: "During the next year, I will assume some administrative and academic responsibilities that will allow me to serve the university, including as a tenured professor of educational administration and higher education. There are many ways to make positive contributions to the university and to helping students, and I am looking forward to those opportunities."
ELGIN — Elgin Community College is the fastest-growing college in Illinois, according to a special report released late last month by “Community College Week” magazine.

That special report also ranked ECC the 13th fastest-growing community college of its size — 10,000 enrollments or more — in the country.

And that comes as no surprise to the college, ECC President David Sam said in a written statement.

“This data is no surprise to us as we experience firsthand how our students rely on this college as a resource to meet their academic and career needs,” Sam said.

The magazine based its rankings on enrollment between the fall 2008 and fall 2009 semesters. Elgin’s enrollment increased 19 percent during that time — more than twice as much as national community college enrollment, which increased 8.3 percent, according to the report.

ECC has 12,219 students enrolled for the fall semester, which will end with commencement on Friday, Dec. 17. That’s a 4.4 percent increase over the number of students enrolled the same time last year, and the third straight semester it has broken its own record enrollment, the college said.

The community college pointed to the number of its students continuing their education there semester after semester when it released the fall enrollment at the start of the school year. That population has grown 12.3 percent this year to 7,553 students.

And Philip Garber, the college’s executive director of planning and institutional effectiveness, named “lot of different reasons” for its continued growth after the magazine’s special report was published.

One is that ECC hasn’t raised its tuition from $91 a credit hour in four years, Garber said. Others include factors outside the college’s control, such as the high unemployment rate and continued population growth in parts of Kane, Cook and DuPage counties served by Community College District 509, he added.

“Lots of folks are unfortunately out of work, and — what you see historically — with an increase in the unemployment rate, you also see an increase in enrollment at community colleges,” Garber said. “Folks can’t find jobs, so they go back to school.”

ECC’s growth has increased 35 percent overall since spring 2008, according to the college. It also has awarded 27 percent more degrees and certificates since summer 2005, according to its data.

That puts the college fifth in Illinois and 61st in the country for awarding one-year certificates, according to a special report by “Community College Week” released in June.

But Garber said, “I don’t know how long that will be sustainable. We’d love that. We’d love to be on top forever.”
Physics professor to chair search for new UI chancellor

Tue, 12/07/2010 - 9:00am | Julie Wurth

URBANA – A physics professor will lead the search for a new chancellor for the University of Illinois' Urbana-Champaign campus.

President Michael Hogan on Monday chose Professor Doug Beck to chair the search committee that will recommend potential successors for interim Chancellor Robert Easter, who has served since former Chancellor Richard Herman resigned under pressure in October 2009. Easter plans to retire.

Beck was one of two faculty members recommended by the campus senate in an online poll that ended Monday. The other professor, Nicholas Burbules, will also be a member of the search committee.

Other committee members will be chosen over the next week by students and/or faculty in the Urbana-Champaign Senate. Under senate rules, the search committee consists of a faculty chairman, eight other faculty, three students, one dean or director, one academic professional and one staff member. A list of nominees is available online.

The search panel will recommend a short list of candidates to Hogan, who will then submit one for approval to UI trustees.

The hope is to name a new chancellor by the end of May and have that person on board for the 2011-12 school year, officials said Monday. Among the committee's first tasks will be to create a job description and choose an executive search firm.

"Everyone wants the process to get up and running as soon as possible," Burbules said. "We want this position filled and settled."

Beck said he may try to schedule a meeting of the search committee before the end of December, but it could be difficult with final exams and students leaving town.

Whoever is named chancellor will also carry the title of "vice president" under administrative changes approved by UI trustees last month, and will need to be able to navigate both roles, Beck said.

"We need to be looking for a strong leader for this campus. He's really our champion, in dealing with the rest of the university system," he said.

Beck, an award-winning physicist who holds degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, joined the UI faculty in 1989. He is leader of a major collaborative project at Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility to investigate "strange quarks" with a superconducting spectrometer.

The board of trustees will be kept apprised of the search's progress but won't be involved in interviewing candidates unless Hogan requests it, trustees said Monday. The board's Governance, Personnel and Ethics Committee met to discuss the board's role in upcoming administrative searches.

Trustee Pamela Strobel said the goal is to make it "clear to the world" that the president is in charge of
those who report directly to him, including the chancellors and vice presidents.

However, trustees said they want to be regularly apprised of the search's progress, and Hogan said "any president would be crazy not to keep the board informed on the process and credentials of the candidates."

"The message we want to send is it's Mike's job to choose, but we would have input along the way," said Trustee Karen Hasara.

Trustees have been more involved in past searches, including the selection of Herman as chancellor. Trustee James Montgomery said the board also had a hand in the appointments of UI Chicago Chancellor Paula Allen Meares, as well as Mrinalini Rao, vice president for academic affairs, and Walter Knorr, vice president, comptroller and chief financial officer.

"There was a desire to stay on the same page," Montgomery said.

A review by the UI of seven peer universities showed that governing boards have different levels of involvement for high-level searches, said board secretary Michele Thompson. At Indiana, Michigan and Missouri, boards approve a candidate recommended by the president, who makes his selection from a list forwarded by a search committee. At Texas, Purdue and California, members of governing boards sit on the search committee. And in Wisconsin, the board of regents has its own committee that works in parallel with the search committee and actually interviews candidates.

Burbules said later he was pleased by the UI trustees' decision, and by Hogan's stated desire for a campus screening committee even in the case of an internal appointment, to provide advice and ensure credibility.

"They were the right things to say, consistent with previous practice and university statutes," Burbules said.

The UI has several top-level searches under way or about to start. The UI Springfield has appointed a search committee for a chancellor to replace the retiring Richard Ringheisen. A provost's search is under way at the UI Chicago campus, and the other two campuses have interim provosts as well.

And trustees last month approved creation of a vice president for health affairs. Hogan has said he plans a national search for the position, and the intent is to move "post haste," said UI spokesman Thomas Hardy.

"Restructuring can't be as effective as they want it to be until we get these positions filled," he said.
SiUC Chancellor Rita Cheng said university college restructuring will lead to an overall smoother operation on the campus.

The biggest change is coming to Student Affairs with Vice Chancellor Larry Dietz stepping down for reassignment and his position remaining open for the time being. According to a staff letter Monday, Cheng said Dietz may assume other administrative duties or teaching responsibilities next semester. In addition, Student Affairs offices now report directly to Provost Gary Minish.

She said Dietz' salary, which is $185,668 annually, also will change when he vacates the position. However, the change in salary is not yet known.

Cheng said the various offices were too far separated from one another and she believes that putting them closer together will lead to a well-oiled machine. The model is similar to a program at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. This includes taking programs such as Saluki First Year, multicultural programs and disability support services to report directly to Peter Gitau, associate vice chancellor and dean of students. He reports to Minish. Departments such as financial aid will merge with the bursar office to make life easier for students and the staff.

New Student Programs, Career Services, Supplemental Instruction, Pre-Major Advisement, University 101, Center for Academic Success and Student Support Services and Residential Life report directly to Minish.

Cheng said it is important that the different departments are in contact with each other and working as a close team, rather being isolated from one another. She said she is "convinced that we have most of the programs in place for student success but didn't have them aligned to ensure close coordination to improve retention and recruitment."

President Glenn Poshard said Cheng has his support.

"The (Board of Trustees), the president and the search committee for a new chancellor were all in agreement that the leadership of the campus community was going to require hard and difficult choices to be made," Poshard said. "That part - in the area of enrollment - the university needed leadership to reverse the decline and the authority lies wholly with the chancellor to determine the appropriate organizational structure for the campus."
North Central College is offering a new option to earn both a bachelor’s degree and a master of leadership studies degree in just five years.

Students accepted into this program earn both a bachelor’s degree — in any discipline — and the master of leadership studies with the completion of 141 credit hours.

“You’re effectively getting a full year of graduate school for free. You get out in five years with a pair of degrees, giving you a tremendous competitive advantage,” said Thomas D. Cavenagh, Schneller Sisters Professor of Leadership, Ethics and Values, coordinator of the master of leadership studies program and professor of business law and conflict resolution.

The option offers a great deal of flexibility, since participants may earn their undergraduate degree in any of the more than 55 majors offered by NCC. NCC’s master of leadership studies degree offers four areas of concentration: higher education leadership, professional leadership, social entrepreneurship and sports leadership.

“This is a great way to prepare for a professional terminal degree — a law degree or a Ph.D. — because you’ve demonstrated a capacity to do graduate work,” Cavenagh said. It’s also an opportunity to prepare for careers in higher education and other fields. “We hope to build a student body that comes from a variety of undergraduate disciplines.”

NCC undergraduate students with a minimum grade point average of 3.33 may apply to the program any time during their junior year of college through the first term of their senior year. Students may count a maximum of 12 graduate hours toward the 120 hours required for their undergraduate degree.
Committee will review all doctoral programs at UI

Thu, 12/09/2010 - 9:00am | Paul Wood

URBANA – An 18-member committee will review every doctoral program on this campus of the University of Illinois.

Interim Vice Chancellor Richard Wheeler said Wednesday the team will look at doctoral programs in their entirety, not at specific programs.

"It's not the goal of the review to end any one program, but it is a goal to get us a clear view of what programs we do have," he said.

The review comes after reports from more than a dozen Stewarding Excellence committees suggest cost-cutting moves, including shutting down the Institute of Aviation and the Police Training Institute.

"This is a different process, one we've been talking about a long time. This process didn't seem appropriate in the thick of the Stewarding Excellence reviews," Wheeler said.

Debasish Dutta, dean of the Graduate College, will head the committee.

The charge letter to the committee is available online.

Wheeler said the assessment "will address fundamental questions about the overall scope of doctoral education at Illinois."

"In addition to the size, quality, demand and effectiveness of individual doctoral programs, this assessment will take into account measures of success for each program (e.g., time to degree, completion rates, job placements, etc.)"
DACC among top 10 in country for enrollment growth

Thu, 12/09/2010 - 8:00am | Pat Phillips

DANVILLE – The statistics are in, and Danville Area Community College has made the top 10 among public community colleges for growing enrollment.

A comparison of fall enrollment for 2008 and 2009 showed an increase of 32 percent – going from 2,722 students to 3,584, an increase of 862 – which tied DACC with three other schools in the 2,500-4,999 enrollment category.

College President Alice Marie Jacobs said the growth can be attributed to a number of reasons, in addition to the economic downturn that has put a number of people out of work, in need of retraining or seeking new careers.

"We also have more College Express students (those receiving both high school and college credit for course work)," Jacobs said. "Having state and nationally recognized faculty members also shows the quality of our staff."

The growth figures still took Jacobs by surprise. The ranking in Community College Weekly was based on data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

"It was certainly exciting to be in the top 10," Jacobs said. "It didn't occur to me we would even be in the top 50. I guess we're focused on what is happening day-to-day."

Enrollment was up another 129 students for the 2010 fall semester, for a total of 3,713 people enrolled.

Nancy Boesdorfer, director of institutional effectiveness, compiles the statistics that are mandated by the state and federal government and which are also used when applying for various grants.

"We also track how many students are retained and if they are successful. We look at where students aren't successful and try to determine what can be done," Boesdorfer said. "We help in evaluating which courses and curriculums will best serve the needs of the community now and in the future."

Boesdorfer said more students are going to community colleges instead of directly to a four-year university.

"Students here can still meet basic requirements of the first two years at a four-year school, make a start on future career coursework and save money while staying at home the extra two years," Boesdorfer said.

The college will begin offering sessions for high school sophomores and their parents to learn more about career requirements, financial aid and course offerings at DACC.

"Community colleges offer vocational skills and a taste of the college experience before heading off to a bigger campus," Jacobs said. "Many gain skills that take them directly into the work force because of our ties with local business and industry."

"What I don't think people realize is that we are also serving a good portion of the top students from area
high schools," she added. "Thirty-five percent of Vermilion County high school honor student graduates are now attending DACC."

Here are the enrollments of the 10 community colleges with the fastest enrollment growth, from Community College Week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Fall 2008</th>
<th>Fall 2009</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valdosta Technical College</td>
<td>Ga.</td>
<td>2,471</td>
<td>3,578</td>
<td>1,107</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Tech Community College-Columbus</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>3,240</td>
<td>4,647</td>
<td>1,407</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta Technical College</td>
<td>Ga.</td>
<td>3,308</td>
<td>4,740</td>
<td>1,432</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Georgia Technical College</td>
<td>Ga.</td>
<td>2,091</td>
<td>2,865</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgecombe Community College</td>
<td>N.C.</td>
<td>2,377</td>
<td>3,249</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy Tech Community College-Whitewater</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>3,451</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northshore Technical College</td>
<td>La.</td>
<td>2,562</td>
<td>3,384</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany Technical College</td>
<td>Ga.</td>
<td>3,004</td>
<td>3,961</td>
<td>957</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flathead Valley Community College</td>
<td>Mont.</td>
<td>1,899</td>
<td>2,501</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danville Area Community College</td>
<td>Ill.</td>
<td>2,722</td>
<td>3,584</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Higher Ed Commission recommends performance-based funding

By Kimberly Pohl
12/7/2010

Those charged with evaluating higher education budgeting practices in Illinois say the state is endangering the quality, reach and effectiveness of its colleges and universities and therefore endangering its citizens.

A report submitted this week to Gov. Pat Quinn and the General Assembly makes recommendations on how to get the state back on the path to success.

It’s the result of a six-month study by the Higher Education Finance Study Commission, made up of more than 20 business, education and political leaders convened by the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

One controversial, yet key reform is a funding shift based on performance instead of enrollment. Performance-based funding creates incentives for institutions to boost performance because the more success they exhibit in meeting state goals, the more funding they receive, the commission states.

“The fact is we have state colleges that have been historically performing at very poor levels in terms of graduation and retention rates,” said state Rep. Fred Crespo, a Hoffman Estates Democrat serving as the commission’s House speaker appointee. “That to me is not acceptable when you consider every college is being funded by state dollars.”

While not intended to be punitive, there’s no avoiding the fact some institutions would see drastic cuts under the new model.

Though hesitant to single any one out, Crespo said it doesn’t make sense to have four-year colleges with “quasi-open enrollment,” calling them glorified community colleges.

“A lot of students who might not meet the threshold to enter a four-year institution go there, get a loan, get a MAP (Monetary Award Program) grant, and then don’t finish their degree,” Crespo said. “It’s a disservice to the student and a disservice to the taxpayer.”

Crespo said it then becomes vital to support at-risk students by creating funding incentives for institutions that foster success.

The report highlights research showing colleges are starving for state dollars while the burden of financing education has increasingly fallen on students and families as the state’s financial aid system has eroded.

Though the concept is generally in its infancy, transitioning toward performance-based funding wouldn’t be unique to Illinois.

The Ohio Board of Regents’ chancellor spoke to the commission about the state’s decision to base subsidies at four-year universities on course completions, with more funds for completion by poorer
students. Schools are receiving at least 99 percent of their previous year’s funding during the first year, allowing time for improvement.

However, changing the funding model for community colleges has proved more challenging since students enroll for a number of reasons. As a result, Ohio adopted “success points” based on student progress toward certain benchmarks. Five percent of funding is based on success points, with the allocation expected to grow.

Indiana, Tennessee and Texas are among states that also use some sort of performance-based funding, according to the report.

The Illinois commission made several other recommendations including investing more in postsecondary education and developing a financial aid policy that expands access to success.

It also urges the state to reduce the burden of unfunded state mandates. One example is the Illinois Veterans Grant for tuition waivers, which Crespo says means well but creates additional budget hardships for colleges.

Crespo said the next step is to hold hearings through the higher education committee, develop a performance-based funding formula and introduce legislation.

“We understand this will be a battle, but we need to start somewhere,” Crespo said.
Kaplan Higher Ed cutting 185 Chicago jobs

By: Todd J. Behme and Ann Weiler December 07, 2010

(Crain's) — Kaplan Higher Education is eliminating more than 700 jobs, about 185 of them from its Chicago operations.

The Chicago-based for-profit education company said in a news release that the cuts, totaling about 770 positions, amount to about 5% of its total workforce.

A spokeswoman confirmed the cuts Tuesday and provided the Chicago job losses. She declined to release details about the positions to be eliminated.

In the statement, Kaplan Higher Education CEO Jeff Conlon said slowing enrollment takes part of the blame. “More importantly, we have made a strategic decision to become more selective in the students we enroll, focusing on students who are most likely to thrive in a rigorous academic environment and meet their financial obligations,” he said. “These factors have led to a shift in our personnel needs.”

Early this year, Kaplan Higher Education sought to expand its office space with a long-term Loop lease.

But for-profit education companies, including DeVry Inc. in Downers Grove and Hoffman Estates-based Career Education Corp., have been under pressure lately from the Obama administration and regulators who have criticized the industry, saying students are ill-served by such programs because they emerge with heavy debt loads but lack the skills they need to prepare them for jobs.

Kaplan Higher Education — a unit of Kaplan Inc., which is owned by Washington Post Co. — has more than 100,000 students enrolled at 75 campus-based schools and online operations across the country.

News of the job cuts was first reported by the Wall Street Journal.
IBHE considers changes in state funding criteria

Posted: Wednesday, December 8, 2010 5:30 am
CHARLESTON

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) heard a report Tuesday on a state commission's recommendation that state funding for universities be linked to graduation rates and other performance factors.

An IBHE press release stated that the Illinois Higher Education Finance Study Commission, at the direction of the legislature, is finalizing recommendations for reforming the way Illinois finances its higher education system.

The commission will recommend the state move toward a performance-based model to allocate a share of new state resources to achieving the state's goals of increasing degree production and improved affordability for students. The recommendations will be made to the governor and the state legislature.

Executives from IBHE delivered a report on the commission's recommendations during the board's meeting Tuesday afternoon at Chicago-Kent College of Law.
Suburbs watch DREAM Act progress

By Kerry Lester
12/8/2010 10:28 PM

A measure that would help millions of children raised illegally in the suburbs and around the country become citizens cleared a major hurdle Wednesday, but faces an even bigger one in a few hours’ time.

By a 216-198 vote, the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DREAM Act, passed the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lawmakers split largely along party lines, with suburban Democrats Melissa Bean, Bill Foster, Debbie Halvorson and Jan Schakowsky voting for the legislation, and Republicans Judy Biggert, Peter Roskam and Don Manzullo voting against it.

The legislation heads to the Senate for an expected vote Thursday.

First proposed by Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin and Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch in 2001, the DREAM Act would give qualifying undocumented youths a six-year-long conditional path to citizenship that requires completion of a college degree or two years of military service.

The legislation stipulates that immigrant youths taking part in the program must have entered the country before their 16th birthday, and have resided in the U.S. for five years before enactment of the law. Those who have committed felonies, voter fraud or marriage fraud would be disqualified.

The vote, supporters say, is an important step toward a bipartisan solution to the country’s immigration system, which both Democrats and Republicans say needs major reform.

“Give them the chance,” a passionate Rep. Luis Gutierrez, a Chicago Democrat and longtime DREAM Act supporter, told his colleagues on the House floor.

“Let’s say that their work, their sweat and their toil will be responded to. We know there are millions of undocumented workers their parents. They were wrong about the Irish, they were wrong about the Italians … they are wrong about the immigrants today. Let this Congress say that they are for immigrants.”

The Congressional Budget Office recently estimated that the boost a crop of better-educated young people would bring to the economy would ultimately outweigh the costs of college tuition for program participants.

Opponents including Rep. Lamar Smith, a Texas Republican warned of massive fraud that might take place, and that federal government has little ability to check whether the claims of applicants are in fact true.

“It puts the interest of illegal immigrants ahead of American citizens,” Smith said.

At a news conference at the Capitol building Wednesday afternoon, Durbin spoke of the impetus behind his filing of the legislation a decade ago: a local Korean mother’s fight to help her undocumented daughter, who had been accepted to Juilliard, stay in the country to further her education.
Durbin said he called immigration authorities on the family's behalf and was told the only option was to send the girl back to Korea.

“These children were not driving when their parents came to America,” Durbin said. “They have been trying to drive through the obstacles.”

Durbin’s obstacle may well be the Senate, where the 60 votes needed for the legislation’s passage are not expected to materialize.

Democrats attempted to pass the legislation in September by attaching it to a defense authorization bill, which also included repealing of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on allowing openly gay troops to serve in the military. It failed, with little Republican support.

Durbin said he believes progress has been made since then.

Fanny Martinez of Addison is among the illegal immigrants who hope to benefit from the DREAM Act. Martinez is a 20-year-old honors student at Dominican University, a volunteer at a local domestic violence shelter, and a student leader who is married to a U.S. soldier now in Afghanistan. She said late Wednesday she was hopeful that “good work” would continue in the Senate Thursday.

Members of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights plan to concentrate efforts on attempting to persuade Sen. Mark Kirk to vote for the legislation, coalition spokeswoman Catherine Salgado said.

“Tomorrow morning we’re going to have a delegation of youth delivering a letter asking Senator Kirk for his support,” Salgado said. “We’re also reaching out to all our members and also leaders to make the calls to the Senate to ask him to vote yes.”

Kirk, a self-described social moderate, declined for months to reveal his stance on the legislation, first noting at an Oct. 19 debate that “this is not the time to do this.”

Kirk reiterated that stance to the Daily Herald in late November.
Civil-rights panel weighs in on where minorities fare best in STEM fields

By Kevin Kiley
December 6, 2010

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in one of two reports released on Monday, weighed in on the question of whether minority students who pursue science degrees leave those disciplines in disproportionate numbers because they are admitted to colleges where their academic preparation falls below the institution's median.

The other report looked at the merits of historically black colleges and universities, or HBCU's, in educating minority students.

The report on minority perseverance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—the STEM disciplines—makes recommendations based on the statements of experts who briefed the panel at a hearing held in September 2008.

Most of the experts who testified at that briefing subscribed to the "mismatch" hypothesis, which holds that minority students fare better in those disciplines if they attend less-demanding institutions where there is not a significant gap in their level of academic preparation and that of other students.

Those experts included Richard H. Sander, a professor of law at the University of California at Los Angeles, and Rogers Elliott, an emeritus professor of psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth College, who have argued that race-conscious admissions policies actually harm many of their intended beneficiaries.

The commission's report, "Encouraging Minority Students to Pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Careers," also includes individual statements from members of the commission, and a majority of them accepted the mismatch theory.

"The research presented at this briefing provides strong reason to believe that attending the most competitive school is not always best—at least for students who aspire to a degree in science or engineering," wrote Commissioner Gail Heriot.

The bipartisan commission consists of four Republicans, two Democrats, and two nonaffiliated members.

Over all, the commission concluded that, at the colleges the panel studied, admissions preferences based on ethnicity resulted in higher attrition rates for minority students who entered intending to study a STEM discipline.

When black and white students enter with similar academic credentials, black students are actually more likely to graduate with a science degree, the report says. It is only when minority students' academic credentials are not close to those of their peers that the problem emerges, it says.

The commission said colleges should warn students whose academic credentials are less than the institution's median about the impact of that deficit, and urged guidance counselors to advise students on the problems they would face entering a STEM program at an institution where they fall below the level of the typical student.
The two Democrats on the commission dissented from major parts of the report.

"Our principal objection to this briefing and report is that they were fundamentally not about encouraging minorities to pursue careers in STEM fields," wrote Commissioners Michael Yaki and Arlan D. Melendez. "Rather, the major focus of the briefing and report was to promote Rogers Elliott, Richard Sander and their 'mismatch' theory."

Another of the experts who appeared at the STEM hearing two years ago, Richard A. Tapia, a mathematics professor at Rice University, said the mismatch theory leads people to draw the wrong conclusion, one that could set minorities back decades. He said elite colleges should continue to admit promising students who might not be as prepared academically, but should do more to help those students once they have been admitted.

"Simply stated, in a 'sink or swim,' non-mentoring, nonsupportive environment, which is what we see at many of our elite research schools, those with poorer preparation will rarely succeed, minority or majority," he said in a statement included in the report. "Why are we not demanding from public and private universities ... quality education of all our citizens?"

In the other report, "The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities," the commission recommends that students in general attend colleges where the caliber of other students better matches their own abilities. It also suggests that researchers study high-performing HBCU's to uncover practices that should be applied to all colleges.
Colleges and students would benefit from White House tax compromise

By Kelly Field
December 7, 2010
Washington

President Obama has reached a deal with Republicans that would extend for two years a series of expiring tax benefits, including a research-and-development tax credit and a trio of deductions and credits for college tuition.

Under the terms of the compromise, Mr. Obama agreed to a two-year extension of the Bush-era income-tax cuts in exchange for an extension of unemployment benefits and a payroll tax holiday. Democrats have not signed off on the agreement, and some liberal House members are threatening to block the measure.

The tuition and research benefits are among several noncontroversial tax benefits that were folded into the deal after negotiators reached agreement on the more-contentious cuts. They include a tuition tax credit worth up to $2,500, a student-loan interest deduction worth up to $2,500, and a benefit that allows companies to provide up to $5,250 in tax-free tuition assistance to their employees.

The agreement would renew a tax credit for corporations that give research dollars to colleges and allow individuals to continue to contribute up to $2,000 a year, tax-free, to Coverdell Education Savings Accounts.

The president and lawmakers also agreed to retroactively restore two benefits that expired at the end of 2009: a tuition deduction of up to $4,000 and a benefit that allows Individual Retirement Account owners over the age of 70½ to make tax-free charitable gifts, totaling up to $100,000 per year, to eligible charities, including nonprofit colleges.

In a news conference Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Obama said he yielded on the income-tax breaks for wealthier Americans to preserve benefits for the middle class.

"This isn't an abstract debate," he said. "This is real money for real people that will make a real difference in the lives of folks who sent us here."

On Tuesday, the Senate majority leader, Harry Reid of Nevada, said he will proceed with the deal, with some modifications. But the House majority leader, Steny Hoyer of Maryland, was more reticent, saying the chamber would wait for the Senate to act. Some House Democrats have denounced the deal and accused the president of capitulating to Republicans.

Still, the deal may be the best lawmakers can achieve in the dwindling days of Congress's lame-duck session. In the end, Democrats may protest the plan but hold their noses and vote for it.
GAO revises report on recruiting practices at for-profit colleges

December 7, 2010, 11:53 pm

The Government Accountability Office recently revised portions of its report on an undercover investigation of for-profit colleges that was the centerpiece of testimony at a U.S. Senate education committee hearing this summer, The Washington Post reported, and at least one senator is crying foul. Sen. Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming, the panel’s senior Republican, said in a letter to the GAO’s acting comptroller that the revisions appear to be “substantial” and that the report should be withdrawn. A spokeswoman for Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa, the committee’s chairman, told the Post that the revisions “do not change the substance of the report” or its conclusions that the for-profit colleges investigated “used deceptive or fraudulent recruiting techniques to enroll new students.”
The certificate solution

December 7, 2010

A key goal of the Obama administration has been to create an environment in which every American receives at least one year of postsecondary education. One year is a notable time frame as that it doesn't correlate with an associate degree or a bachelor's degree. A report being issued today suggests that the United States needs to follow that cue and focus on a form of education that comes in a range of durations -- the certificate.

The report, issued by Complete College America and prepared by FutureWorks, argues that it may be more viable for many Americans with limited time to earn a certificate than to earn a college degree. And the report notes that while those who take some courses toward a degree but do not finish are unlikely to gain much economically from their efforts, there is substantial evidence that certificates do advance people economically.

Certificates are a "too often underutilized strategy," the report says, "but one that can deliver greater income returns than associate and even some bachelor's degrees."

In 2007-8, just under 750,000 certificates were awarded in the United States, the report says, 41.6 percent at community colleges and 42.2 percent at for-profit institutions, with the remainder coming from other sectors. Across sectors, by far the top field for certificates is health care, which was the focus of 41.2 percent of all certificates, followed by business (10.9 percent), mechanical (8.5 percent) and security (5.6 percent).

While promoting the value of certificates, the report argues that research shows that "all certificates are not created equal," and that there are significant advantages economically for those who enroll in long-term programs (duration of one year or longer). For instance, studies by Kentucky officials found that individuals in that state who earned certificates of at least one year saw increases in their income "nearly identical" to the gains associated with earning an associate degree.

The report -- not surprisingly given that its sponsor was a group focused on college completion -- repeatedly stresses the importance of finishing programs. And it suggests that this is a key advantage of certificate programs at some institutions. At many institutions that focus on certificates, completion rates are much higher than at other institutions.

Despite evidence that certificates help recipients find jobs or better paying jobs, the report notes policy and educational concerns. Some of the most rapid certificate enrollment gains in recent years, the report says, have been in short-term programs, not the long-term programs that yield the greatest economic gains. While short-term programs "may be helpful in updating the skills of adult workers who are well launched in their occupations and who have good earnings history," the report says that "there is much room for skepticism about their labor market value for young adults, or for older and dislocated workers."

Further, the report describes state approaches to certificates as "seemingly haphazard" with "striking variation" among states. The report says that, on a per-capita basis, Georgia, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Arizona and Kansas produce 10 to 15 times as many certificates as do Hawaii, Nevada, Montana and every Northeastern state.

But producing more certificates doesn't necessarily mean that they are the best certificates. States like Kentucky and Louisiana "produce large numbers of less valuable, short-term credentials" while other
states -- such as Wyoming, Oklahoma and Arkansas -- see more of their certificates in long-term programs.

The report offers a series of suggestions for policymakers, urging them to:

- Include certificates in plans for postsecondary completion, defining certificates in consistent ways.
- Set "aggressive" goals for certificate completion.
- Use funding formulas and other policies to reward long-term programs and to discourage "shorter-term programs that lack significant labor-market payoffs."
- Collect more data about certificates and the alignment of programs with the labor market.
- Focus on completion issues.

— Scott Jaschik
US students halt academic 'free-fall,' but still lag in global testing

Korean and Finnish students scored highest in the latest round of PISA tests aimed at assessing reading, math, and science literacy.

By Amanda Paulson, Staff Writer posted December 7, 2010 at 11:45 am EST

American students made modest gains in science and math, but still lag significantly behind their counterparts around the world.

The latest results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) released Tuesday by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show Asian students – particularly those from China, who participated in the exam for the first time in 2009 – at the top of the pack, with the United States generally in the middle or, in math, toward the bottom.

“We are in the middle of the pack; that's not where we want to be,” said Stuart Kerachsky, deputy commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, in a call with reporters. “That’s not the goal, but all I see in these numbers is things maybe inching in the right direction.”

The test is given to 15-year-old students in dozens of countries around the world every three years, and aims to assess their reading, math, and science literacy as they prepare to enter college or the workforce. It has long been used in the US to raise alarm bells about American students falling behind in a global world.

And indeed, the most striking result from the 2009 PISA may be the top performance of Chinese students, who participated in the exam for the first time with a pilot program that tested students in several cities.

Mr. Kerachsky and others cautioned not to read too much into the comparisons, since they are from cities – those which draw many of China’s top students – and are hardly representative of all of China. But the results from Shanghai, in particular, which came out No. 1 in all three subject areas, were remarkably high.

In math, for instance, Shanghai students scored an average of 600 (on a scale with a 500-point average). Students in Korea, the top OECD country, scored a 546, and in the United States, they scored 487.

That score puts them in 25th place among the 34 OECD countries, though the score is statistically lower than just 17 of those countries, and indistinguishable from 11 others.

American students scored below the OECD average of 496. The countries outperforming the US include Finland – perennially a top-shower on PISA, along with Korea – Belgium, Estonia, Iceland, France, and the Slovak Republic, among others. US students scored higher than those in just five OECD countries: Greece, Israel, Turkey, Chile, and Mexico.

Still, there was some good news on the mathematics front, where Kerachsky notes that no countries moved ahead of the US since 2006, and the US caught up with nine countries that previously had higher average scores.
The best news for American students came in science, where they raised their score from 489 in 2006 to 502 in 2009 — on par with the average OECD score. The US caught up with six countries, and moved ahead of six other countries, though it still scored below 12 of them.

In reading — a major focus of this PISA — the US had no change in its showing from previous years. It was on par with the OECD average, and just six countries — Korea, Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and Australia — had average scores that were measurably higher.

Some experts caution that comparing countries with vastly different populations is fraught with complexities, and that the rankings aren’t as straightforward as they might seem. In the US, for instance, about 20 percent of students are non-native English speakers, notes Clifford Adelman, a senior associate with the Institute for Higher Education Policy. In Korea, virtually all students are native speakers of Korean, the language in which they take the test.

“We’ve got a very motley crew here as a nation of immigrants,” says Mr. Adelman. “That’s not an excuse, but we ought to be comparing apples to apples.”

Still, PISA has in recent years been seen as a wake-up call to Americans who once prided themselves on their education system, but have seen their students start to fall behind peers in other countries.

In a speech in North Carolina Monday, President Barack Obama reminded Americans how the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in the 1950s prompted increased investment in math and science education, and called this a new “Sputnik moment.” “America is in danger of falling behind,” he said. Obama has also set a goal for the US to have the highest proportion of students graduating from college by 2020.

“The good news is that the free-fall seems to have stopped — and it was a free-fall for a while,” says Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and the former governor of West Virginia. He adds that he’s encouraged by the fact that 30 percent of US students who are low-income performed in the top quartile. “That says to me … that the child’s income level is not determinative of how well they can do.”

Still, he adds, “we’re still treading water. We’re in a kayak and some other nations have been in a speedboat.”
After reviewing 80 hours of videotapes by its undercover investigators, to remove personally identifiable information, the Government Accountability Office has revised its hard-hitting report on recruiting practices in for-profit higher education — softening some of the findings but without changing its conclusion that the colleges visited had engaged in deception or fraud.

“After the review of the tapes, we chose to issue the revised report to add more precise language and to clarify some aspects of the report,” said Chuck Young, a spokesman for the G.A.O. “But ultimately nothing has changed with the overall message of the report, and nothing has changed with any of our findings.”

The report, issued Aug. 4 at hearings on for-profit colleges by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, described undercover investigators’ visits to 15 for-profit campuses, where they posed as prospective students and used hidden cameras to record admissions representatives. The colleges visited included branches of the University of Phoenix, Corinthian Colleges and Kaplan, a unit of The Washington Post Company.

Many changes were of little significance, but some did soften the findings of wrongdoing. For example, in a finding that a college representative told the undercover applicant that she “should” take out the maximum amount of federal loans, even if she did not need all the money, and that she “should” put the extra money in a high-interest savings account, the revised version makes it “could” instead.

In another, where the original report said the school representative told the undercover applicant that getting a job later was a “piece of cake” and said she had graduates making $120,000-$130,000 a year, the revised version added the representative’s warning that in the current economic environment, $13 to $14 an hour would be a likely starting salary.

Given the highly partisan atmosphere surrounding the Senate committee’s oversight hearings, and the Department of Education’s continuing effort to tighten the rules governing for-profit colleges, the revisions themselves have become a charged political issue.

Senator Michael B. Enzi of Wyoming, the ranking Republican on the committee, who has been critical of the hearings, wrote to the G.A.O. on Tuesday, saying the revisions raised “serious questions about the quality of rigor” of the investigation and asking for a detailed explanation of each change. A spokesman for the Senate committee, however, said Wednesday that the updates did not change the substance of the report.
The public verdict is in and overwhelming: The better the education people get, the stronger the U.S. economy will be, a poll shows. But don't count on folks to support higher taxes to improve schools.

Eighty-eight percent say a country's education system has a major effect on its economic health. Nearly as many — 79 percent — say the U.S. economy would improve if all Americans had at least a two-year college degree, according to an Associated Press-Stanford University poll.

Yet when it comes to financing public school improvements, people tilt slightly against raising taxes to do so, with 47 percent opposing and 42 percent in support. The findings underscore the tensions confronting federal and local officials across the country balancing the competing pressures of strengthening education while not overburdening taxpayers at a time of economic weakness and huge federal and state budget deficits.

"Education is vitally important to our country today," said Ronald Bartlett, 66, of Marshall, Texas, who works at a mechanic's shop. But when it comes to higher taxes for schools he says no, adding, "We're continually pouring money into the government supposedly to improve education, and it's not improving. Too much government control is not good."

The consensus about education's impact on the country's economy differs little by gender, age, race or levels of education and income. The responses were similar to when the same questions were asked in a June 2008 AP-Knowledge Networks poll, though the number saying the economy would get a very large boost from better education has grown somewhat.

"Obviously, the public is getting the message that colleges give you a better shot at a good job, and that's going up because of the economy," said Michael Kirst, professor emeritus of education and business administration at Stanford.

The tendency to oppose raising taxes to help schools is also fairly consistent among different groups of people.

The AP-Stanford University poll also shows that people mostly blame students and their parents for poor college graduation rates. And they give high marks to all sectors of American higher education including for-profit colleges, despite recent criticism of dubious recruiting tactics, high student loan default rates and other problems at some schools.

Asked where the blame lies for graduation rates at public four-year colleges, 7 in 10 said students shouldered either a great deal or a lot of it, and 45 percent felt that way about parents. Between about a quarter and a third blamed college administrators, professors, teachers, unions, state education officials and federal education officials.

Kirst said the tendency to mostly blame students for graduation rates is a troubling sign for reformers who have elevated college completion to the forefront of higher education policy debates and pushed colleges to fix the problem. But Stan Jones, president of Complete College America, which championed such efforts, disagreed.
"This will play out like the high school dropout issue," Jones said. "The more it becomes a subject of public discussion the more advances we will make on confronting the college dropout problem."

Just over half of first-time students who entered college in 2003-04 had not earned a degree or credential within six years, the Education Department reported recently. That's slightly worse than students who started in 1995-96.

Overall, about 4 in 10 Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 have a two-year college degree or more, according to Census Bureau data.

Experts caution it is tricky to measure success and compare graduation rates because today's older, less-traditional college student population takes more time to finish school and is harder to track.

The poll also found that:

— Seventy-seven percent of Republicans and 68 percent of Democrats fault students heavily for low graduation rates. Republicans are also slightly likelier than Democrats to blame federal officials for the problem.

— Fifty-seven percent of minorities blame parents for college graduation rates, while just 40 percent of whites do.

— Minorities are more prone than whites to blame professors and teachers for college graduation rates, with 40 percent of minorities but just 29 percent of whites doing so.

— Asked about the quality of schools, public four-year colleges received the highest marks, with 74 percent calling them excellent or good.

— Other institutions got strong marks, too: Four-year private nonprofit colleges (71 percent), two-year public colleges (69 percent), private for-profit colleges (66 percent) and private for-profit trade schools (57 percent).

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Lumina Foundation and others have directed money and attention to states and colleges to improve completion rates, and several states are taking action.

The poll was conducted September 23-30 by Abt SRBI Inc. It involved interviews on landline and cellular telephones with 1,001 adults nationwide, and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Stanford University's participation was made possible by a grant from the Gates Foundation.
As state budgets shrink, college advocates seek regulatory relief

By Eric Kelderman
December 2, 2010
Austin, Tex.

Last year’s annual conference of higher-education government-relations professionals was focused largely on ways of persuading state lawmakers to spare institutions from devastating budget cuts.

But there seems less enthusiasm for those strategies this year, with states facing a third or fourth year of budget shortfalls, a new crop of Republican governors and legislators intent on downsizing government, and a public exasperated by persistent increases in tuition and fees.

The theme at this year’s conference is “Performing Under Pressure,” with the recognition that much of public higher education will have to undergo a major transformation, with the goal of graduating many more students with much less support from the states.

Legislators are wary of higher education and perceive that colleges are simply asking them to "give us more money and leave us alone," said Raymund A. Paredes, commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. "I can tell you that argument doesn't work," he said.

Instead, he and other speakers urged lobbyists to press for legislative changes that would give them more regulatory autonomy, and be willing to accept strict accountability measures.

"We have to demonstrate our willingness to make fundamental changes," Mr. Paredes said.

High Expectations

Mr. Paredes and others acknowledged that higher education has a poor reputation among many lawmakers, who think of academe as a bastion of arrogance. And the public base their perceptions of higher education largely on what they know of the most elite public and private colleges, not on the thousands of smaller, less-prestigious institutions that educate the bulk of students, he said.

Francisco G. Cigarroa, chancellor of the University of Texas system, told conference attendees that the way to prove higher education's value to the public is not just by touting the prestige of private and federally funded research, but by retaining a strong focus on improving undergraduate education.

The push to increase graduation rates is being driven both by President Obama, who has set the goal of making the United States the best-educated country in the world, and by several nonprofit organizations, such as the Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which are seeking to spur innovations that will lead to better graduation rates and more efficiency in higher education.

Efforts to significantly improve college completion have already begun in earnest in states such as Indiana and Ohio, where state appropriations are now being tied to graduation rates or credit completions.

Brian Noland, chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, said that ensuring
that students finish their degrees not only builds trust with the public but also is a fundamental way to improve the economic fortunes of the state.

But the challenges involved in increasing the number of degrees go beyond the fiscal and political hurdles, Mr. Noland said. In his state, as in many others, the number of high school graduates is declining, so West Virginia is trying to lure back to the classroom adults who have had some college courses but dropped out. That effort includes mailings, phone calls, and, this coming spring, setting up personal appointments between potential students and higher-education recruiters who will try to persuade them to return to college, he said.

Opportunity in Crisis

Daniel J. Hurley, director of state relations and policy analysis for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, one of the organizations that sponsors the conference, said that there may be a small, silver lining to the difficulties facing higher education: a window of opportunity to loosen the reins of state regulation.

Colleges across the country have been chafing at state rules on hiring, construction, procurement, and, most importantly, authority over tuition, arguing that the required processes are cumbersome and costly.

Cristin Toutsi, assistant for policy analysis at the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, said several states have passed or proposed new measures in the past year that would free colleges to operate with more autonomy. For example, Louisiana lawmakers passed a law giving public universities more authority over tuition if they can meet performance benchmarks, such as improved graduation rates. Idaho passed a law that gives the state's public colleges some freedom from rules on bidding and constructing new buildings.

The advantage of those proposals is that they may be popular with the host of new Republican state leaders who are taking a hard line on spending and have not always been traditional supporters of higher education.

In New Jersey, for example, Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican who has garnered a nationwide reputation for his devotion to cutting the state budget, has proposed five measures that would, among other things, give the state's public colleges control of their workers-compensation insurance and collective bargaining agreements with unions.

While the bill relating to workers-compensation insurance was approved and is now awaiting the governor's signature, the other four proposals face strong opposition in the Legislature, said Michael W. Klein, director of government and legal affairs for the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities.

Mr. Hurley, of the state-colleges association, said that such bills may be the best that colleges can hope for in the coming legislative sessions: "There isn't going to be any more money."

The conference, which ends Friday, is also hosted by the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.
URBANA – The University of Illinois flash index has risen for six straight months, suggesting the Illinois economy continues to improve.

The index increased from 93.8 in October to 94.2 in November – well above the low point of 90 recorded in September 2009.

But the index remains far below 100, considered the dividing line between economic decline and growth.

The index, issued by the UI's Institute of Government and Public Affairs, is a weighted average of Illinois growth rates in corporate earnings, personal income and consumer spending.

It's calculated by UI economist J. Fred Giertz, who monitors state tax receipts from corporate income, personal income and retail sales each month.

Last month's figures required an adjustment as a result of the state's tax amnesty program, Giertz said.

"Tax receipts in November were substantially higher than normal because many taxpayers took advantage of the amnesty to avoid certain penalties and interest," he said.

"Unfortunately, at this time, it is impossible to disentangle precisely the normal tax receipts from the unusual amnesty payments," he said.

But if the figures hadn't been adjusted, the index would have increased to an uncharacteristically high 99.

"Much of the amnesty money would have been collected eventually," Giertz said, "but taxpayers took advantage of the special situation to pay in November."

Giertz said the state unemployment rate has fallen to 9.8 percent and is now only 0.2 percentage points above the national average.
The Legacy Student Enhancement Program will offer 80 percent of the current applicable in-state or out-of-state tuition for transfer or undergraduate students whose parent or legal guardian is an SIUC graduate. The proposal is pending approval at the SIU Board of Trustees meeting Thursday in the SIUC Student Center Ballrooms.

Chancellor Rita Cheng said such policies are common at private institutions and are becoming more common at public universities such as SIUC.

"I think this builds us an incredible, powerful and supportive alumni base around the world," Cheng said.

Cheng said there is an amazing alumni base locally and internationally. She said finances may come into play for some of those alumni sending their children to college, and she hopes the discount will give them a nudge toward Carbondale.

If approved, the Legacy Student Enhancement Program will be added to the Revision to Residency Status Policies passed in 2007. The policy included the alternate Southern Stars tuition rate and in-state tuition rates for entering students from Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee and Arkansas.
Inside Higher Ed, December 6, 2010

Dueling cost estimates on DREAM Act

The Congressional Budget Office released a report last week saying that the DREAM Act -- which creates a path to citizenship for some students who came to the United States as minors and were educated in the country, without legal authority to remain -- would reduce the deficit by $1.4 billion over 10 years. The CBO analysis assumes that many of these students would over time get jobs, pay taxes and thus contribute to the federal budget. The report also estimates costs associated with the DREAM Act, such as spending on student loans and other programs for which the students would become eligible. The CBO report was generally much more optimistic on the impact of the act than was a report issued last week by the Center for Immigration Studies, a nonpartisan group that generally argues for tight controls on immigration. That organization predicted billions in additional costs to taxpayers, based on an assumption of many more students enrolling in college.

The reports came amid lobbying of the Senate to approve the legislation. Obama administration officials held a series of press briefings last week in support of the DREAM Act, and many college presidents have been speaking out in support. The White House blog also released a list of "10 reasons we need the DREAM Act." But Republicans in the Senate continue to block the bill -- with some opposing the legislation and others opposing consideration of any legislation on any subject unless the Bush administration's tax cuts for wealthy Americans are extended.
Campus leaders back most of report on generating revenue

Thu, 12/09/2010 - 9:00am | Paul Wood

URBANA – Campus leaders say they welcome a report urging more online education, commercialization of intellectual property and heightened financial accountability from campus units.

They dismissed, however, a suggestion that professors be evaluated for promotion and tenure with how much money their research or instruction brings in as a criterion.

Interim Chancellor Robert Easter and interim Vice Chancellor Richard Wheeler addressed the issues in a letter this week, responding to a University of Illinois Stewarding Excellence report. Those cost-cutting teams were initiated in February.

Wheeler said Wednesday that the campus has stepped up its oversight of patents and other intellectual properties.

"We didn't have a perfect record in the past," he said, noting that the UI set up an Office of Technology Management in 2001 and that since then the university has been better able to capitalize on its discoveries.

Wheeler and Easter said in their response to the report that they agree with the team that the campus had met some goals in finding dollars in its intellectual property, pointing to sustained growth in licensing royalties over the last three years, and meeting a 2009 strategic goal of 12 start-up companies by 2013.

The campus has produced 384 patents since 2001.

The administrators said they would charge a task force to work on evaluating the creation and operation of online, professional and international educational opportunities with an eye to new revenue streams.

Wheeler said Wednesday that the campus is looking closely at tuition for graduate and professional training courses, with an eye on revenue-generating certifications.

Easter and Wheeler wrote that financial planning for project funding could be improved as part of an overall picture of the Urbana campus, and that they would create financial measurements for the projects.

"Proposals that seek central funding will be required to show how they serve core institutional missions," they wrote.

"Requests for ongoing support will be required to show how a plan for becoming self-supporting within a specified reasonable time frame or to demonstrate why a longer or permanent subsidy is appropriate."

Wheeler said "not everything the university does will pay for itself, but we should go into new projects with the idea that they could support themselves with grant funding, and be as specific as we can about which expectations of that program are met."

The team's praise for the engineering and social work schools for defining clear career paths for research professorships should encourage greater use of "largely grant-funded positions."

But the administrators said they "approach with caution" or do not endorse the idea of increasing class size so a larger number of out-of-state or out-of-country students, who pay higher tuition, could be admitted, saying it could impact the dynamics of learning.

They also looked askance at including financial criteria in evaluations for professors, saying that teaching responsibilities should address student needs, not revenue generation.
Poshard: SIUC has to find $1.4 million

BY CODELL RODRIGUEZ, THE SOUTHERN | Posted: Thursday, December 9, 2010 1:00 am

CARBONDALE - After budgetary shortfalls and cash flow problems, SIUC will be $1.4 million in the hole, even with cost cutting measures in place.

SIU President Glenn Poshard said at a meeting of the SIU Board of Trustees Wednesday at the Stone Center that the university is facing a $15.3 million shortfall. Drops in tuition make up $4.8 million, missing stimulus funds caused the bulk of the shortfall with $7.5 million and a lack of state support for veterans’ grants make up the last $3 million.

He said SIUC has been able to secure all but $1.4 million of that money through upcoming tuition dollars and various steps including a savings of $1.6 million from the hiring freeze and the 4 percent cuts throughout the departments.

He said they will make up $2.6 from administrative closure days. That number, however, is based on all staff members taking the closure days. Several unions are still in contract negotiations. Poshard said if an agreement could not be made the money will have to come in some other form. He said one possibility is layoffs.

"I'm still hopeful we can reach some kind of agreement with the unions on administrative closure days," Poshard said.

With the hiring freeze, Poshard said all hiring has been put on hold except for positions that Chancellor Rita Cheng feel are critical to the operation.

He said one of the most critical things for SIUC is to turn around is enrollment and that if it can be turned around, it will be a great relief to the university.

"(Tuition) is the one thing we can do for ourselves," Poshard said.

Poshard also detailed the amount of state appropriations still owed to the university. SIUC is still owed $5,478,000 for fiscal year 2010 and $128 million for fiscal year 2011. He said the state promises the fiscal year 2010 money by the end of the calendar year and that steps are being made in Springfield to try and get caught up in fiscal year 2011 payments. But he said the state would likely pay off debts on Medicaid and pensions before talking appropriations for higher education.

"We're sort of third tier in this thing," Poshard said.

SIU Board of Trustees Chairman Roger Tedrick said one bright spot in the university's financial crises is that it gives SIU the opportunity to make the adjustments needed to tighten things up.

"It's a chance for change," Tedrick said. "It gives us a chance to be a better university."

"And we will," Poshard said.
UI gets $660,000 to bring Latinos into biological sciences

Thu, 12/09/2010 - 10:00am | Julie Wurth

URBANA – The University of Illinois has received a major grant for research fellowships to encourage Latino students to pursue careers in biological sciences.

The $662,836 award from the National Science Foundation will be used to establish a UI program called New Biology Fellows, providing research opportunities and mentoring for Latino undergraduates.

Under the program, 28 students will be given research experiences in quantitative biology and informatics, starting in the summer of 2011 and continuing through 2015.

The effort was spearheaded by Latino faculty at the UI's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences hoping to mentor a new generation of Latino scientists. Illinois has one of the fastest-growing Latino populations, but that group is underrepresented in science and research, according to Gustavo Caetano-Anolls, co-principal investigator and professor in the Department of Crop Sciences.

Less than half of Latino students graduate from high school, and with rigorous college entrance requirements, financial challenges, a lack of role models and little to no exposure to biosciences, it's not surprising that few of them enter science, technology, engineering and math at the UI, said Maria Villamil, assistant professor in crop sciences.

The College of ACES' Latino undergraduate enrollment has doubled in the last five years, to about 133 students. But that's still just under 6 percent of the total, and the growth has not translated into more Latino students entering graduate school, said Jesse Thompson, assistant dean of academic programs and coordinator for diversity programs. Just 30 of the college's 550 graduate students are either African-American or Latino, he said.

One goal of the fellowship program is to boost that number through support provided by faculty role models, he said. Latino students face many barriers to graduate study, including the need to provide for their families financially and parents who may not understand the value of a college education or understand financing options, he said.

All of the researchers involved are experienced scientists, but "it's not as much about the science as it is about the mentoring that's going to be happening, not just in the summer, but year-round," he said Wednesday.

During each year of the fellowship program, seven sophomores or juniors who have completed introductory biology and math courses at the UI or an Illinois college with at least 25 percent Hispanic enrollment will be accepted as New Biology Fellows. Eligible schools include Northeastern Illinois University, Morton College, Triton College, Harry S Truman College, Waubonsee Community College and Wilbur Wright College.

The experience will include a 12-week intensive summer research internship, a mentor-guided academic year at their home institution, and an optional second summer research internship. Students will receive
$15,000 fellowships for their work at the UI on a topic of their choice, such as plant and animal bioinformatics, quantitative genetics and plant breeding, statistical genomics and food nanotechnology.

"We plan to create a permanent pipeline to help students in two-year programs move on to a four-year program and eventually pursue graduate degrees at the U of I," said Sandra Rodriguez Zas, co-principal investigator and professor in the Department of Animal Sciences, in a news release announcing the grant.

The UI program is intended to serve as a model for other schools, with the overall goal to expand the pool of multicultural, multidisciplinary scientists, Thompson said. The UI also hopes to continue the program with other funding after the grant expires, he said.

"This could be life-changing," Villamil said in the release. "Not only can this experience increase a student's chances to find their dream job or be accepted into graduate college, but they can also learn the latest techniques and gain valuable academic and leadership skills from some of the leading scientists in the country."

Amanda Dominguez, 21, a UI junior studying food science, said the program would be "a dream come true" for most students.

"There's so much competition, especially in the sciences. To have that kind of helpful hand and experience as well, and kind of get your foot in the door, whether it be into graduate school or into the workforce, would be great," she said.

She said she benefited from another ACES program, known as the Research Apprenticeship Program, which helps prepare African-American and Latino high school students to study science.

"It kind of helped me see myself in the future, what kind of goals I wanted to achieve," said Dominguez, who hopes to work in product development at a major food company.

The fellowships will be offered by the UI departments of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Agricultural and Consumer Economics, Animal Sciences, Crop Sciences, Food Science and Human Nutrition, and the Institute of Natural Resource Sustainability.

Applications are due March 4, 2011. For more information, go to http://bighorn.animal.uiuc.edu/urmnb.
More college students taking degree programs online

BY KARA SPAK Staff Reporter/kspak@suntimes.com
Dec 5, 2010 10:48PM

Danny Ashcom reports for class in the living room of his Uptown one-bedroom apartment.

The 32-year-old counselor is earning an online master's degree in computer science through the University of Illinois at Springfield. He started the program in August, the same month he graduated with a traditional bricks-and-mortar master's degree in psychology from a different school.

"Doing psychology I wouldn't have thought about an online degree because you need to be face-to-face with people," he said. "In computer science, there is no real price to pay for doing it on your own. You can do it quickly and efficiently."

Online classes and degree programs have exploded in size and popularity in the last decade, led primarily by public universities who see the programs as a way to reach non-traditional students.

Traditional students are also finding more online options mixed in with lectures and seminars.

Nearly 30 percent of all higher education students take at least one class online. More than 60 percent of chief academic officers said that online education was critical to their long-term strategy, according to a Sloan Consortium report, "Class Differences, Online Education in the United States, 2010."

In autumn 2002, 1.6 million students were taking an online class. That number jumped to nearly 4 million in fall 2007, the group reported.

And in the past two years, the dismal economy pushed even more students into online classes. Universities responded to meet the demand.

More than 5.6 million students were taking at least one online class in 2009, an increase of nearly 1 million students from 2008, the report said.

In Illinois, online enrollments jumped 27 percent from spring 2009 to spring 2010, according to Illinois Virtual Campus.

Illinois schools with the largest online enrollments compared with their peers are DePaul University, the College of DuPage and College of Lake County, DeVry University and the U. of I.'s Chicago campus.

"The big question that keeps coming up is when does the growth stop- " said Jeff Seaman, co-author of the "Class Differences" study and co-director of the Babson Survey Research Group, which has surveyed universities about online offerings for the last eight years. "If the economy picks up, what's the impact going to be for online enrollments- Will they slow growth, stay steady or will they drop- No one knows."

As their popularity grows, the stigma that these degrees aren't worth as much as a traditional degree is fading, Seaman said.

"It can be at least as good as face-to-face," he said.
"The stigma was not within the higher ed community," Seaman said. "There's always been a perception issue in the general public side more so than in higher education."

Getting the public to accept that these degrees had the same value as a traditional bricks-and-mortar degree was helped in large part by having well-known schools offer online programs.

"Look at Penn State World Campus [which offers 70 online degrees and certificates]. People believe Penn State is a quality institution and offers good educational value."

Ray Schroeder has taught at the U. of I.'s Urbana-Champaign campus and then its Springfield campus every semester since 1971. He now leads online programs at the Springfield campus, which offer more online courses than the other two U. of I. campuses combined.

"What drives many of us in this field is serving the student who cannot come to campus," he said.

Students include those with disabilities, military students or others working full time and parents who can't make it to class at a specific time and place. Almost all of them are paying for their own education.

Schroeder said more than half of the school's students are enrolled in at least one online class during the fall semester. For students seeking degrees totally online, the average age of an undergraduate is 34, the average master's is 35, he said.

"At most brick-and-mortar universities we don't dilute standards one bit when we go online," he said. "It's the same faculty members, the same outcomes."

The students who are successful are self-motivated, he said.

"There are people who are surprised that the rigor is the same and in some respects it's a little more difficult to take an online class," he said.

For Sue Nierstheimer, 56, of Vernon Hills, the personal connections she has made in the online master's degree program in education through the Springfield campus has been the biggest surprise.

A full-time faculty member at the College of Lake County and the department chair in the school's dental hygiene program, Nierstheimer enrolled in the online master's program to meet a requirement of her current job.

An empty nester, Nierstheimer does her schoolwork at the kitchen table while her husband watches sports in the next room.

"I can get online anytime," she said. "It makes it so possible for me. I don't think I could be doing this otherwise."

She is now looking at her school's dental hygiene program to see where online classes would fit.

"This generation of students, they are all becoming so technically competent that I really see this as being a preference," she said. "Many of our courses are hands on in the dental hygiene program but there are ones that could be online and others could do a hybrid."

Of the roughly 4,000 higher education institutions in the United States, about one-third offer no online
options, Seaman said.

He doesn't see a day when online classes will replace the traditional college experiences of dormitory all-nighters and classes in ivy-covered buildings.

Colleges and universities are assessing their missions to see where online coursework might fit in, Seaman said. In some cases, there is no place for it.

"If I am a large but private research institution where my students are paying $40,000-plus per year, it's not a good match for my mission," he said.

Schroeder agrees, calling the traditional post-high school, on-campus university stint a "wonderful experience for the 18-year-old."

"Many, many students can't afford it when they need to have a job," he said. "Having this has really opened up higher education."
Performance funding: No college student left behind?

Christine Brandel
Posted: December 1, 2010 08:58 PM

Recently Teresa Lubbers, Indiana's Higher Education Commissioner announced that colleges and universities should expect more funding to be tied to performance. Colleges and universities will need to increase the number of students who graduate with degrees on time to be rewarded with public money.

Performance funding, far from being the shocking new approach Governor Daniels suggested it was in his speech to Indiana's first Trustees Academy on August 30, 2010, has been around for many years. Its use has always been defended as a way of holding institutions accountable. By 2002, thirty-six states had links between public funding of higher education and performance. However, by 2003, the numbers began to decrease. Much research has been done on the success of performance funding, and little has shown it to be ultimately effective -- partly because it is often associated with politicians who then leave office so that the practice is not given enough time to fully be evaluated and partly because indicators used to determine "good" performance are vague or inappropriate to all colleges and universities.

This is of particular importance to community colleges, where so many students take many years to complete "two year degrees" or leave college without degrees at all. There are multiple reasons this happens: students come in needing remediation which means they might not technically even begin their degrees until their second years; students do not know if they want to be in school and choose a community college as a less expensive way to test the waters; and, most importantly, many students have full time lives outside of college -- families, jobs, and other responsibilities -- which means that their studies cannot always take priority. Will a single mother with a full time job who takes five years to complete her associates degree be seen as a failure and lead to less funding for her college? What does that say to the student? And what changes might that lead to at the institution?

I see real similarities between performance funding for higher education and the problems of the No Child Left Behind Act, which many educators agree has had some detrimental consequences to the success of American schools. With the focus being laid on the "success" of students (with regards to test scores in schools and timely graduation rates in colleges and universities), the actual learning that takes place gets moved to the back burner. There have been accusations that schools have neglected both very high and very low achieving students to concentrate on those in the middle whose test scores may make the difference to the school's overall rating. If states are going to reward colleges who graduate students in a timely manner, will higher ed have to make similar choices? Will community colleges be forced to shut their "open door" admissions to those students who may take "too long" to graduate? Performance funding places the entire responsibility for graduation on the institution, without acknowledging that students' abilities, attitudes, and schedules also play a role. Because of this omission, the goal of wanting students to graduate may be reinterpreted as wanting students who will graduate. This may leave behind an already undereducated population, which has suffered so greatly economically.

Increasing graduation rates should be of importance to higher education institutions; they should be held accountable, especially given their ever-increasing price tags. American education on all levels is in crisis. Rather than threats, a shift in attitude towards education -- its purpose and its contribution to our society -- on all stakeholders' parts is what's needed.
Don't nickel and dime colleges

By R.W. Hafer, Special to the Beacon
Posted 5:00 am, Fri., 12.3.10

Participants in the deficit debate, both nationally and at the state level, agree that spending reductions are necessary to achieve fiscal balance. The fight will focus on where such cuts should be made. Actions taken by the Missouri and Illinois governments portend that higher education will suffer.

To use an oft-heard commencement line, state universities have gone from state funded to state supported institutions. Over the past 30 years, states' funding of public universities has declined markedly. While universities received more than half of their revenues from states in the 1960s, today the proportion is more like a third. In an environment of budget freezes, downsizing and furloughs, university administrators feel lucky to get that.

Why did advancing higher education and the long-term economic benefits it creates tumble down the list of spending priorities? State legislators and governors face trade-offs, like everyone else. Funds that once went to universities have been diverted to K-12 education, meeting health-care mandates, and other areas with more political clout.

This decline in funding partly answers the question posed by Robert Archibald and David Feldman’s book “Why Does College Cost So Much?” Another important part, argue the authors, stems from the fact that “higher education is a personal-service industry.”

Like health care and law, quality education is based on student-teacher interaction. Like medical advice, education is best when delivered in a personal format. Impersonal massive lecture halls, closed-circuit transmissions of such lectures or internet classes available on demand all lose the dynamics of a classroom. So why do they exist? Large lectures allow universities to rein in costs. It is more cost-effective to spread a professor’s salary across 300 students than it is 30. Though good for business, this approach discounts the true mission of higher education. Are universities in the business of providing a quality education or a diploma? Unfortunately body count too often trumps quality.

But doesn’t technology reduce costs? If technology makes it cheaper to produce a car, why not education? Advancing technology does not deliver the same productivity gains in a service industry as in manufacturing. Archibald and Feldman show that the price of higher education, law and medicine follow similar paths: Each relies on personal service more than automated delivery. Required to keeping pace with technology, costs of production in these fields rise, not fall.

Universities must adopt new technology to fulfill their mission. Providing up-to-date training means that universities must be able to equip physics and chemistry labs with modern equipment. In my field, failure to employ recent technologies, whether it is sophisticated statistical packages or access to real-time financial data, puts our graduates at a competitive disadvantage. These come at a cost.

Technology requirements also go beyond the classroom. Student demand wireless connectivity from dorms to student lounges to fitness centers. Classrooms must be capable of presenting material in the most modern formats. Such improvements are costly.

The business side of higher education requires that those demands be met lest students opt for a different school. The modern administrator’s metric is straightforward: Fewer entering freshmen means even less revenue to offset state cuts.
Universities also must meet the technology needs of faculty. To maintain research agendas that keep them involved with developments in their fields — and therefore keeps students on the forefront new discoveries — faculty also require updated technology. Computers on every desk, data base access, sophisticated computer programs and modern lab equipment are minimal to keep good faculty. The goal of higher education should be education, not credentialism. The states’ two-pronged approach of reducing funding and erecting barriers that prevent institutions from addressing rising costs is a recipe for undesirable long-term consequences.

*R.W. Hafer is a research professor of economics and finance at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and a research fellow at the Show-Me Institute.*
Measure career colleges by success in job placement

December 5, 2010

To the Editor:

It is unfortunate that the primary question posed by Stephen Burd in "The Washington Post and the Perils of For-Profit Colleges"—Are private-sector colleges a good value for students?—can be answered only by torturing the data and arriving at a conclusion different from the original question (The Chronicle, November 7).

The value of the education provided by private-sector colleges such as Corinthian cannot, and should not, be determined solely on the basis of loan-repayment data. Many students of public and private institutions graduate with significant debt and take many years to pay off those loans.

The value of the education obtained in a career college should rightfully be assessed based on job placement in the field for which the student was trained. The Detroit campus mentioned in the article provides a case in point and demonstrates the value of our career training for students. In an economically depressed area, in the midst of a nationwide recession, placement rates at Detroit campuses average 74.7 percent. For those placed and for those still to be placed, our lifetime placement-assistance commitment sustains this positive track record over time.

We know that repayment and default rates are not closely related to the type of school a student attends, but rather to certain socioeconomic factors. Corinthian has implemented a number of policies to improve repayment rates and continues to work with students to address this important issue. To judge, as Mr. Burd does, any college on a single criterion does a disservice to a thoughtful discussion on this subject, and, in fact, fundamentally misses the point.

Kent Jenkins
Vice President, Public Affairs Communications
Corinthian Colleges Inc.
Washington
Tough luck, kids

December 6, 2010

Here's a tough math lesson for kids in the Aurora area:

62 – 7 = You lose.

We'll explain. The Illinois House on Wednesday had a chance to tweak state law so that Aurora University could create a math and science charter school for kids in that area. The school would give talented students a chance to receive advanced instruction that's generally not available at their schools.

It was a great opportunity for those kids … and a way for Illinois to lead on school reform.

We'd like to report here that the bill sailed to victory in the House. And it did … before it failed. Stay with us now. Here's how it happened:

The first roll call was 64 to 44 in favor of the bill. But the bill needed 71 votes to pass under House rules because it would be effective immediately.

The sponsors amended the bill to delay the timing. The second roll call was 62 to 39 in favor, two more votes than needed to pass it.

But Democratic Rep. Monique Davis, D-Chicago, who opposed the bill, demanded a verification roll call. That means the name of each member is called, and the member must affirm out loud his or her vote. If a member has stepped away from the chamber or doesn't answer for any other reason, his or her vote is voided.

Seven members didn't answer. The bill lost, 55-39.

And so the House denied hundreds of kids a chance at a superior math and science education.

What a terrible shame.

This charter school has the support of the local school districts. It has the support of the State Board of Education and the nearby Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, one of the state's premier high schools.

We'd like to point out that Davis' district office is 49 miles from Aurora University. So what's her interest in denying an education opportunity to children in the far western suburbs? That's easy. She's been trying to stop the charter school movement for years. She's the legislature's most dogged defender of the sorry status quo in public education in Illinois.

She has a victory. Let's hope it's a temporary victory.

The Aurora charter school would take up to 500 talented math and science students, third through eighth grade, from the East Aurora, Indian Prairie, Oswego and West Aurora school districts. It would be run by the university and give teachers from the local districts a chance to hone their teaching skills and earn advanced degrees.
It could be a national model to boost math and science education.

But the two largest teachers unions in Illinois oppose the bill because it would expand the parameters of this one charter school in Illinois. The school would draw students based on academic ability, not by lottery as other charter schools do.

The vote should have been unanimous. Instead, the House has stalled yet another good idea in public education.

The chief sponsor, Democratic Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia of Aurora, told us she'll keep working to pass the bill. She's optimistic that she'll have the votes in January. So is House Republican leader Tom Cross of Oswego.

Next month, the Illinois House will get another chance at this bill, another chance to show it's committed to better schools. Don't blow it.
Missourians who most struggle to pay for college need a champion

The Editorial Board | Posted: Tuesday, December 7, 2010 9:15 pm

The prospects for public higher education in Missouri appear to be especially bleak in the coming year, particularly for children from middle-class and lower-income families.

Gov. Jay Nixon signaled that a two-year tuition freeze will end beginning next fall, and more cuts in state support for higher education are in store. This year, the governor cut Missouri’s only needs-based scholarship program, Access Missouri, by more than half — to approximately $30 million from the $82.8 million appropriated by the Legislature.

An infusion of cash from Missouri’s Higher Education Loan Authority restored $30 million of that amount, but that still left Access Missouri with $20 million less to distribute to needy students than in the previous budget year and without secure replacement funds in future years.

Indeed, because of a sharp rise in eligible students, the maximum Access Missouri grant available to students attending Missouri’s public four-year colleges and universities shrank to $950 from about $1,700.

We asked Mr. Nixon’s communications staff whether the governor has any proposals pending — or expects to be making any proposals during the coming legislative session — to improve access to state colleges and universities for children from middle- or lower-income Missouri families. Specifically, we wondered whether he would be proposing any funding increases or decreases to the Access Missouri program.

Scott Holste, a spokesman for the governor, said that the “proposed state budget for the next fiscal year is still very much a work in progress, and it’s too early to talk about funding for specific programs.”

This lack of specifics is understandable. The state budget process is an ungainly dance in which participants have little incentive to signal their intentions in advance.

But high school seniors hoping to attend the University of Missouri-Columbia next fall don’t have that luxury. They have begun the desperate scramble to fund their educations. They need to know now.

Mr. Nixon’s spokesman said that the governor is keenly interested in improving access to higher education. He notes that Missouri’s university system stood alone nationally in freezing tuition for two years in a row. He observed that enrollment is up by 10,000 students systemwide.

Missouri must be “doing something right — and, in fact, several things right — when it comes to increasing accessibility for Missouri students,” he said.

The governor can be proud of these accomplishments. But there are reasons to question the extent of their reach.

Missouri’s financially neediest college students benefited least from the tuition freeze. Benefits from the second year were all but offset by the decreased Access Missouri scholarship funding. Moreover, nothing
in published enrollment data indicates whether children from lower-income Missouri families win their fair share of enrollment gains.

Indeed, high school graduates from outside Missouri made up one of the largest growth categories. The number of Illinois residents enrolling as first-time students at the University of Missouri-Columbia this fall exceeded by 50 percent the number of first-time students from the city of St. Louis and St. Charles and Jefferson counties combined.

Missouri’s financially neediest high school graduates face major barriers to higher education even in the best of times. The question is whether in hard times Mr. Nixon and Missouri’s other top political leaders will champion them and their futures.
A Sputnik moment for U.S. education

China delivers another wake-up call to those who think American schools are globally competitive.

By CHESTER E. FINN JR.
DECEMBER 8, 2010

Fifty-three years after Sputnik caused an earthquake in American education by giving us reason to believe that the Soviet Union had surpassed us, China has delivered another shock. On math, reading and science tests given to 15-year-olds in 65 countries last year, Shanghai's teenagers topped every other jurisdiction in all three subjects. Hong Kong also ranked in the top four on all three assessments.

Though Hong Kong took part in earlier rounds of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the 2009 test marked the first time that youngsters in mainland China participated. It was only Shanghai—the country's flagship city, on which Beijing has lavished much investment and attention, many favorable policies, and (for China) a relatively high degree of freedom. But Americans would be making a big mistake to suppose that Shanghai's result is some sort of aberration.

If China can produce top PISA scorers in one city in 2009—Shanghai's population of 20 million is larger than that of many whole countries—it can do this in 10 cities in 2019 and 50 in 2029. Or maybe faster.

I have misgivings about PISA—about how it defines knowledge, what it tests, and how it tries to divorce itself from school curriculum. But its international rankings are widely trusted as a reliable barometer of how young people in different countries compare on core academic subjects.

How did Shanghai accomplish this? The OECD folks offer some explanations, terming Shanghai a "leader in reform." They specifically cite the city's near universal education system, its competitiveness (measured by student admissions to universities and to the best secondary schools), a very high level of student engagement, a modern assessment system, an ambitious curriculum, and a program to intervene in weak schools.

Today most cities and towns in China don't have these resources. But tomorrow is apt to be a very different story.

Also near the top on PISA were five countries that should come as no surprise: Singapore, Taipei, Finland, South Korea and Japan. In reading, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the Netherlands also did well. The United States was, once again, in the middle of the pack in reading and science and a bit below the international average in math. So we're not getting worse. But we're mostly flat, and our very modest gains were trumped by many other countries.

Plenty of experts have been pointing out this trend for a long time. But until this week we could at least pretend that China wasn't one of those countries that was a threat. We could treat Hong Kong as a special case—the British legacy, combined with prosperity. We could allow ourselves to believe that China was only interested in building dams, buying our bonds, making fake Prada bags, underselling everybody else, and coating our kids' toys with toxic paint, while neglecting its education system.

Yes, we knew they were exporting Chinese teachers to teach Mandarin in our schools while importing native English speakers to instruct their children in our language. But we could comfort ourselves that their curriculum emphasized discipline and rote learning, not analysis or creativity.
Today that comfort has been stripped away. We must face the fact that China is bent on surpassing us, and everyone else, in education.

Will this news be the wake-up call that America needs to get serious about educational achievement? Will it get us beyond excuse-making, bickering over who should do what, and prioritizing adults over children?

I sure hope so.

Mr. Finn is a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. He is a former assistant secretary at the Department of Education.
Tax cuts for the rich, or better teachers in schools?

By Matt Miller
Wednesday, December 8, 2010; 1:00 PM

It was depressing enough when the president caved on extending $120 billion in tax cuts for the highest-earning 2 percent of Americans at a time of war and surging debt. As proof of White House fear and timidity, and Republican greed and myopia, the news doesn't get much worse.

That's $120 billion over two years that won't go to boost job creation. Nor will it fund a portion of the $300 billion we'll spend on wars during same period - instead, we'll borrow that abroad and hand the bill to the kids. Worse, none of that cash will be available to lure America's top young talent to the classroom by finally making teaching a prestigious, well-paying career.

Oops - I forgot - no one in the tax and budget talks was talking about transforming the teaching profession as part of America's long-term economic recovery plan. After all, that would mean thinking beyond 2012.

Yet the education world was rocked Tuesday when students in Shanghai, in that city's debut on a respected international test, outscored dozens of other countries in math, science and reading. Shanghai was No. 1 in all three subjects; the United States was 17th, 23rd and 31st. "I'm thinking Sputnik," Chester Finn, a Reagan administration education official, told the New York Times.

This grim reminder of our lagging schools comes atop stunning new research that shows that even America's best students aren't achieving anything close to world-class performance.

The alarming report comes courtesy of scholars Eric Hanushek of Stanford, Paul Peterson of Harvard and Ludger Woessman of the University of Munich, in the journal Education Next. In an article, "Teaching Math to the Talented," the trio compared the percentage of U.S. students who reach advanced levels of math achievement with the performance of other countries.

What do they find? In the high school class of 2009, 6 percent of U.S. students reached advanced levels of math achievement. This compares with 28 percent in Taiwan and 20 percent or more in Hong Kong, Finland and South Korea. Twelve other countries had more than twice the percentage of high achievers as the United States: Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, the Czech Republic, Japan, Canada, Macao-China, Australia, Germany and Austria.

Also outperforming the United States were Slovenia, Denmark, Iceland, France, Estonia, Sweden, Britain, Slovakia, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland, Norway, Ireland and Lithuania.

As the authors note, "the only OECD countries producing a smaller percentage of advanced math students than the United States are Portugal, Greece, Turkey and Mexico." On the bright side, we're just about tied with Latvia.

These are national results. The authors then explode the myth that our best-performing states are nonetheless world class. Massachusetts, often seen as our gold standard, trails 14 countries, with rates of advanced math students similar to Germany and France. No. 2 Minnesota lags behind 16 nations, placing it on a par with Slovenia and Denmark. Texas and New York are about the same as Lithuania and Russia. The lowest-performing states - West Virginia, New Mexico and Mississippi - do worse than Serbia or Uruguay, "although they do edge out Romania, Brazil and Kyrgyzstan," the authors note dryly.
"This is not a story of some states doing well but being dragged down by states that perform poorly," the authors add. "Nor is it a story of immigrant or disadvantaged or minority students hiding the strong performance of better-prepared students. Comparatively small percentages of white students are high achievers. Only a small proportion of the children of our college-educated population is equipped to compete with students in a majority of OECD countries."

Math (and science) achievement today predicts technological leadership and economic strength tomorrow. So these results should shock us. And they're related to the tax debate. We'll never attract enough talented young Americans to teach subjects such as math and science when average starting teacher salaries in the United States are $39,000 and rise (over decades) to an average maximum of $67,000. That tax benefit of $120 billion might have endowed a hefty federal effort to remake the teaching profession for the 21st century. The showdown could have been between "the new generation of teachers America needs to compete" vs. "lower taxes for the top."

This is how the debate needs to start sounding - and fast. As part of her newly launched advocacy group, Students First, former D.C. schools chancellor Michelle Rhee should take these scary new findings to editorial boards, business groups and PTAs in every state. Only when enough of us wake up to the fact that we're losing badly in today's global education race will we have a hope of getting serious about turning things around.

Matt Miller, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress and co-host of public radio's "Left, Right & Center," writes a weekly column for The Post. He can be reached at mattino2@gmail.com. Follow him on Twitter at @mattmillernow.
Panel accepts compliance report from regional accreditor that came under fire

December 2, 2010, 6:02 pm

The National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, which advises the education secretary on accreditation issues, accepted a compliance report on Thursday from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The commission, which continues to be recognized by the U.S. secretary of education, has come under fire from Congress and from the Education Department’s inspector general, who had said the commission was too lax in its standards for determining the amount of credit a student receives for course work.
Budget-cutting colleges bid some languages adieu

By LISA W. FODERARO
December 3, 2010
Albany

THE bad news was not unexpected: sweeping cutbacks at the State University of New York at Albany, prompted by sweeping cutbacks in state aid. The reactions, too, had a whiff of the familiar: student rallies, faculty resolutions, an online petition.

But then came an op-ed article in the French newspaper Le Monde, calling the cuts Orwellian. And an open letter from the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, sarcastically suggesting that universities give up teaching the humanities altogether.

If the cuts have struck a nerve far from this upstate campus and in more than one language, it is in large part because they involve language itself, and some cherished staples of the curriculum. The university announced this fall that it would stop letting new students major in French, Italian, Russian and the classics.

The move mirrors similar prunings around the country at other public colleges and universities that are reeling from steep drops in state aid. After a generation of expansion, academic officials are being forced to lop entire majors. More often than not, foreign languages — European ones in particular — are on the chopping block.

The reasons for their plight are many. Some languages may seem less vital in a world increasingly dominated by English. Web sites and new technologies offer instant translations. The small, interactive classes typical of foreign language instruction are costly for universities.

But the paradox, some experts in higher education say, is that many schools are eliminating language degrees and graduate programs just as they begin to embrace an international mission: opening campuses abroad, recruiting students from overseas and talking about graduating citizens of the world. The University at Albany’s motto is “The World Within Reach.”

“There’s no way on earth we should be cutting these languages,” said John M. Hamilton, executive vice chancellor and provost at Louisiana State University, where officials this year decided to phase out majors in German and Latin, as well as basic instruction in Portuguese, Russian, Swahili and Japanese, after losing $42 million in public financing over the last two years.

“We should be adding languages and urging more students to take them,” Dr. Hamilton added. “I’m being asked to prepare students for the global economy, but this is almost like asking them to use the abacus instead of computers.”

Most public colleges still teach languages, but fewer are allowing students to make them a specialty. The University of Maine’s president, Robert A. Kennedy, has recommended suspending undergraduate degree programs in German and Latin. This fall at the University of Nevada, Reno, students can no longer declare majors in German Studies or minors in Italian. At Winona State University in Minnesota, officials have placed a moratorium on new majors in French and German while it challenges the faculty to make those disciplines more relevant to the contemporary world.

Other schools, public and private, have recently eliminated or diluted the foreign-language component of

their core curriculums. Starting next fall at the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences at the George Washington University, students will no longer have to take a foreign language to graduate, although they may use language courses to help fulfill a broader humanities requirement.

Bob Peckham, a professor of French at the University of Tennessee at Martin whose own program came under threat, has made it his mission to fight the retrenchments nationwide. As chairman of the Commission on Advocacy of the American Association of Teachers of French, he monitors cutback proposals and provides research that helps campuses tailor their protests.

“There are at least 54 foreign-language majors that have been either threatened or eliminated,” Dr. Peckham said. “People don’t realize that this is happening in a lot of places.”

Still, languages are holding their own on campus. A report due Wednesday from the Modern Language Association, which advocates for language programs nationwide, will show that overall enrollments in college language classes are actually up over 2006, when the last survey was conducted, and are at their highest level since 1960.

One reason is a surge of interest in languages like Arabic and Spanish, which is thriving on campus in response to the nation’s growing Latino population. China’s rising importance has prompted more college programs in Mandarin, and the Chinese government has been generous in financing them.

Richard N. Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations, caused a stir with a speech last month to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in which he questioned the prominence of European language instruction, given the shift of power centers and political hot spots from Europe to Asia and the Middle East.

“My argument wasn’t so much against this or that language,” Dr. Haass, a former State Department official, said in an interview. “But if we’re going to remain economically competitive and provide the skill and manpower for government, I think we need more Americans to learn Chinese or Hindi or Farsi or Portuguese or Korean or Arabic. In an ideal world, that wouldn’t mean fewer people would know Spanish, French, German and Italian. But in a real world, it might.”

Rosemary G. Feal, executive director of the Modern Language Association, rejected the notion of languages as “a zero-sum game,” and said the field had become too responsive to fads.

“We always do these things in fits and starts,” said Dr. Feal, who is a Spanish professor at the University at Buffalo. “We pick targets of opportunity as the geopolitical circumstances change, and we don’t create a steady infrastructure so that language learning at a deep level is possible.”

She said the program cuts also revealed an “Anglocentric perspective” that fluency in English was enough to understand the world.

“How can you be a comprehensive university center,” Dr. Feal said, “and not offer students even the chance to take advanced courses in French, German, Russian and Italian, to read Goethe in the original?”

It is a tough choice, but a necessary one as publicly funded universities can no longer rely on piecemeal, one-time cuts to balance budgets, said Terry W. Hartle, a senior vice president of the American Council on Education. Across the country, he said, foreign language programs “are being looked at carefully with an eye toward measuring student demand versus expenses.”
At SUNY Albany, which has lost tens of millions of dollars in state aid in the past few years and faces another $13 million loss this year, the situation has “reached a breaking point,” said its provost, Susan D. Phillips.

The French department has seven full-time faculty members and 40 majors, while 15 doctoral students do “a great deal of the undergraduate instruction,” Dr. Phillips said. In Russian, there are three full-time faculty members for 19 majors. By contrast, the communications department employs six full-time faculty members for 520 majors.

The university, which has also stopped accepting new majors in theater, has suspended degree programs in French, Italian and Russian. Making the change permanent would require State Department of Education approval.

Dr. Phillips said she hoped some instruction would continue in those languages. Currently, classes are offered in 13 languages, including Arabic, Dutch, Hebrew and Korean; students can earn undergraduate degrees in Spanish, Chinese and Japanese, and in East Asian Studies.

Meanwhile, those who have declared French, Russian or Italian as a major or minor say they worry that their diplomas could lose value if the degree programs vanish.

Jessica Stapf, a freshman, arrived on campus planning to pursue a double major in French and political science, followed by a master’s in French, the only language in which the university offered advanced degrees. She hopes to land a job someday with the United Nations in Africa, where French is widely spoken.

Though the university made an exception and allowed her to declare a French major anyway, she was advised that she would need to cram 11 upper-level courses into the next three semesters. The master’s, she said, appears to be out of the question.

“It’s extraordinarily inconvenient for me,” Ms. Stapf said. “If the university wants to provide that ‘world within reach’ they’ve been sloganeering about, then they have to provide the languages that bring the world within reach.”
Doctorate degrees in U.S. increase to record level

By THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE
December 5, 2010

Research doctorate degrees were awarded to 49,562 students by American academic institutions in the 2008-9 academic year, the highest number ever reported, according to the National Science Foundation’s Survey of Earned Doctorates.

The figure represents a 1.6 percent increase over the 2007-8 year.

The growth was due largely to increases in the number of degrees awarded in the fields of science and engineering. In 2009, 67.5 percent of all doctorates went to science and engineering students (a total of 33,470), a 1.9 percent rise over 2008. This increase, in turn, resulted from an upswing in the number of women earning science and engineering degrees. Of the total science and engineering doctoral recipients, 13,593 were women — representing a 4.8 percent increase over 2008 levels — while the number of men earning science and engineering doctorates declined very slightly.

However, a decline was observed in the number of doctorates earned by foreign students. In 2009, doctorates awarded to students holding temporary visas declined 3.3 percent in science and engineering, and 4.6 percent across other disciplines.

The National Science Foundation, an independent government organization founded in 1950 to promote science, has conducted its Survey of Earned Doctorates since the 1950s.

— REBECCA APPEL
Graduation rates fall at one-third of 4-year colleges

December 5, 2010
Akron, Ohio

Jerome Thompson entered the University of Akron in 1996, fresh out of high school. He dropped out within a year, saying in retrospect that he lacked the maturity and discipline to continue his studies. “It was, Should I go to class that day, or am I gonna hang out?” he says. “OK, I’m gonna hang out.”

He didn't give up on academe, however. He returned to the university in 2001 and earned a bachelor's degree in social work, although it took him eight more years.

It was a personal victory for Mr. Thompson. But for Akron, it was as if he had never returned, at least when it came to reporting the university's graduation rate to the federal government. The rules didn't allow Akron to count Mr. Thompson as finishing his degree, because he didn't do so within six years of first enrolling.

Students like Mr. Thompson may help explain why at Akron and other colleges, the graduation rate has been heading in the wrong direction. A Chronicle analysis of nearly 1,400 four-year institutions shows that one-third reported lower graduation rates for the six-year period ending in 2008 than for the one ending in 2003.

The rate dropped by six percentage points at North Dakota State University, by seven points at Bowling Green State University, and by eight points at Wilmington University. Akron's seven-point decline was one of the largest among all public, research-intensive universities. And its graduation rate, 33 percent, was one of the lowest.

Akron and other institutions cited a variety of reasons for the lagging rates, including competing priorities and changing student demographics, and they described renewed efforts to improve.

There are certainly many models to follow. Colleges have raised graduation rates through proactive advising and by better integrating freshmen into campus life, among other measures. The colleges have incentives: The Obama administration, foundations, and state officials are all pressing them to produce more graduates to ensure the country's economic health in the future.

But it will take time and strong leadership to raise rates across colleges, experts say, as mounting financial pressures on both students and institutions combine to push rates lower.

The Rate People Hate

Besides failing to count students who take a long time to complete their degrees, the graduation rate is in other respects an incomplete measure of institutional quality. The data describe a minority of all enrolled students, counting only full-time, first-time students who enroll in the fall and complete degrees within "150 percent of normal time"—six years for students seeking bachelor's degrees. The graduation rate excludes students who transfer to other colleges and earn degrees there. It also omits students who transfer in and graduate. By one estimate, the rate ignores up to 50 percent of all enrolled students.

What's more, the graduation rate doesn't measure how much students actually learn. Nor does it show how well colleges are helping academically underprepared students to succeed.
Even so, despite its methodological shortcomings, the rate is the primary, publicly available, uniform metric that describes how well colleges are serving their students.

The picture it paints is not pretty. Aside from the institutions where rates have declined, growth has been modest at best. The median graduation rate among four-year colleges increased by approximately two percentage points, to about 53 percent, from 2003 to 2008. The rate dropped at nearly 500 four-year institutions during that period. Among colleges where graduation rates were below average in 2003, a similar pattern of slow growth and some declines also held.

An institution's graduation rate can change over time for many reasons, and colleges have more control over some than others. In interviews on and around the University of Akron's campus in November, students who had stopped pursuing bachelor's degrees offered a variety of reasons.

For Taylor Ayers, who started classes in summer 2008 and has an interest in designing and building bicycles, it was the feeling that his studies in mechanical engineering were too theoretical. "I couldn't find a reason I was learning," he says.

This past spring he switched to a two-year program in mechanical-engineering technology at Summit College, a division of the university focused on producing associate-degree graduates. There, he says, classes are much more focused on practical applications.

Laken Ward, who started at Akron in 2009, dropped out this year after conflicts with roommates and confusion over her financial-aid package.

She had misunderstood a conversation with the financial-aid office and thought the university was dropping her from classes because of a delay in processing her aid. By the time the misunderstanding was worked out, she had missed nearly three weeks. "I was so far behind already, I couldn't really catch up," Ms. Ward says. She is now working at a local restaurant and hopes to return to college.

**Trying to Do It All**

The University of Akron is working to grow and improve as the city around it struggles. Akron is one of many Rust Belt communities facing decline. The nation's tire industry, which started here, has dwindled.

The city's population has declined since 1960, falling 5 percent in the past decade. The poverty rate has grown, to 25 percent, about 10 points above the national average in 2009.

The university is downtown, amid old industrial buildings and highways. Concrete and brown-brick buildings from the cold-war era make up much of the campus, and students say the surrounding area is not particularly safe.

Campus leaders have pushed hard to change its uninviting look. Akron conducted a $500-million capital campaign and has put up 20 buildings, including a student center, over the past decade.

The facelift was part of a successful strategy to build enrollment, which has grown by more than 4 percent annually for the past several years, reaching about 28,000 this year.

But some officials say the university's ambitious growth plans have outpaced its efforts to graduate more students.
Since Luis M. Proenza became president, in 1999, he has talked about promoting student success, and the topic was named a high priority in strategic plans. But as enrollment grew, Akron, like other growing public institutions, found itself playing some catch-up on retention efforts, says F. John Case, who was vice president for finance and administration from 2005 to last March.

"Getting them in the door was great, but you have to help them once they're there," says Mr. Case, now a higher-education consultant.

Another concern: The growth in enrollment was accompanied by a rise in the proportion of part-time faculty, to nearly 60 percent. That is among the highest rates of all research-intensive universities, The Chronicle found. The part-timers were a cost-effective way of keeping up with the enrollment growth. But Akron's new provost, William M. (Mike) Sherman, says he wants to improve "the quality of the student experience" by hiring more full-timers.

Mr. Sherman and Mr. Proenza point to student demographics to explain the recent decline in Akron's graduation rate. "Very troublesome," the president calls it. "Do we fully understand it? No." But, he adds, "one measure doesn't tell the story, especially in metropolitan state universities."

Like some of those institutions, Akron has an open-admissions policy, he notes, essentially admitting all applicants. The average ACT score of entering students dipped for a few years, meaning that the students admitted were less prepared academically and therefore less likely to finish within six years. (The average is now on the rise, Mr. Sherman says.)

The influx of those underprepared students has, in effect, dragged down the graduation rate over time, Mr. Proenza says. He cites internal data showing that the graduation rate of students in the top two quartiles of ACT scores rose from 2003 to 2010.

But the federal government's one-size-fits-all reporting system does not account for such nuances. Nor will they be taken into account in Ohio's formula for distributing appropriations to state universities. Ohio is one of the few states to explicitly make graduation rates a part of its appropriations formula.

Mr. Proenza mentions another aspect of student demographics that influences Akron's graduation rates: the increasing tendency of students to take well over six years to graduate.

"Every year at the commencement ceremony, I ask students who took more than four years to graduate to raise their hands," he says. "And then I ask those who took 10 years to graduate. There are a few every year who raise their hands."

Mr. Thompson, who returned to Akron to complete his bachelor's degree, says he needed eight years because of a variety of personal circumstances. He failed several classes that he had to repeat, and he took just 12 credit hours at a time. In addition, he worked and served as a caregiver for his grandmother.

Even then, he says, he found it difficult to find a job in his major, social work. So he has returned to Akron again to work on a master's degree in the field.

Mr. Thompson's case is unusual, however. Nationally, only a slightly higher percentage of students graduate within eight years than within six years, according to the Education Department. (The agency has required colleges to start reporting eight-year graduation rates, and the first batch of such data covers the period ending in 2008.)

Finances Influence Delay
Other colleges contacted by The Chronicle about drops in their graduation rates also pointed to more students taking longer to complete degrees.

Financial pressures are partly to blame at Alverno College, says Sister Kathleen O’Brien, senior vice president for academic affairs at the private, master’s-level women’s college in Milwaukee. The graduation rate fell by eight percentage points, to 39 percent, from 2003 to 2008—at an institution that had developed a national reputation for systematically assessing the learning of its students. That was one the larger drops among private master’s institutions.

Graduation rates for the period ending in 2008 predate the start of the recession. But in Milwaukee, the economy was already struggling, Sister O’Brien says. The city’s poverty rate is among the highest in the country, and the percentage of students at Alverno receiving Pell Grants has risen to 63 percent.

“I think we’re doing the right things, so I think it’s more financial than anything,” she says of the graduation-rate trend.

Officials at the University of Colorado at Denver, too, say financial pressures on students help explain a dip in the graduation rate there, from 39 percent in 2003 to 37 percent in 2008.

“As an urban research institution, the nature of our students means that they’re employed starting at the freshman year,” says John A. Lanning, assistant vice chancellor for undergraduate experiences. “Even if things go well, they’re hard-pressed to graduate by that six-year mark.”

Increases in tuition and fees may be deterring students as well, he says. “We used to be a low-tuition-and-fees state for public higher education. Now we’re in the middle of the pack. It’s a big change, and state support continues to go down.”

The Denver campus has made new efforts in the past five years, like starting a seminar program for all first-year students, to help undergraduates complete their degrees.

Akron is starting similar efforts to raise its graduation rate. They include adding 12 academic advisers to the existing corps of 60. In addition, the university has tested an early-warning system for faculty and staff members to identify students who are struggling academically, so Akron can offer them additional attention. That system is being put in place this year.

Mr. Sherman, the provost, began his job in June with a mandate to improve graduation rates. He came to Akron from a job at Ohio State University overseeing its regional two-year campuses, where some academically underprepared students go to prepare to transfer to the main campus at Columbus.

He wants Akron to raise its 33-percent graduation rate to 60 percent by 2020. It’s an ambitious goal: That would be the highest rate of any large college that has open admissions.

At the same time, Mr. Sherman is planning for prospective budget cuts because of Ohio’s fiscal difficulties. He does not expect Akron to have any new dollars to use to improve graduation rates. To free up money, he says, he will consider cutting academic programs that are underenrolled and unlikely to reach capacity.

“If we are really integrated in our planning across the institution, in terms of these goals and objectives,” he says, “I think we can get” to 60 percent.

Money Isn’t Everything
Some colleges have raised graduation rates with a variety of interventions (see article, Page A15). Few studies have examined how much they cost. Researchers at Cornell University found that colleges that spent more on student services, such as tutoring, tended to report increased graduation rates, especially if they enrolled many poor students with low test scores.

Many colleges with low graduation rates also tend to be less-selective institutions, with more underprepared students and less financing than at flagship public universities and elite private colleges, says Ronald G. Ehrenberg, director of Cornell University's Higher Education Research Institute. Yet states' financing formulas for those colleges don't take that into account, either.

When colleges invest the effort, they often can move their rates, says Kevin Carey, policy director at Education Sector and a *Chronicle* contributing writer. But if no outsiders, like accreditors or trustees, are pushing them to do so, it's easy for them not to bother trying.

At least one incentive for change has come from two foundations that put grant money behind efforts to improve graduation rates—the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation for Education. More than half of the $55-million awarded by Lumina in 2009 was focused on improving the academic success of students and their institutions, estimates Jamie P. Merisotis, Lumina's president.

Another impetus, although mostly a rhetorical one, is President Obama's goal for America to have the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020. Given a college-age population projected to level off and decline, that will probably require a major increase in graduation rates.

Those new pressures are too new to have affected graduation rates yet. And several experts predict that the rates will continue to change only slowly, because improving teaching and student-support services across a campus is hard.

"It will take five, 10 years for them to start turning this oil tanker around," says Vincent Tinto, a professor at Syracuse University who has studied ways to raise graduation rates.

Getting "a fleet of small boats all to sail in the same direction," might be a better analogy, Mr. Tinto adds, given that control within many academic institutions is spread across their schools and colleges. Improvement, he says, depends "not on how many programs a university has, but how coherently they are aligned in a consistent way."

*Jane Coaston and Alex Richards contributed to this article.*
It is a deeply flawed measure of college performance, but it is also one of the best we have.

Today The Chronicle published an analysis of recent changes in the six-year graduation rates at nearly 1,400 colleges. At most institutions, the rate ticked up at least modestly between 2003 and 2008. But at 35 percent of the colleges in the data set, the rate declined, in some cases steeply.

In other words, despite all the attention thrown at graduation rates during the last 15 years, many colleges’ numbers remain stagnant or worse.

But what exactly is a six-year graduation rate? Here are a few basics. (If you already live and breathe this stuff, this post isn’t for you. Go watch this instead.)

Q. What do these numbers represent?

A. In 1990, Congress passed the Student Right-to-Know Act, which requires colleges to disclose information on graduation rates and serious crimes.

In particular, the law requires colleges to report the proportion of students “completing their program within 150 percent of the normal time to completion.” For four-year colleges, that means the proportion of students who earn bachelor’s degrees within six years. In 1997 the federal government began to systematically collect those numbers through its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, commonly known as IPEDS.

Q. In general, how are colleges doing on that measure?

A. A little more than half of students who enter four-year colleges earn a bachelor’s degree from the same institution within six years. You tell me whether that’s good or bad.

Q. And how have the numbers changed since 1997?

A. Recent trends have been at least modestly positive. Among students who entered four-year colleges in 1996, 55.4 percent had earned bachelor’s degrees six years later. For the cohort of students who started college in 2001, the figure was 57.3 percent. That’s according to data published by the federal government last year. If you study that table, you’ll see similar small, steady increases in most categories.

Q. Why does the IPEDS six-year graduation statistic make some people rend their garments and gnash their teeth?

A. It doesn’t cover people who begin college as part-time students. It doesn’t cover people who begin at community colleges and then transfer to four-year institutions. In fact, it doesn’t cover people who transfer at all: To get picked up in the federal data, students have to begin and end at the same institution. It doesn’t cover the nontrivial number of students who complete college seven or more years after they start. Whole swaths of higher education are rendered invisible.
The Chronicle of Higher Education, December 6, 2010 (Page 2 of 2)

**Q. What could we use instead?**

**A.** In many people’s eyes, the gold standard would be a unit-record tracking system that would follow students from institution to institution for the full length of their college careers. But Congress rejected that idea several years ago amid heavy political opposition.

The unit-record concept has not died, however. The Obama administration has given tens of millions of dollars to states to build data systems that would track students’ progress from elementary school through college. (The State Higher Education Executive Officers has recently published two reports about the best ways to create those databases.) Even if no true federal data system emerges, there will probably be a de facto national unit-record database within a decade or so.

**Q. If we used a unit-record data system, would four-year colleges’ graduation rates look healthier than they do now under the IPEDS six-year graduation statistic?**

**A.** It depends on what you want to measure. If four-year colleges received credit for graduating students who transferred in from community colleges, then their numbers would certainly look better. That’s an important topic, and most people agree that four-year colleges should be credited for playing that role.

But if we want to focus on students who begin their college careers at four-year colleges, then a unit-record system would probably make the national graduation rate look only somewhat better.

Unlike the IPEDS data, a unit-record system would capture students who begin at one four-year college and graduate from another four-year college. But including those transfer students would probably improve the national six-year graduation rate by only a few percentage points.

To see what I mean, look at the data released last week from the Beginning Postsecondary survey, a periodic federal study that tracks a sample of students through their college experiences. Among students who enrolled in four-year degree programs in 2003-4, 63.2 percent had earned a bachelor’s degree within six years. That’s better than the 57.3 percent rate I cited above from the national IPEDS data, but it’s not an enormous difference. (For more analysis of the Beginning Postsecondary data, see Kevin Carey’s Brainstorm post from last week.)

**Q. Until the dawning of a unit-record-tracking age, the IPEDS six-year graduation rate will probably be the best available measure. Since we have to live with this system, are there ways we could improve it?**

**A.** Maybe. In July, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative published a white paper about how to improve the IPEDS graduation-rate calculations. Among other things, the report suggested that the federal government’s College Navigator Web Site should display five-year rolling averages of an institution’s graduation rate, rather than focusing solely on a single cohort.
AP IMPACT: State Dept. stands silent through decades of abuse in huge student-exchange program

HOLBROOK MOHR, MIKE BAKER, MITCH WEISS
Associated Press
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MYRTLE BEACH, S.C. (AP) — Lured by unsupervised, third-party brokers with promises of steady jobs and a chance to sightsee, some foreign college students on summer work programs in the U.S. get a far different taste of life in America.

An Associated Press investigation found students forced to work in strip clubs instead of restaurants. Others take home $1 an hour or even less. Some live in apartments so crowded that they sleep in shifts because there aren’t enough beds. Others have to eat on floors.

They are among more than 100,000 college students who come to the U.S. each year on popular J-1 visas, which supply resorts with cheap seasonal labor as part of a program aimed at fostering cultural understanding.

Government auditors have warned about problems in the program for 20 years, but the State Department, which is in charge of it, only now says it is working on new rules. Officials won’t say what those rules are or discuss on the record the problems that have plagued J-1 visas.

John Woods, deputy assistant director of national security for Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, told the AP there were at least two federal investigations under way into human trafficking related to J-1 visas. He would not provide details.

The AP interviewed students, advocates, local authorities and social service agencies, and reviewed thousands of pages of confidential records, police reports and court cases. Among the findings:

— Many foreign students pay recruiters to help find employment, then don’t get work or wind up making little or no money at menial jobs. Labor recruiters charge students exorbitant rent for packing them into filthy, sparsely furnished apartments so crowded that some endure “hotbunking,” where they sleep in shifts.

Students routinely get threatened with deportation or eviction if they quit, or even if they just complain too loudly. Some resort to stealing essentials like food, toothpaste and underwear, according to police. "The vast majority of participating students in this program find it a rewarding experience and return home safely," the State Department said in an e-mail to the AP.

But it’s not hard to find exceptions. Most of the nearly 70 students the AP interviewed in 10 states, hailing from 16 countries, said they were disappointed, and some were angry.

"This is not what I thought when I paid all this money to come here," said Natalia Berlinschi, a Romanian who came to the U.S. on a J-1 visa hoping to save up for dental school but got stuck in South Carolina this summer without a job. She took to begging for work on the Myrtle Beach boardwalk and sharing a three-bedroom house with 30 other exchange students.

"I was treated very, very badly," Berlinschi said. "I will never come back."
The State Department failed to even keep up with the number of student complaints until this year, and has consistently shifted responsibility for policing the program to the 50 or so companies that sponsor students for fees that can run up to several thousand dollars. That has left businesses to monitor their own treatment of participants.

The program generates millions for the sponsor companies and third-party labor recruiters.

Businesses that hire students can save 8 percent by using a foreign worker over an American because they don't have to pay Medicare, Social Security and unemployment taxes. The students are required to have health insurance before they arrive, another cost that employers don't have to bear.

Many businesses say they need the seasonal work force to meet the demand of tourist season.

"There's been a massive failure on the part of the United States to bring any accountability to the temporary work visa programs, and it's especially true for the J-1," said Terry Coonan, a former prosecutor and the executive director of Florida State University's Center for the Advancement of Human Rights.

The issues are serious enough that the former Soviet republic of Belarus told its young people in 2006 to avoid going to the U.S. on a J-1, warning of a "high level of danger" after one of its citizens in the program was murdered, another died in what investigators in the U.S. said was a suicide, and a third was robbed.

Strip clubs and adult entertainment companies openly solicit J-1 workers, even though government regulations ban students from taking jobs "that might bring the Department of State into notoriety or disrepute."

"If you wish to dance in USA as a J-1 exchange visitor, contact us," ZM Studios, a broker for topless dancers, advertised on its website this year. The ad said ZM Studios is "affiliated with designated visa sponsors" and can get women J-1 visas and jobs at topless clubs in cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

ZM Studios president Julian Andreev denied employing J-1 students in an e-mail to the AP, but the company's site on Friday still guaranteed help getting visas for prospective dancers, noting that they need a J-1 or one of two other types of visas to work legally.

J-1 students have been recruited to smuggle cash that authorities said was stolen from U.S. bank accounts, court records show, and their identities have been used in a million-dollar income tax scam.

"It's difficult to prosecute these cases because the workers usually leave the country within a few months. That's why the J-1 is the ideal visa to exploit," Coonan said.

In the worst cases, students get funneled into sexual slavery.

The J-1 Summer Work and Travel program, which allows college students to visit for up to four months, is one of the State Department's most popular visas. Participation has boomed from about 20,000 in 1996 to a peak of more than 150,000 in 2008.

The visas are issued year-round, since students come from both hemispheres on their summer breaks. They work all over the country, at theme parks in Florida and California, fish factories in Alaska and upscale ski destinations in Colorado and Montana.

The influx has been especially overwhelming for some resort towns.
In Maryland, the Ocean City Baptist Church served more than 1,700 different J-1 participants from 46 countries who sought free meals this summer, sometimes upward of 500 in one night, said Lynn Davis, who leads the food ministry.

Down the coast in Virginia Beach, Va., a homeless shelter that typically feeds 100 people a day was serving twice that many this summer as the site became overrun with J-1 students. The Judeo-Christian Outreach Center began running out of food on some days and was forced to limit how often the students could eat there, said Tony Zontini, the shelter's assistant director.

Hotels, restaurants and other businesses often hire third-party labor recruiters to supply the J-1 workers. Many of those brokers are people from the students' native countries, often former Soviet bloc nations.

These middlemen commonly dock students' pay so heavily for lodging, transportation and other necessities that the wages work out to $1 an hour or less, according to George Collins, an inspector at the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Department in the Florida Panhandle who has worked cases involving J-1 students since 2001.

Collins, who once notified the State Department that "J-1 abuse is epidemic here," told the AP the same companies often exploit students year after year despite his reporting them.

For years, the State Department has refused to publicly discuss problems in the program in any kind of detail.

The AP asked the State Department in a Freedom of Information Act request in March 2009 for a full list of complaints related to the program. In May, more than a year later, the department finally responded that it kept no such list, and that it keeps records related to the program for only three years.

Last month, the department said it had finally created a database of complaints.

"It turns out that until this year, we did NOT keep a record of complaints. Now, we do," Marthena Cowart, a senior adviser for the department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, said in a Nov. 10 e-mail.

Cowart did not provide a copy of the complaint database to the AP or indicate how many complaints it included. And the department declined to discuss the AP's findings on the record.

"We are deeply concerned by any allegations involving the poor treatment of participants as this potentially undermines our goal of promoting mutual understanding and goodwill between the people of the United States and the people of other countries," the department said Friday in declining an interview request.

For the many J-1 women who end up working in strip clubs, whether by choice or force, the changes can't come soon enough.

In Florida, a 19-year-old Russian told the AP she went to work as a cocktail waitress this summer at a topless bar in Fort Walton Beach because the souvenir shop where she worked didn't pay much and the shop owner had her living in a crowded, run-down apartment.

She gave the AP only her first name, Oleysa, because she hadn't told her parents.

"My father doesn't know where I work," she said, lowering her gaze to a tray of beers and mixed drinks.

A Ukrainian woman who said she was forced to strip in Detroit asked the AP to identify her only as Katya, because she fears for her life.
Katya, who used the same alias when testifying to Congress in October 2007 about how sex trafficking brought her to the U.S., said she was studying sports medicine in Kiev back in 2004 when her boss told her about the J-1 program.

Instead of waitressing for a summer in Virginia as she'd been promised, however, Katya and another student were forced to strip at a club in Detroit. Their handler confiscated their passports and told them they had to pay $12,000 for the travel arrangements and another $10,000 for work documents, according to court records.

Katya said he eventually demanded she come up with $35,000 somehow, by dancing or other means.

"I said, 'That's not what I signed here for. That's not right.' He said, 'Well, you owe me the money. I don't care how I get it from you. If I have to sell you, I'll sell you.'"

The women were told that if they refused, their families in Ukraine would be killed, Katya said.

Over the next months, the two men beat the women, threatened them with guns and made them work at Cheetah's strip club, court records state. Katya said one of the men also forced her to have sex, a memory she still struggles with.

The two men are now in prison, and Katya's old boss in Ukraine is a fugitive. Katya was allowed to stay on a different visa designed for victims of human trafficking and other crimes, and her mother was allowed into the U.S. because of threats on her life in Ukraine.

Even J-1 students who avoid physical or sexual abuse often face other challenges.

Exchange student Munkh-Erdene Battur said he and four others were fired from their fast-food jobs last year in Riverton, Wyo., after complaining about living in what looked like a converted garage and paying $350 apiece per month for the accommodations.

"In my whole life, I've never lived in that kind of place and that kind of conditions," said Battur, who is from Mongolia.

Iuliia Bolgaryna came to work this summer at a souvenir store on the outskirts of Surf City, N.C.

The store manager offered to let her and two other women from the Ukraine stay with him for $120 a week. But he wouldn't let them eat at the table, so they huddled together for meals on the floor. They worked loads of overtime but were only paid for 40 hours a week.

The store manager declined to comment.

"It was almost normal that he screamed, that we worked 14 hours, that we ate on the floor," she said. "That was our America."

Mohr reported from along the Florida Panhandle. Weiss reported from Myrtle Beach and Columbia, S.C. Baker reported from Surf City, N.C. Associated Press writers Michael Kunzelman in New Orleans and Mike Schneider in Orlando contributed to this report, as did The AP News Research Center in New York. AP videojournalist Jason Bronis contributed from Detroit and the Florida Panhandle.

The AP National Investigative Team can be reached at investigate(at)ap.org.
Experts recommend improved strategies for getting minority males into graduate school

by Jamaal Abdul-Alim, December 6, 2010

WASHINGTON – At a time when much national higher education discussion revolves around student access to and through college, the Council of Graduate Schools’ annual conference that wrapped up in Washington, D.C. over the weekend focused on the challenges associated with positioning students to pursue more than just a bachelor’s degree.

Sometimes, the lack of interest in graduate school stems from lack of information on what graduate school entails and the financial benefits that it brings, said Larry A. Griffith, vice president of the Gates Millennium Scholars program at the United Negro College Fund.

“We need to help them think about what graduate school is and how to communicate that to their community of support,” Griffith said at a panel discussion titled “Diverse Perspectives on Achieving Student Success.” He lamented that graduate school has proven less enticing than the world of work, particularly for Hispanic students who feel compelled to work to help out their families.

The Gates Millennium Scholars program, which provides unmet need scholarships and guidance to high-performing minority students who are Pell Grant eligible, has served some 14,000 students since its inception in 1999. Of that number, 2,470 have gone on to graduate school.

However, when you delve deeper into the numbers, they reveal that the program is failing to persuade many males to pursue anything beyond a bachelor’s degree.

For instance, of the 697 Gates scholars currently in graduate school, only 201 are male. Griffith said part of the problem stems from higher education proponents not making a strong enough case to answer the question “Why bother?” when it comes to graduate school.

"I think we have lost the conversation with the large majority of students and particularly with African-American males in helping them understand why college, why graduate school and a doctorate are important to their success," Griffith said, arguing that many have become disillusioned by instances of racism in corporate America and have opted to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors that enable them to maintain their identity.

“They’re saying there are other avenues that I could pursue that are more reflective and respective of me,” Griffith said.

On the flip side, the low number of males in graduate school is not always a matter of a lack of interest but a lack of preparedness, said Dr. William A. Person, associate dean of the graduate school at Mississippi State University, who attended the panel discussion where Griffith spoke.

“I’ve had students come to me and say, ‘Dr. Person, I want to come to graduate school,’” Person recounted during an interview with Diverse. “And I look at their record and say, ‘I don’t know what program is going to admit you.’”

"So we ask them to develop some clean-up strategies like come back and work on a second bachelor’s degree and make good grades. That might help you get into some good programs," he said.
Similar discussions played out throughout the 50th anniversary meeting of the Council of Graduate Schools, which drew more than 700 graduate school deans and others to the J.W. Marriott in Washington, D.C.

Topics ranged from what graduate school deans can do to attract more students in tough economic times to developing strategies for effective diversity programs in graduate schools.

Council of Graduate Schools president Debra Stewart said the conference helped provide clarity on where graduate schools fit into the Obama administration’s college completion agenda, which calls for, among other things, restoring the United States to its former status as the most college-educated nation in the world.

“The fact of the matter is, if we don’t improve the completion rate for America’s undergraduates, we’re not going to have Americans go to graduate school in the future,” Stewart said.

Stewart said she thought the conference helped illuminate possible solutions that graduate schools can employ to remain viable and vibrant in tough economic times.

“The standard of success in this meeting is did it really provide deans with some new perspective and new tools for being effective in what is a tough environment,” Stewart said. “I think the answer to both of those questions is yes.”

Person, who has been attending the organization’s conferences for 20 years, concurred.

“What I got out of it was the need to start looking at information that helps to inform us better about the kind of planning that we need to be doing in terms of preparing students for the 21st century,” Person said. “The demographics basically are telling us that we’re not paying close attention to what’s going on.”
The Motion Picture Association of American began sending letters to thousands of colleges and university presidents today, alerting them that the industry group will start notifying colleges whenever it detects illegal trading of Hollywood films and hit TV shows on their campuses.

The MPAA has never before sent “takedown” letters directly to individual colleges, although movie and television studios have long done so as part of their copyright-enforcement procedures.

The movie-industry group’s letter begins by reminding college leaders of new legal regulations on digital piracy that went into effect this summer as part of the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Those rules require that colleges devise a campuswide plan for addressing illegal movie and music downloading on their campuses.

The letter, signed by Daniel M. Mandil, the group’s general counsel, offers help to colleges in complying with the law, including a link to a Web site that lists legal sources of popular films and TV shows. It also points to a resource page about the new regulations compiled by Educause.

An official of the MPAA, who asked not to be named, emphasized a provision of the law that requires colleges to review their plans for effectiveness every few years. “Content theft is changing all the time, so it’s not a static situation where you can develop one plan and not revisit it,” he said, noting that the group wants to help colleges keep their plans up to date and make sure they realize when students are breaking the rules and trading movies and shows online.

He said he was not sure whether the group’s new practice of sending alert letters to colleges about incidents of infringement will lead individual studios to stop their warning letters to colleges.

Steven L. Worona, director of policy and networking programs at Educause, described the MPAA’s note as “an accurate summary” and “useful reminder” of the new regulations on digital piracy. “We’re quite confident that most, if not all, of the colleges in the U.S. are already in compliance,” he said.

The MPAA’s warning that it would send notifications of individual cases of file trading is useful, Mr. Worona added, because it will help colleges prepare their systems to respond to the requests. In many cases, colleges have built automated systems that streamline the process of responding to such notices, which also come from publishers, music studios, and other copyright holders.
Certificate programs could play a key role in meeting the nation's educational goals

By Jennifer Gonzalez
December 7, 2010

Creating more certificate programs would help colleges meet the challenge of getting more students to finish a postsecondary credential and help states build skilled work forces, according to a new report from Complete College America, a Washington-based nonprofit group.

Certificate programs, especially those that are at least one year in length, would give students an opportunity to earn a postsecondary credential in a relatively short period of time, the report says. Students in those programs would be able to enter the work force faster than their peers, and the programs would build a foundation for students to pursue further academic work in the future, the report adds.

Complete College America, which works with states to increase college access and the number of college graduates, commissioned the report, "Certificates Count: An Analysis of Sub-Baccalaureate Certificates." The report was completed by FutureWorks, a Seattle consulting and policy-development firm.

Calling long-term certificate programs an underutilized strategy in meeting the nation's college-attainment goals, the nonprofit group advocates aggressive federal and state policies to promote such programs. "The United States should double the number of long-term certificates produced within the next five years, and then double that number again over the subsequent five years," the report says.

Earning a certificate has "real economic value," said Stan Jones, president of Complete College America. "In some cases, they have more value than associate degrees and even some bachelor's degrees."

About 750,000 certificates were awarded in 2007-8, the most recent year for which data are available. A little more than half of all certificates are awarded by public institutions, mostly community colleges. About four in 10 are granted by for-profit institutions.

Not all certificates are created equal.

Two-year colleges offer both long- and short-term certificate programs. However, the report finds that students reap the most financial benefits when they enroll in and complete a long-term certificate program of one year or more.

Research shows that those types of programs are consistently linked to increased earnings. That's because they tend to include greater technical and academic rigor than shorter-term programs, and they provide graduates with a wider range of job skills.

The report highlights research from Kentucky that found increases in average income for people who earned certificates from programs of at least one year were nearly identical to income returns of earning an associate degree. The incomes of women who completed either the certificate program or an associate degree increased by almost 40 percent, while the incomes of men who completed either went up by about 20 percent.

However, short-term certificate programs resulted in a much smaller increase in incomes. Men who
completed certificate programs lasting less than one year earned about 10 percent more than those who did not complete those programs, while the earnings advantage for women in these short-term programs was only about 3 percent.

The report makes several recommendations for using certificate programs as more of a central tool in increasing college completion. They include encouraging states to put in place spending formulas and other policy incentives to support the creation of certificate programs of one year or more. Shorter-term programs that lack significant labor-market payoff should be discouraged, the report says.
Graduation gap between black and white college football players said to be growing

by Jamaal Abdul-Alim, December 7, 2010

When most football fans tune into the college bowl games over the next few weeks, most will be concerned about which teams score the most points.

A study released Monday focuses attention on team statistics of a different sort: A racial breakdown of the rate at which the members of their team rosters earn a degree.

The study—titled Keeping Score When It Counts: Assessing the 2010-11 Bowl-bound College Football Teams - Academic Performance Improves but Race Still Matters—was conducted by The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) at the University of Central Florida. It found what the study's authors described as a “disturbing” and growing gap in the graduation rate between Black and White football players at the vast majority of universities in the Football Bowl Subdivision, formerly known as Division I-A schools.

Specifically, the study found that, of the 70 bowl-bound teams this year, the graduation success rate (GSR) for African-American football student athletes is 60 percent while the rate for White football student athletes was 80 percent. While both the African-American and White GSR increased over last year’s rates of 58 and 77 percent, respectively, the gap between the two also grew from 19 to 20 percentage points.

Dr. Richard Lapchick, director of TIDES and principal author of the study, said the problem emanates from educational disparities that occur early in a student’s academic career and therefore must be remedied long before the student attracts the attention of recruiters.

"I think that the only long-term solution is not going to take place on college campuses,” Lapchick said. “It’s going to take place in K-12 education.”

"Whereas some of the African-American student athletes come from urban areas that are underfunded, don’t have the best teachers, and technology is not the best, until that type of reform takes place, it’s going to be difficult to close the gap,” he added.

But Lapchick said the solutions to the problem don’t rest solely in the realm of K-12 education. He credited a 2004 academic reform effort initiated by the National Collegiate Athletic Association that he said has led many colleges to recruit student athletes who actually have a chance to graduate, whereas before, colleges could “cut corners.”

“Now, they have a prospect of losing scholarships,” Lapchick said of the NCAA reform effort, which created the Academic Progress Rate, or APR, which holds each team accountable for the success of student-athletes in the classroom and in their progress toward graduation.

Individual teams suffer penalties if they fall below an APR score of 925, which translates to an expected graduation rate of 50 percent of its student athletes. Up to 10 percent of a school’s scholarships can be taken away for failing to meet the APR standard.

This year, the study said, only Florida International is the only bowl-bound team with an APR below 925, but it is not subject to penalties by the NCAA.
Other findings of Lapchick’s study:

-- Sixty-three schools (90 percent) had graduation success rates of 66 percent or higher for White football student-athletes, which was more than 2.7 times the number of schools with the same GSR for African-American football student-athletes (23 schools or 33 percent).

-- Seventeen schools (24 percent) graduated less than 50 percent of their African-American football student-athletes, while only one school—Oklahoma—graduated less than 50 percent of its White football student-athletes.

-- Five schools (7 percent) graduated less than 40 percent of their African-American football student-athletes, but no school graduated less than 40 percent of its White football student-athletes.

The study also found that 15 schools (21 percent) had graduation success rates for African-American football student-athletes that were at least 30 percentage points lower than their rates for White football student-athletes, and that 35 schools (50 percent) had graduation success rates for African-American football student-athletes that were at least 20 percentage points lower than their rates for White football student-athletes.

Five schools bucked the trend with a GSR for African-American football student-athletes that surpassed their GSR for White football student-athletes: Northwestern (one percentage point higher), Virginia Tech (three percentage points higher), Southern Mississippi (three percentage points higher), Notre Dame (four percentage points higher) and Troy (10 percentage points higher). That is up from four schools that bucked the trend last year, the study states.
Top test scores from Shanghai stun educators

By SAM DILLON
December 7, 2010

With China’s debut in international standardized testing, students in Shanghai have surprised experts by outscoring their counterparts in dozens of other countries, in reading as well as in math and science, according to the results of a respected exam.

American officials and Europeans involved in administering the test in about 65 countries acknowledged that the scores from Shanghai — an industrial powerhouse with some 20 million residents and scores of modern universities that is a magnet for the best students in the country — are by no means representative of all of China.

About 5,100 15-year-olds in Shanghai were chosen as a representative cross-section of students in that city. In the United States, a similar number of students from across the country were selected as a representative sample for the test.

Experts noted the obvious difficulty of using a standardized test to compare countries and cities of vastly different sizes. Even so, they said the stellar academic performance of students in Shanghai was noteworthy, and another sign of China’s rapid modernization.

The results also appeared to reflect the culture of education there, including greater emphasis on teacher training and more time spent on studying rather than extracurricular activities like sports.

“Wow, I’m kind of stunned, I’m thinking Sputnik,” said Chester E. Finn Jr., who served in President Ronald Reagan’s Department of Education, referring to the groundbreaking Soviet satellite launching. Mr. Finn, who has visited schools all across China, said, “I’ve seen how relentless the Chinese are at accomplishing goals, and if they can do this in Shanghai in 2009, they can do it in 10 cities in 2019, and in 50 cities by 2029.”

The test, the Program for International Student Assessment, known as PISA, was given to 15-year-old students by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a Paris-based group that includes the world’s major industrial powers.

The results are to be released officially on Tuesday, but advance copies were provided to the news media a day early.

“We have to see this as a wake-up call,” Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in an interview on Monday.

“I know skeptics will want to argue with the results, but we consider them to be accurate and reliable, and we have to see them as a challenge to get better,” he added. “The United States came in 23rd or 24th in most subjects. We can quibble, or we can face the brutal truth that we’re being out-educated.”

In math, the Shanghai students performed in a class by themselves, outperforming second-place Singapore, which has been seen as an educational superstar in recent years. The average math scores of American students put them below 30 other countries.

PISA scores are on a scale, with 500 as the average. Two-thirds of students in participating countries
score between 400 and 600. On the math test last year, students in Shanghai scored 600, in Singapore 562, in Germany 513, and in the United States 487.

In reading, Shanghai students scored 556, ahead of second-place Korea with 539. The United States scored 500 and came in 17th, putting it on par with students in the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and several other countries.

In science, Shanghai students scored 575. In second place was Finland, where the average score was 554. The United States scored 502 — in 23rd place — with a performance indistinguishable from Poland, Ireland, Norway, France and several other countries.

The testing in Shanghai was carried out by an international contractor, working with Chinese authorities, and overseen by the Australian Council for Educational Research, a nonprofit testing group, said Andreas Schleicher, who directs the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s international educational testing program.

Mark Schneider, a commissioner of the Department of Education’s research arm in the George W. Bush administration, who returned from an educational research visit to China on Friday, said he had been skeptical about some PISA results in the past. But Mr. Schneider said he considered the accuracy of these results to be unassailable.

“The technical side of this was well regulated, the sampling was O.K., and there was no evidence of cheating,” he said.

Mr. Schneider, however, noted some factors that may have influenced the outcome.

For one thing, Shanghai is a huge migration hub within China. Students are supposed to return to their home provinces to attend high school, but the Shanghai authorities could increase scores by allowing stellar students to stay in the city, he said. And Shanghai students apparently were told the test was important for China’s image and thus were more motivated to do well, he said.

“Can you imagine the reaction if we told the students of Chicago that the PISA was an important international test and that America’s reputation depended on them performing well?” Mr. Schneider said. “That said, China is taking education very seriously. The work ethic is amazingly strong.”

In a speech to a college audience in North Carolina, President Obama recalled how the Soviet Union’s 1957 launching of Sputnik provoked the United States to increase investment in math and science education, helping America win the space race.

“Fifty years later, our generation’s Sputnik moment is back,” Mr. Obama said. With billions of people in India and China “suddenly plugged into the world economy,” he said, nations with the most educated workers will prevail. “As it stands right now,” he said, “America is in danger of falling behind.”

If Shanghai is a showcase of Chinese educational progress, America’s showcase would be Massachusetts, which has routinely scored higher than all other states on America’s main federal math test in recent years.

But in a 2007 study that correlated the results of that test with the results of an international math exam, Massachusetts students scored behind Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Shanghai did not participate in the test.
A 259-page Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report on the latest Pisa results notes that throughout its history, China has been organized around competitive examinations. “Schools work their students long hours every day, and the work weeks extend into the weekends,” it said.

Chinese students spend less time than American students on athletics, music and other activities not geared toward success on exams in core subjects. Also, in recent years, teaching has rapidly climbed up the ladder of preferred occupations in China, and salaries have risen. In Shanghai, the authorities have undertaken important curricular reforms, and educators have been given more freedom to experiment.

Ever since his organization received the Shanghai test scores last year, Mr. Schleicher said, international testing experts have investigated them to vouch for their accuracy, expecting that they would produce astonishment in many Western countries.

“This is the first time that we have internationally comparable data on learning outcomes in China,” Mr. Schleicher said. “While that’s important, for me the real significance of these results is that they refute the commonly held hypothesis that China just produces rote learning.”

“Large fractions of these students demonstrate their ability to extrapolate from what they know and apply their knowledge very creatively in novel situations,” he said.
Cables spilled by WikiLeaks portray college campuses as ideological battlegrounds

By Peter Schmidt
December 8, 2010

Diplomatic cables recently made public by the WikiLeaks Web site show how the United States and other nations have focused on colleges and universities as key battlegrounds in their efforts to win over hearts and minds.

A common theme in many of the U.S. State Department dispatches from Europe and the Middle East is that colleges must play a central role in the fight against Islamic extremism, by promoting Western values and by offering educational opportunities that will help keep Muslim people from feeling politically or economically disenfranchised.

The bad news that the cables hold for the United States is that many of its adversaries and competitors similarly have recognized higher education's potential to advance their interests. For example, the cables cite Iranian efforts to recruit Afghans into its universities and to extend its influence in Iraq through gifts to students and professors there.

Vive l'Intégration

The most comprehensive discussion of higher education as a tool for battling Islamic extremism is offered in a cable sent this year by Charles H. Rivkin, the U.S. ambassador to France. In it, he says that "French institutions have not proven themselves flexible enough to adjust an increasingly heterodox demography." Among France's elite educational institutions, he notes, only its Institute of Political Studies of Paris (better known as "Sciences Po") is known to have taken "serious steps to integrate" the nation's nonwhite population. If France does not do more, the cable warns, it could become "more crisis-prone and inward-looking, and consequently a less capable ally."

The cable outlines a sweeping strategy to encourage France to do more to assimilate its minority populations, which includes a plan to "provide tools for teaching tolerance" to "over 1,000 American university students who teach English in French schools every year."

The cable by Mr. Rivkin has attracted considerable attention in the French media, with some of the coverage suggesting surprise that the American efforts to promote France's assimilation of its minority residents would be so concerted and thoroughly planned.

A separate diplomatic cable, from 2005, describes an attempt by France's Interior Ministry to encourage that nation's universities to offer courses on French culture to Muslim imams. The effort failed, the cable says, because only one university expressed any interest, and it backed out after concluding that participating in such a program would run counter to its secularist principles.

Middle East Worries

As might be expected, higher education plays a much more central role in the fight against Muslim extremism in the Middle East, the documents released by WikiLeaks show.

In one set of cables, the U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia, James Smith, described that nation's efforts to
use educational reforms to not only diversify its economy but weaken the most reactionary elements of its religious establishment. He noted that the United States is contributing to the effort through more educational exchanges—as of the 2009-10 academic year, he said, more Saudi students were studying in the United States than had been even before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. And he added that Saudi officials worry that their educational-reform plans could be undermined by a pending climate-change agreement that would reduce the nation's income from fossil fuels, leaving little money for those reform plans.

A separate cable relays how the Maldives' ambassador to the United States, Abdul Ghafoor Mohamed, urged more educational exchanges and partnerships with his nation to deter students there from seeking the free education in Islamic studies offered to them by colleges in Egypt and Pakistan, where they could become radicalized.

A 2008 State Department cable describes how Asif Ali Zardari, who was then co-chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party and was soon to be elected Pakistan's president, called for more Pakistanis to receive scholarships to study in the United States, as a means of promoting social development in his country. And a separate State Department cable sent this year quotes India's foreign secretary, Nirupama Rao, as saying that his nation, which annually provides about 1,300 scholarships to Afghans for education and training, was considering sharply increasing such scholarship offerings and building a new agriculture college in Afghanistan to aid that nation's development efforts.

**Russian Revisionism**

It has been known for some time that Russian officials were seeking to rehabilitate the image of Joseph Stalin. A cable sent last year from the U.S. embassy in Moscow describes in detail just how far some were willing to go. Titled "Is Stalin's Ghost a Threat to Academic Freedom?" the cable describes how faculty members at the nation's universities have been urged by nationalistic government officials to report scholars who engage in "falsification" by portraying the former dictator in a negative light. It also relays a *Moscow Times* report that a historian who had researched the deportations of Soviet Germans under Stalin was being investigated for allegedly violating privacy rights, and his research data had been seized.

But there is another side. The cable noted that attempts to dictate the terms used by academics have been half-hearted, and "there remain enough Russians both in and out of the government who question the nationalists' logic and strive to keep the memory of Stalin's victims alive."

A separate cable sent by the embassy in Moscow last year reported that the Interior Ministry had brought pressure on Russia's Higher School of Economics to expel students. The cable said the economics institution had resisted, but other institutes and universities there might have "quietly capitulated" to similar demands.

*Aisha Labi in New York and Anna Nemtsova in Moscow contributed to this article.*
Colleges are urged to play a greater role in regional development efforts

By Karin Fischer
December 8, 2010
Washington

Colleges must play a greater, and more deliberate, role in helping regions innovate and thrive in an increasingly competitive and globalized economy, speakers urged this week at a conference on higher education and economic development.

Economic development is "no longer about attracting businesses," said Sam M. Cordes, co-director of the Purdue Center for Regional Development. "It's about attracting people, about attracting talent."

Participants in the two-day conference, "Providing a Uniquely American Solution to Global Innovation Challenges: Unleashing Universities in Regions," delved into the various ways colleges can help build stronger local economies, including acting as conveners for conversations about regional development, aligning their curricula with local elementary and secondary schools, and producing and retaining well-educated workers.

The meeting was organized by the Transformative Regional Engagement Roundtable, an organization started at Pennsylvania State University that brings together universities, government, business, and nonprofit groups to focus on innovation-based regional development.

Timothy V. Franklin, who is director of public partnerships and engagement at Penn State and served as the conference's chair, says colleges should view their economic-development role on a regional scale, rather than as a responsibility limited by city lines or neighborhood boundaries. Communities that do not attract research dollars themselves need colleges' help to transform their economies, says Mr. Franklin, who formerly led a technology center in rural Virginia set up by Virginia Tech, calling for a kind of "innovation equity."

Nancy L. Zimpher, chancellor of the State University of New York, opened the conference, talking about her effort to make economic revitalization a driving mission of her 64-college system.

Ms. Zimpher said she has faced critics who believe that SUNY's colleges and universities should "get back in their box" and not engage in economic-development work. But she has pushed forward to try to foster "regional innovation hubs" that get all of SUNY's institutions, from community colleges to research universities, working in areas that reflect both the system's academic and research strengths and the state's economic assets: life sciences, nanotechnology, information technology and high-performance computing, and energy.

The university system also has begun a greater collaboration with the state's private colleges and with the City University of New York on economic and research priorities. Representatives of the three groups recently met with Gov.-elect Andrew M. Cuomo about their efforts.

"We will be better if we do this together," Ms. Zimpher said.

But another speaker, Joe Reagan, president and chief executive of Greater Louisville Inc., says higher-education administrators haven't always been good partners. When his regional-development group
surveyed leaders in different business sectors, it found that college officials had the fewest ties to key actors in other fields.

What's more, Mr. Reagan says, he initially struggled to get the presidents of the 30 postsecondary institutions in and around his Kentucky city to work with one another on a plan to improve educational attainment there. The higher-education leaders, however, have since come together with industry executives as part of a project called Higher Income Requires Education, or HIRE, that seeks to increase the number of college-degree holders in Louisville by 55,000 over projections within a decade, through strategies such as getting working adults with some college education to go back to school.

A fellow panelist, Wanda F. Garza, executive officer of the North American Advanced Manufacturing Research and Education Initiative at South Texas College, says collaboration can pay dividends. For example, college officials and business leaders have pressed for the creation of a research and education park in the Rio Grande Valley area, to be supported with federal and private-sector funds. In the current budget climate, such a project would likely have not gotten off the ground without such partnerships, she says.

Wayne H. Watkins, associate vice president of research at the University of Akron, says colleges can apply creative approaches to business and economic development. For example, Akron's research foundation recruited a handful of retirees in key industry sectors as fellows who can act as consultants to local entrepreneurs and start-up companies.

Other speakers suggested that colleges can serve as safe, neutral places for the various parties involved in development issues to hash out strategies and air differences.

But Mr. Reagan, of Greater Louisville, says the most important role colleges can play is by being "great universities, with great educational outcomes," turning out larger numbers of skilled graduates.
Co-op announces furlough discount day

BY ROB CROW, THE SOUTHERN | Posted: Wednesday, December 8, 2010 3:00 am

CARBONDALE - With Southern Illinois University Carbondale's second furlough day coming later this month, one local retailer is looking to lend a helping hand.

Neighborhood Co-op Grocery is offering a 5 percent discount to all customers Dec. 23, the second scheduled furlough day for the university.

"SIU is not only the largest employer, but the major economic engine for this region," Co-op General Manager Francis Murphy said. "We had seen that some of the folks who shop with us regularly had seemed to be impacted by the furlough days. ... As a result, we just wanted to offer something back to the community that has supported us so well all these years."

Murphy said the store considered giving the discount only to SIUC employees, but decided it was impractical, and that it would make more sense to expand the discount to all customers.

"Whatever happens to the SIUC community really has an impact on all of Southern Illinois," Murphy said.

The days leading up to Christmas are traditionally busy for the store, and Murphy said he expects business to be even more brisk this year with 5 percent customers can save.
The rate at which undergraduate students took foreign language courses in 2009 remained constant compared to three years prior, while the variety of languages offered continued to set records, according to the findings of a survey conducted by the Modern Language Association of America to be released Wednesday.

In raw terms, the number of enrollments -- the metric used by the MLA to capture course participation rather than the number of students studying a language -- grew from 1.57 million in 2006 to 1.68 million in 2009, or 6.6 percent. That percentage growth was about half the one last reported, between 2002 and 2006. “I believe that the exciting takeaway from this report is that more students are studying more languages,” Russell A. Berman, first vice president of the MLA, and professor of German studies and comparative literature at Stanford University, said during a Tuesday call with reporters.

But this growth took place during a period in which the total number of undergraduate students also increased. As a result, the ratio of enrollments in language courses compared to overall student enrollments remained at 2006 levels -- 8.6 per 100 total enrollments. While this level is lower than the high mark of 16.5 enrollments per 100 set in 1965, the current ratio still exceeds those since the early 1970s (except for 2006), and is above the low of 7.3 enrollments per 100 in 1980.

Similarly, the percentage of bachelor’s degrees earned in foreign languages (1.16 for every 100 -- 70 percent of which are earned by women) has remained flat since 1980. This rate is also well below the high of 3 percent earned in 1968, according to MLA data. One historical reason for the drop cited by the report’s authors, Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin, is the move in the late 1960s away from prescribed core requirements. Distribution requirements, which replaced many core curriculums, have generally demanded less extensive coursework in foreign languages compared to past decades.

The release of the survey results comes amid trying times for foreign languages, with many departments facing cuts, closings, or mergers with other programs. Recently, administrators at the State University of New York at Albany announced that they wanted to close admissions to programs in French, Italian, and Russian. Majors in German and Russian also face extinction at Howard University. Berman described such cuts as “perplexing” given the increasing number of students seeking out such courses, coupled with a decade’s worth of public preoccupation with globalization and international connectedness. “Some administrators are just simply shortsighted,” he said. “It’s a problem of a lack of imagination in parts of higher education leadership.”

This year’s survey, the 22nd produced by the MLA since 1958, tracked undergraduate and graduate course enrollments in languages other than English in fall 2009 at 2,514 associate, bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral-granting institutions nationwide. These institutions represent 99 percent of the higher education institutions that offer language courses in the U.S. The survey is so comprehensive that it captures not just the most popular languages (Spanish, French, German, and American Sign Language, in that order) but also the seven that had just one student enrolled at any level in 2009 (Albanian, Aymara, Javanese, Kana, Kyrgyz, Malay and Tswana, if you were curious). In all, 232 different languages were taught, which marks a record.

Arabic posted the most vigorous increase in popularity, with 46 percent more enrollments in 2009 than it had three years prior. The showing allowed Arabic to leapfrog from 10th place to 8th on the list of most popular languages. American Sign Language (16.4 percent), Japanese (10.3 percent) and Chinese (18.2 percent) also posted double-digit percent gains. Spanish remained far and away the most popular language, with nearly 865,000 enrollments. Its growth rate was 5.1 percent over 2006.
The aggregate growth also disguised very different trends in language study among varying types of institutions. Community colleges witnessed the most robust increase, posting 14 percent more enrollments than they had in 2006. Hawaiian and Vietnamese were among the most popular languages at these institutions, though they were absent from the roster of highly subscribed courses at four-year colleges. Rosemary G. Feal, executive director of the MLA, said that the growth in language study among two-year colleges could reflect students’ interest in connecting to their heritage or becoming better-equipped to work in nearby communities, among other reasons. “Students are seeing language as an essential part of the toolkit for career readiness,” she said.

Feal pointed to another troubling trend: colleges preserving more popular and highly subscribed introductory foreign language courses -- which allow students to satisfy core requirements -- while slashing advanced classes. “Four semesters give you a foundation,” which can help students build basic skills in a language, said Feal. The higher levels of language study open higher modes of thought and scholarship because that is where, she continued, “expertise and liberal learning, frankly, are in play.”

— Dan Berrett
'Lessons Learned'

December 8, 2010

William G. Bowen was president of Princeton University from 1972 to 1988, and he reflects on his experiences and the nature of the presidency in a new book, Lessons Learned (Princeton University Press). The book uses various issues he faced as president to discuss broader themes about leadership in higher education. Bowen, president emeritus of both Princeton and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, responded to questions about the new book.

Q: Toward the end of the book, you suggest that 8-10 years would be "a good target" for a president to accomplish an agenda. You served 16 years at Princeton, but these days, five- and six-year presidencies are increasingly the norm. Why do you suggest a bit longer as a target goal? Do you think something is lost when presidencies are shorter?

A: My experience is that more than five or six years is often needed to achieve important objectives. As I explain in Lessons Learned, building strength in the life sciences at Princeton was a major strategic objective, and it took us a decade or more to do what needed to be done: achieve clarity on the precise goals, recruit essential faculty leadership, plan for the construction of laboratory space, raise the large amounts of money required, and recruit additional faculty. We made several false starts (from which we learned important lessons), and it then took time to accumulate the necessary resources and recruit strong faculty leadership. Shorter-term presidencies also mean that searches are more frequent and that too much time is spent on transitions. But of course much depends on the age of a president (I was 38 when I became president of Princeton), on health, and a number of other factors that can be specific to the institution or the individual.

Q: With some regularity, college presidents are criticized for their compensation packages, and you write that presidents should be sure that their packages are "kept under control." Can you elaborate? Should presidents be earning seven-figure compensation packages? How much is too much -- especially when those setting salaries tend to come from the business world, where academic salaries may seem frugal?

A: I think that presidents should not allow their own compensation to become too high -- especially in comparison with the compensation paid other key officers and senior faculty. Colleagueship is very important and can be threatened by outsize salaries and other perks enjoyed by a president. And, yes, I am skeptical that seven-figure compensation practices are either necessary or appropriate. But we also need to be aware that some reporting of presidential salaries confuses rather than enlightens -- when, for example, there is a failure to distinguish annual compensation from a combination of annual compensation, deferred compensation, and pension payouts.

Q: You discuss several hot-button issues that divided some on the campus during your presidency (ROTC, South African apartheid, controversial speakers, and so forth). What lessons did you learn about approaching such issues that might apply to today's campus controversies?

A: First, it is important to anticipate, as best one can, issues that will become controversial -- to avoid being taken by surprise. Second, it is important to listen to what others are saying, especially when there are strong disagreements about the right course of action. Third, patience is required -- some debates just have to be allowed to run their course. Fourth, I found that close and continuing discussion with key faculty leaders was valuable in building consensus and avoiding the perception that the president was alone in taking a controversial position. Fifth, it is important, in my view, to articulate clearly the long-term principles that are at stake and to "stay the course."
Q: On many campuses today, faculty members complain that the tight economic times have led administrators to exclude them from key decisions -- and many administrators complain that faculty are too unrealistic or deliberative to be effective in such times. Do you have any thoughts based on your experience on how to bridge this divide?

A: Again, close, continuing consultation and informal discussion can be very helpful in bridging such divides. In my experience, "reasoning together" pays big dividends. Also, being explicit about the choices that have to be made, and examining the trade-offs carefully, can discourage exaggerated and wrongheaded claims of what is at stake. I do think that the financial pressures that beset higher education today raise real challenges for shared governance, and that continuing efforts have to be made to align incentives — for example, in deciding how to employ sophisticated online learning technologies and how to share any savings achieved in this way.

Q: You note in the book your efforts to promote diversity of various kinds at Princeton, and your post-presidential career has included considerable research and advocacy for inclusion and affirmative action. But Arizona just joined several other states in voting to bar the consideration of race in admissions at public institutions. Why has the general consensus among college presidents in support of affirmative action not translated into public support?

A: It is difficult for many people to understand the educational values of genuine diversity, and it is especially difficult to have an appreciation for diversity if you yourself have not had an opportunity to study in a truly inclusive setting. More generally, we are, I fear, at a point in our history when it is hard for many to see the over-arching importance of building a strong social fabric in the country.

Q: You served as a trustee of your alma mater, Denison University. How did your presidential experience shape your perspective as a trustee?

A: Having had the experience of serving as provost and president of another educational institution gave me insights into the cross-pressures that beat upon the president of any college. My experience helped me, I would like to think, explain to my colleagues on the Denison board that many of the problems that concerned us were generic. There is a danger, however, that one will over-interpret or over-generalize, lessons learned in a university setting that can be very different from a college setting. I always tried to be careful to say that what made sense at Princeton might or might not make sense at Denison.

— Scott Jaschik
WASHINGTON — When Congress moved in 2008 to sweeten tuition payments for veterans, it was celebrated as a way to ensure that military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan could go to college at no cost and to replicate the historic benefits society gained from the G.I. Bill after World War II.

Now, a year after payouts on the so-called Post-9/11 G.I. Bill started, the huge program has turned into a bonanza of another kind for the many commercial colleges in the United States that have seen their military revenues surge.

More than 36 percent of the tuition payments made in the first year of the program — a total of $640 million in tuition and fees — went to for-profit colleges, like the University of Phoenix, according to data compiled by the Department of Veterans Affairs, even though these colleges serve only about 9 percent of the overall population at higher education institutions nationwide.

As the money flows to the for-profit university industry, questions are being raised in Congress and elsewhere about their recruitment practices, and whether they really deliver on their education promises. Some members say they want to place tighter limits on how much these colleges can collect in military benefits, a move certain federal officials say they would welcome.

These questions come as the for-profit education industry is under increased scrutiny, with the Department of Education proposing regulations that would cut off federal aid to colleges whose graduates have extremely low loan repayment rates.

Amid this debate, the industry’s powerful lobbying forces are pushing for even more, including a change in the law that would allow veterans who sign up exclusively for online classes to also get government housing subsidies, even if they live at home, which would make online education even more attractive.

With their multimillion-dollar advertising and recruitment campaigns, these colleges have pitched themselves as a natural choice for veterans and active-duty personnel, given their extensive online class offerings, accelerated degree programs and campuses spread across the nation, including near many military bases.

“We offer the flexibility and career focus they want,” said Bob Larned, the executive director of military education at ECPI College of Technology, a Virginia institution with a major online program and campuses in three states that collected $16 million in G.I. Bill benefits in the first year.

Active-duty personnel are eligible for free tuition, which explains why the for-profit colleges have received about $200 million in Department of Defense tuition reimbursement benefits and fees in the last year, mostly for online classes, in addition to money collected from the G.I. Bill.

But high dropout rates at some of these colleges, difficulty in transferring credits, higher tuition bills than at public colleges and skepticism from some employers about the value of the degrees are all creating unease among some in Congress.

“For-profit schools see our active-duty military and veterans as a cash cow, an untapped profit resource,” said Senator Tom Harkin, Democrat of Iowa, the chairman of the Senate committee that oversees federal
education policy. “It is both a rip off of the taxpayer and a slap in the face to the people who have risked their lives for our country.”

It is a concern echoed by eight current and former recruiters from some of the nation’s largest for-profit chains, who in interviews said the intense drive to enroll veterans had led them, at times, to sign up military personnel for classes when they were all but certain they would drop out or fail.

“There is such pressure to simply enroll more vets — we knew that most of them would drop out after the first session,” said Jason Deatherage, who worked as military admissions adviser at Colorado Technical University until this spring, when he was fired, he said, for not meeting his quota. “Instead of helping people, too often I felt like we were almost tricking them.”

In interviews, veterans offered conflicting views. Some said the online classes enabled them to complete their studies while also tending to their families, and perhaps a day job. But other veterans said it was a waste.

“I felt like I made a horrible, horrible decision,” said Jason Longmore, 31, a Navy veteran who spent six months at Westwood College, based in Denver, only to conclude that the degree was not attractive enough to employers, forcing him to repeat classes elsewhere before he could transfer credits to a Colorado state university.

Robert L. Songer, a retired Marine colonel who is the lead education adviser at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, said some of the for-profit colleges hounded active-duty personnel there as they pursued “hot leads,” calling them repeatedly to get a piece of the military tuition grants.

Mr. Songer said that he was not opposed to the colleges, but that they often enrolled Marines in classes of limited educational value. In some cases, the colleges even take out high-interest-rate loans on behalf of the Marines to cover extra costs, he said.

“They are very easy targets, especially because many of them have never had anyone in their families go to college,” Mr. Songer said in an interview, citing numerous complaints he has received from Marines. “All they hear from these schools is, ‘This won’t cost you a thing.’ ”

What is beyond dispute is the extraordinary impact tuition payments by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have had on the for-profit colleges, which have already experienced tremendous growth.

The number of military students at Bridgepoint Education of San Diego, a for-profit company that owns Ashford University, among others, jumped to nearly 9,200 in 2009 from 379 three years before, a far faster pace than the company’s overall growth. Just in the last year, after the adoption of the new G.I. Bill, revenue from military education benefits at 20 for-profit chains jumped 211 percent, according to a report to be released Thursday by Mr. Harkin’s committee.

Acknowledging the issue, the Defense Department is now moving to demand that colleges participating in its tuition reimbursement program maintain graduation rates at a certain minimum level, among other measures.

“What we want to do is make sure the students have the information they need in order to make informed decisions on how they want to best use the benefits,” said Keith M. Wilson, the director of education programs at Veterans Affairs, which is also assembling clearer data on graduation and dropout rates among veterans.
The rise of Colorado Technical University, whose Department of Military Education is in a suburban Chicago office building, across the street from a shopping mall and next door to the ever-popular Joe’s Crab Shack, is a testament to the impact of the federal money.

There are no professors or classrooms in this office building. Instead, lined up row by row in cubicles, are dozens of admissions advisers — they often call themselves salesmen — who spend their days trying to convince active-duty military personnel and veterans that Colorado Technical is the place to invest their education benefits, six current and former admissions advisers said.

Executives at the Career Education Corporation, the Illinois company that owns Colorado Technical, said they closely monitor the work of these advisers to ensure that they are accurately and fairly describing the program — not twisting arms.

“Doing what’s in the best interest of the student is paramount,” Gary E. McCullough, the company’s chief executive, wrote in an August memorandum to supervisors, which addressed accusations that certain for-profit colleges were misleading potential students.

But the admissions advisers — who have actually made the calls — said in interviews that the extremely high enrollment targets set by their bosses all but forced them at times to sign up veterans for programs or classes they knew they were not qualified for.

“They weren’t going to make it, and we knew it,” said NaQuan Hudson, who worked as an admissions adviser in the military recruitment office there until August 2009, after the university had started to sign up students under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. “I knew I had no business enrolling some of these students. But everything here is about numbers. You make your numbers, or you are out of a job.”

The recruiters — five of whom spoke on the record — said their goal was not to simply enroll students in online classes, but to get them to log in at least once, do their first assignment and remain for a full week. That way, the government could not get a refund.

“What about your family? Aren’t you are doing this for them? You don’t want to let them down,” Mr. Deatherage recalled of the informal script he often used with veterans who were considering dropping classes.

No records are publicly available showing how many veterans drop out of courses at Colorado Technical’s online program, where most of them take their classes. But in general, the online program has an unusually low rate of retaining first-time students pursuing bachelor’s degrees full time. Only 39 percent of those enrolled in the fall of 2008 returned the next fall, compared with a 77 percent average for four-year colleges nationwide.

A spokesman for the university said it considered this comparison unfair, because many of the military students come with prior credits, meaning they are not counted as first-time students. Regardless, Mr. McCullough said the company had recently reinforced its rules about ethical conduct with its admissions staff.

“We did go back and reiterate the right and wrongs and dos and don’t in our admissions organizations,” Mr. McCullough said last month in a presentation on the company earnings. “We take some of those issues very, very seriously.”

Two recruiters at other for-profit institutions that sought out veterans and active-duty military personnel —
Ashford University and Westwood College — described similar aggressive recruitment tactics in recent years.

“We know they are going to pay, that they had a guaranteed way to get money,” said Brent Park, a former Ashford University recruitment adviser, who worked there until 2008, when the university had already started to see a surge in veterans enrolling under the previous G.I. Bill.

Ashford offers a variety of incentives for veterans to enroll, including admission fee waivers and tuition discounts.

Bridgepoint, the company that owns Ashford, last year spent more on marketing and promotion than on education for its 53,700 students, 99 percent of whom took classes online. A spokeswoman for Bridgepoint did not respond to a request for comment.

Brian Hawthorne, 25, a staff sergeant in the Army Reserves, used his benefits to get a two-year, online degree from the for-profit American Military University and was able to transfer the credits to George Washington University, where he recently received a bachelor’s degree.

Sergeant Hawthorne said online education was his only option for his associate’s degree, as his Army Reserve unit was called up while he was taking classes. He continued to study as he moved to four states and then to Iraq. Many for-profit online colleges offer accelerated schedules, meaning it is possible to get an undergraduate bachelor’s degree in less than three years.

“Vets are really not at college to get the traditional undergraduate experience,” he said. “We are already professionals. College is a box checker, meaning we need a college degree to go into whatever we want to go into.”

For these reasons, Sergeant Hawthorne, a board member of a group called Student Veterans of America, cautioned against condemning the whole industry. “I did not feel taken advantage of,” he said. “If there are those who feel that way, let’s investigate it as individual cases and not as an industry exploiting veterans.”

Representative Walter B. Jones, Republican of North Carolina and a member of the Armed Services Committee, said employers had told him they do not value degrees from these online, for-profit colleges as they do from traditional universities.

“Here we are telling these young men and women they can get a higher education, and they get cheated,” Mr. Jones said. “I think it is a sin.”

Harris Miller, president of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, pointed out that the two-year graduation rate at for-profit colleges was better than for the nation’s community colleges, and he said industry studies showed that job placement rates for graduates of these institutions were high.

“We are proud that our institutions provide purposeful, military-friendly education to active-duty and veteran students,” Mr. Miller said, in a statement his organization issued last month, on Veterans Day.
The value of a master’s degree in education – in monetary, philosophical and educational terms – is under fire as conflicting camps are responding to increasingly high-profile criticism of merit pay systems.

The debate over how teachers are paid -- and how to attract the best teachers – has been going on for years. But U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and education mega-philanthropist Bill Gates went further – perhaps not coincidentally, within two days of one another – in using recent speeches as opportunities to call on school districts to reward teachers based on their students' performance and other measures of merit -- not based on whether the teachers have earned master's degrees.

That puts Duncan and Gates at odds with the traditions of many school districts, which typically do pay teachers more if they have earned master's degrees. And any shift away from such pay policies worries those at education schools that offer master's degrees.

"We are concerned about the fact that this comment really does kind of take the wind out of the sails of teachers when they are really excited about doing graduate work," says Donna L. Wiseman, dean of the College of Education at the University of Maryland at College Park. "This could make them feel like it's not worth their time to enroll in graduate school. And that's counter to what we think, of course."

Duncan and Gates targeted pay increases for degree type and years of experience as wasteful spending that should be redirected to teachers who either prove their ability to perform or who take on areas where they're most needed, such as low-income schools or larger classes. While Gates mentioned master’s degrees but focused primarily on seniority, Duncan’s focus on master’s degrees hinted at the complexities of the debate over merit pay systems.

"Doing more with less will likely require reshaping teacher compensation to do more to develop, support, and reward excellence and effectiveness, and less to pay people based on paper credentials," Duncan said in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute last month. "Districts currently pay about $8 billion each year to teachers because they have master's degrees, even though there is little evidence teachers with master's degrees improve student achievement more than other teachers – with the possible exception of teachers who earn master's in math and science."

Because salary scales differ from district to district, it's difficult to determine the total amount a teacher could earn based on the fact that he or she has a master's degree. But Alison Hilsabeck, dean of the College of Education at National-Louis University, said the degree could make a difference of 5 percent or more.

Many experts agree that a higher degree is not synonymous with higher student achievement. But they also take issue with the research methods used to arrive at that conclusion: student testing, they say, is not a sound way to gauge a teacher's abilities.

"The research is so inconclusive that I really do wonder why we have such a bold statement when in fact it's born of a really important question," says Sharon P. Robinson, CEO of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. She said that Duncan was engaged in "a leap of faith" in saying that master's degrees don't help teachers.

In Florida, the debate over how teacher pay should be set has been intense. After teachers and unions
bombarded Gov. Charlie Crist with opposition, he vetoed a bill that would have moved pay differential away from degree and seniority criteria and replaced them with rewards based on evaluations of teachers and on student performance. The legislation is expected to reappear on the 2011 agenda.

Sandra L. Robinson, dean of the College of Education at the University of Central Florida, said the research showed that this year wasn't the right time to make such a bold move. She wants to see more thorough research that breaks down master's degrees' impact on performance by the degree-granting institution, the person's age, the public school district and so forth. "We could examine the practices that make teachers better, rather than taking away incentives for teachers to get more education," she said. "It's logical that we would want our teachers to be learners, since that's the profession they're in."

(Preliminary findings from forthcoming Florida research show that children in classes with teachers who took more advanced reading courses themselves scored an average of 10 percentage points higher than children in other classes.)

Some colleges are already shaking up their teacher preparation programs to address questions of merit and teacher effectiveness. National-Louis this year is piloting a master's degree designed to help novice teachers with initial certification develop the skill set to work in high-need urban schools. "Teacher preparation programs don't generally have the time to turn somebody into a master teacher," Hilsabeck said. "Our idea is, explicitly move people toward adding value to their skill base and being effective educators in their general classroom... We have to figure out how to give them the tools that are going to allow them to do that."

National-Louis is a recipient of the federally funded Teacher Quality Partnership grant, which places teachers in residency at urban schools and requires them to return to the same schools to teach after obtaining their master's degree. The program is underscored by the belief that college-public school partnerships are the ideal way to increase teacher effectiveness (an assertion that Duncan and others drove home in a recent report on revolutionizing teacher preparation methods).

Amid the debate about the value of the master's programs is another question: Will the criticism of master's programs (or a move away from rewarding teachers with the degrees) discourage enrollments? Many in teacher education say that they aren't worried about a loss of students.

"More knowledge is better than less knowledge," says Margaret Crocco, chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities at the Columbia Teachers College in New York, where a master's is required for long-term teacher certification. "The field of education is not unique in that having a master's degree won't automatically make you better at what you do, but I certainly think that it is a very important component of being a successful teacher."

Wiseman, the Maryland dean, is troubled by an implication that the only reason to pursue higher learning is to make more money.

"I can't erase the fact that when teachers have master's degrees it doesn't improve student achievement," she says. "But I don't think a master's degree is worthless because of that."

— Allie Grasgreen
Spurred by President Obama’s rhetoric and the work of a few influential foundations, many states have echoed the national call for more community college graduates by setting their own completion goals in recent months. And though some say these statewide goals are evidence of a larger shift in community college mission from access to completion, others see them as a preemptive attempt to demonstrate the kind of accountability that the federal and state governments may impose. Some question whether these newly set goals are even realistic amid dwindling funding for higher education.

Last month, the Community College League of California, a group made up of the leaders of the state’s 112 two-year institutions, announced an ambitious completion goal of its own. It wants California to produce one million more community college certificate and degree holders by 2020.

This, it argues, is its share of President Obama’s larger national goal, because California serves about one-third of the country’s community college students. To reach the statewide goal, the group notes, each of the state’s 112 community colleges will need to boost its average annual completions from 1,200 to 3,500.

The organization released a set of recommendations that spelled out how such a massive increase in the number of community college graduates could be achieved in light of recent budget cuts and overcrowding issues in California. The suggestions include requiring students to “participate in integrated student support, assessment, counseling and orientation, and enroll in courses according to well-publicized and strictly enforced registration deadlines.”

Criticism Remains

Many in California, however, doubt whether the organization’s lofty call for more graduates is possible without state government funding for enrollment increases and hiring more full-time faculty at the community college level.

“When we make goals, we have to take into consideration all of what’s available,” said Ron Norton Reel, president of the Community College Association, a union affiliated with the National Education Association in California. “I don’t know that this goal is attainable. The bottom line is, how are we going to get it done? How is it going to be funded? Every year we lose more full-time faculty members, yet the remaining full-time faculty members are asked to do more. At what point can they just not take on any more? It’s a battle we fight every day.”

Reel noted that the faculty union will formally review the completion challenge put forth by the League later this week, at which point it will weigh in on its feasibility and possibly make its own recommendations for executing the plan.

Scott Lay, president of the League, has heard his share of criticisms of the goal.

“Many people are telling us we are aiming too high — whether it be in tripling the number of annual completions or eliminating the achievement gap,” Lay wrote in an e-mail. “However, the people that dropped out at mile 25 of the California International Marathon on Sunday have a lot more to be proud about than those that instead stayed on the couch to watch football.”

Plethora of Plans

California is not the only state to set ambitious community college completion goals. In Virginia, Gov. Robert M. McDonnell has called this week for the state legislature to give $58 million to higher education
in the state to help meet his goal of awarding 100,000 more associate and bachelor’s degrees by 2025.

Last week, the Maryland Association of Community Colleges, which is made up of leaders from the state’s 16 two-year institutions, signed a pledge to increase the number of community college graduates annually from about 11,200 this past academic year to more than 18,600 in the 2024-25 academic year. That works out to nearly a 4.5 percent increase each year.

Maryland’s goal was unveiled as part of its membership in Complete College America, a group formed last spring as an alliance of 24 states. Some states, like Colorado, have formal plans and initiatives sponsored by their state governments. Most, however, are like Maryland in that their completion efforts are considered voluntary because they are headed by non-government groups. The participating states have agreed to “set completion goals”; “develop action plans and move key policy levers”; and “collect and report common measures of progress.”

“The impetus here is for our colleges to take the president’s challenge seriously,” said Clay Whitlow, executive director of the Maryland association. “We’re seeing similar goals pop up all over the country. Frankly, I give the president credit for that. It’s not like no one ever thought of these issues before. But, this really has focused our efforts on completion.”

The association hosted a meeting last week at which representatives from the state’s 16 institutions shared specific plans for how they planned on boosting their completion rates. Some of the ideas included a mathematics redesign effort “to reduce lecture time, increase student engagement, and decrease costs” and a retention program that encourages “early intervention and intrusive advising designed to identify and assist students who are academically and/or behaviorally at risk.”

There are some doubters in Maryland when it comes to the effectiveness of setting a solid completion goal. Whitlow noted that people have asked him if the state’s community colleges are setting themselves up for failure or embarrassment if they do not reach their goal.

“I don’t see this as just being about hitting a number,” Whitlow said. “I see this as being about inspiring institutional transformation. I want to see every community college in Maryland, two or three years from now, be able to answer what it is doing that they weren’t doing before that has improved completion. Every college ought to have a substantive answer to that question regardless of whether or not they meet their own individual goal.”

In 2000, before many other states jumped on the bandwagon, Texas introduced Closing the Gaps, an ambitious initiative that aims to “increase the overall number of students completing bachelor’s degrees, associate’s degrees and certificates to 171,000 by 2010; and to 210,000 by 2015.” Specifically, for community colleges, the goal is to “increase the number of students completing associate’s degrees to 43,400 by 2010; and to 55,500 by 2015.”

As of last year, Texas was on track to meet the 2010 benchmark, but state leaders agree that they have a lot of work to do to ensure they will meet their 2015 goal. For example, last month, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board suggested that the state legislature adopt an outcomes-based funding formula for its community colleges and public universities next year to help meet the goal. So far, though, Texas has improved its college completion levels by mandating that all high school students take the "Recommended High School Program" of courses to quality for college admission, testing students for remedial gaps in their education while they are still in high school, and better linking student information systems between secondary and postsecondary institutions, among other ideas.

**Anticipating Accountability**

Though he said it was not the primary motivator for Maryland’s creation of a completion goal, Whitlow did acknowledge that the possibility of increased federal accountability of the community college sector will factor in to how the state judges itself and measures its success on the way to its goal.
“The proverbial handwriting is on the wall that we’re going to see increased accountability on the federal level,” Whitlow said. “I think it behooves us all in higher education, both in the two- and four-year sector, to get out ahead of that…. We’re going to be looking at our completion on a regular basis now. This isn’t just a one-time thing until the deadline arrives.”

In California, Lay argued that there are a number of factors that have influenced state community college officials like him to identify their own completion goals.

“As I regularly say, people drink the Kool-Aid for one of three reasons — political, economic and moral,” Lay wrote. “Some got on the bandwagon to get ahead of the political tide of accountability, whether it be federal, state or local. Others are motivated by the economic calamity of having the ‘greatest education generation’ retiring and their children following as a lesser education population. Finally, some are primarily motivated because of growing income inequality, and the impact that the achievement gap for black, Latino and other socioeconomic minorities will have as the minorities become majorities.”

Linda Serra Hagedorn, professor and interim chair of Iowa State University’s Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies, argued that some other contemporary moves may have prompted states to look at their own “completion agendas.” No matter the reason, she holds that these individualized goals are good for community colleges.

“First, with the decline in the economy, many ‘middle class’ students who would have gone to state schools are opting for the community college that is less expensive,” Hagedorn wrote in an e-mail. “This opens these institutions to greater scrutiny. Second, it has been a long-kept secret that completions (and other measures of success) are low in community colleges. But the truth is that most colleges really did not know or at least did not articulate these numbers…. The movements about have opened up these conversations and a new era of accountability seems to be upon us forcing community colleges to analyze their data.”

Completion Catches On

A more in-depth look at how the states perceive the completion agenda was provided last month with the release of an annual survey of state directors of community colleges. The 2010 survey was conducted by Steve Katsinas, director of the University of Alabama’s Education Policy Center, and Janice Friedel, educational leadership professor at California State University at Northridge. When asked if “Increased attention to state-level student success/degree completion is being paid in my state,” 46 of the 50 respondents either “agreed” or “strongly agreed.” Two were neutral. Respondents from South Dakota and Maine “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed” respectively.

Thirty-six of the states, or 72 percent of them, agreed that “community college capacity needs expansion to achieve President Obama’s goal of dramatically increasing the number of adult Americans attending college.” Still, 30 of the states, or 60 percent, agreed that “in light of state funding cuts, achieving increases in graduation rates will be difficult.”

Despite the difficulty of doing more with less, Thomas Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University Teachers College, finds a lot to like in the many state-centric completion goals.

“It’s good to set ambitious goals,” Bailey said. “It’s probably more important to err on the ambitious side rather than the non-ambitious side. It sends the message, ‘This is important. Let’s get moving.' ”

— David Moltz
MU degree rationales rebuffed

State wants more proof of need for programs.

By Janese Silvey Columbia Daily Tribune
Wednesday, December 8, 2010

University of Missouri administrators thought they had justified why dozens of degree programs should remain intact, but the state wants more proof.

The Missouri Department of Higher Education is asking the campus to explain exactly how it’s going to reconfigure other degree programs.

The new request is the latest in the state’s controversial “low-producing” degree review. The process began this fall when the department — under direction of Gov. Jay Nixon — asked universities to identify and justify programs that award fewer than 10 bachelor’s, five master’s and three doctoral degrees a year.

MDHE has requested more information about 40 of the degrees MU defended in its original report to the state. In three cases — graduate-level neuroscience, public health and linguistics — MDHE is asking for further proof after MU reported that the degrees were justified because they use resources from multiple departments and don’t cost much.

“What we’re asking for is just documentation that it is, in fact, interdepartmental by giving us the percentage of courses unique to that program and whether it shares faculty and courses,” said Rusty Monhollon, senior associate for academic affairs at MDHE.

The department will not accept “low cost” as justification because there’s no way to prove that claim, he said.

MU also told MDHE it would consider reconfiguring 25 degree programs, but that also is not good enough.

MDHE wants specific plans.

“They said they’re going to review” those degrees “and make a decision, and we’d like to have what that decision is,” Monhollon said.

MU also attempted to justify its graduate-level theater programs because they have a prominent national reputation, but MDHE rejected that defense.

“I’m just shocked that anyone who thinks about education would care more about numbers of graduates than quality,” MU Faculty Chairwoman Leona Rubin said.

“And that seems to be what we’re getting from MDHE. When we tell them a program is nationally ranked as one of the best programs in the country, they don’t seem to care.”

Provost Brian Foster yesterday sent a letter to MU deans calling on them for more specific plans as to how they want to see 25 degrees reconfigured.
MDHE plans to take a report of all small degree programs in the state to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education in February. Monhollon said that will start some tough discussions about how to address those degrees. Unjustified low-producing degrees won’t automatically be eliminated, he said, adding that it’s up to each institution to make those decisions.

George Justice, MU’s dean of graduate studies, said he is optimistic that the discussions will lead to stronger programs.

By promoting collaboration between departments, he said, MU should be able to continue to offer the same range of academic offerings even if there are fewer degrees on the books.

“Hopefully by having productive conversations among faculty members whose areas overlap,” he said, “we can still provide high quality, in-depth instruction but have more faculty contributing to a broader student experience.”