President Obama’s Community College Initiatives

President’s Budget Request
In February, the President released his fiscal year 2013 budget request. The President laid out a blueprint to increase funds for job-training with the new $8 billion “Community College to Career Fund.” As proposed, this $8 billion three-year investment is the centerpiece of the Administration’s investment in community college and business partnerships and would be jointly administered by the U.S. Department of Education and Labor. The program will be developed based on existing successful models between industry and community colleges, and is aimed at targeting specific skills that lead to high-growth and high-demand jobs. The President’s proposed budget is an ambitious plan for our nation’s education system. Revenues to pay for these proposals would come largely in the form of changes to the tax code that would increase the amount that higher-earning individuals would be expected to pay.

President’s Address to the National Governors Association (NGA)
In late February, President Obama addressed the National Governors Association (NGA). While the primary focus of this meeting was economic reform, the President spent a majority of his time emphasizing the need for states to invest in education, and linking this need to job creation and employment. His proposal included support for the newly proposed $8 billion Community College to Career Fund, the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant program, and continued support for the Skills for America’s Future initiative. While the Governors were generally receptive to the call for greater investment, most states are struggling to fund their current priorities and have severely limited resources to develop and implement new initiatives.

Proposals to Reform Federal Job Training and Employment Services
On March 13, 2012 President Obama provided details on the Universal Displaced Worker Program. This proposal would consolidate displaced workers under Trade Adjustment Assistance and other unemployed workers under the Workforce Investment Act into a singular training program. This new Universal Displaced Worker Program would provide training awards of up to $4,000 a year for two years to eligible workers wishing to pursue training in technical fields. These workers would also be eligible for a stipend to provide for childcare, transportation, and other expenses. Older workers would be eligible for wage insurance.

President Obama also introduced a proposal to streamline the American Job Center. The proposal included rebranding one-stop career centers, providing online tools, and increasing research. This would include a $50 million investment which would include satellite programs and virtual centers at community colleges and other public locations. While some of these proposals can be accomplished through executive authority, the majority will still need Congressional approval.

New “College Scorecard”
President Obama and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) are planning to add a new tool to USDOE’s College Affordability and Transparency Center; this is a website that allows prospective college students to
compare colleges using measures of affordability and value. This new tool will be in the form of a “college scorecard” which assesses higher education institutions in five categories: costs, graduation, student loan repayment, student loan debt and earning potential. This tool’s purpose is to make it easier for students and their families to identify and choose high-quality, affordable colleges. A draft of the scorecard is currently open to public comment on the White House web page.

**Congressional Activity**

With the beginning of the second session of the 112 Congress, work has resumed on payroll tax relief, emergency unemployment benefits, and reauthorization of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Senate and House Authorizers and Appropriators will begin addressing key higher education issues, such as whether to support part or all of the President’s higher education initiatives unveiled as part of his 2013 budget proposal, reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act and funding for fund the Pell Grant Program.

**Senate**

As the Senate plans to move forward with legislation to spur job creation among America’s small business and entrepreneurs, Nevada Senator Harry Reid stated that he would like to bring more appropriation bills to the Senate Floor this year. In the past, appropriation bills have largely been brought to the House of Representative’s floor.

**The House of Representatives**

Since President Obama’s release of his budget proposal, there has been a lot of internal debate within the House of Representatives regarding what the ceiling for the Budget Control Act should be. Under the current Act, the ceiling is set to 1.047 trillion dollars, and some members are pressing for a budget resolution that holds discretionary spending at $97 billion below this cap.

**Departures Changing the Face of 2013 House Education and the Workforce Committee**

Due to recently announced retirements and redistricting issues, there will be a number of similar members who will be leaving the House Education and Workforce Committee before the 113th Congress is sworn in next January. In total, five Democrats and one moderate Republican member will be leaving. This includes longstanding member Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) from Marin and Sonoma County. The departure of so many senior members represents a major loss of institutional knowledge for the Committee, and could have a significance effect on future policy discussions on education issues.

**Passage of Gainful Employment Regulations**

The House passed H.R. 2117, the “Protecting Academic Freedom in Higher Education Act.” This bill was sponsored by Congresswoman Virginia Foxx (R-NC) and will rescind regulations issued by the U.S. Department of Education that define a credit hour and set minimum requirements that all higher education institutions must meet to be considered authorized by a State in which they provide educational programs. It will also bar the Secretary of Education from enforcing any new rules to define the term “credit hour.”

The need for this bill stems from the findings by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) that some institutions of higher education were awarding more and more credits in order to obtain more student financial aid. This bill is part of a larger package known as the “gainful employment” or “program integrity” regulations, and attempts to protect institutions and students from significant financial and bureaucratic burdens. Now, the bill
will proceed to the Democratically-controlled Senate where the possibility of passing is slim due to concerns over for-profit institutional accountability and the growing concerns about the quality of these degrees.

**WIA Reauthorization Bill**
The House Education and Workforce Committee will likely markup a WIA reauthorization bill this Spring. It is expected to be a legislative measure that combines provisions from other bills introduced by House Republicans late last year.

**Pell Grants**

For AY 2013-2014, the Pell Grant program is stable, with a projected $1.5 billion surplus. This is partly due to the infusion of $17 billion during the debt ceiling negotiations last summer and the eligibility changes made in December. According to estimates, the program will face another shortfall exceeding $8 billion for AY 2014-2015. The administration has signaled that additional changes to the program may be necessary to ensure Pell is sustainable in the future. If Congress continues to preserve the appropriated base of $4,860 for the Pell Grant, this combined with mandatory funding will bring the maximum award to $5,635 for the year 2013-2014.

**New Round of Awards for TAACCTG**

A new round of awards has opened for the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant (TAACCCTG) Program. The solicitation for applications is on the Department of Labor’s website and will remain open until May 24, 2012.

The TAACCCTG Program awards grants to community college around the country to help economically dislocated workers who are changing careers. In November of last year, the C6 Consortium, a central valley consortium of twelve colleges lead by West Hills College in the City of Lemoore, was awarded $19 million to fund a three year project to develop workforce development programs.