

Halftime Report on this Legislative session

At the end of the first week of February, at the approximate halfway point in this legislative session, bills were passed out of the policy and fiscal committees and on to the House and Senate Floors for floor votes. Most of the bills reviewed at the end of the first two weeks are moving forward, especially the bill permitting DACA students equal treatment with respect to loans and grants.

Examples of other legislation are some bills moving forward to the House floor and then should move on to the Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee:

HB 1169: providing advice and assistance for students encumbered with college loan debt

HB 1437: add faculty member to board of regents of UW and WSU

HB 1499: providing fairness and protection for students in college loan processes

HB 1561: providing opportunities for universities to develop open educational resources

There is no indication yet from either the House Appropriations Committee or the Senate Ways & Means Committee about whether there will be increased funding for the State Need Grant or the State Work Study in the 2018 supplemental to the operating budget, and it will be a few weeks before we learn definitively. In this academic year, 22000 students were eligible for the State Need Grant but did not receive them due to insufficient funding by the legislature. There is obvious desire by the legislators to increase the funding for 2018-19 via the supplemental budget, but the revenues may not be available.

The operating budget that passed last year regrettably included the requirement that universities will get one half of the approved 2% annual increase (i.e., matches inflation) for salary and benefits to state employees to come from student tuition. The logic is that because at least half of the university operating budgets come from student tuition, then half of the increase in salaries of university personnel should come from tuition. Other state employees get the full 2% out of state funds. The obvious efforts by the state legislature to freeze and lower tuition in the last few years does not comport with last year's requirement to take the 1% of salary increases from student tuition. The consequences are problematic. WSU for example, is simply accepting the 1% loss in salary and benefits for university personnel. The four regional comprehensives are asking for the combined \$18 million to be placed into the supplemental budget. We have heard from lawmakers that although they regret placing universities in the uncomfortable ethical dilemma of "raise tuition v. accept financial loss to personnel due to inflation," and that they, the legislators, will try to do better in the next biennium, there is unlikely to be a rise from the 1% to 2% for this biennium.

There are other bills relevant to Higher Education that do not move through the House Higher Education Committee and the Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee. We will be attentive to those and do our best to make sure there are no unintended detriments to students, faculty and universities.