

## **Higher Education News March and April 2008**

### **U.S. House Approves Bill to Head Off a Potential Crisis in Student Lending**

*Source: <http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/04/2553n.htm>*

Acting with uncharacteristic swiftness, the U.S. House of Representatives on Thursday approved legislation aimed at averting a crisis in student lending. The bill ([HR 5715](#)), which passed by a vote of 383-27, seeks to stem the departure of loan companies from the federally guaranteed student-loan program. More than 50 lenders have left that program in recent weeks, amid a credit crunch that has rippled across the financial sector, making many types of lending less profitable. To encourage lenders to remain in the federal program, the bill would allow the secretary of education to buy up loans that lenders have struggled to sell to investors. That move would inject liquidity into the student-loan market, providing lenders with fresh capital to make new loans.

Coming as the lending season kicks into high gear, the bill is also an attempt to reassure students that the federal government will step in if private lenders continue to drop out of the system. To that end, the bill would clarify that the Education Department has the authority to advance federal funds to guarantee agencies, which would make student loans if they became widely unavailable from traditional lenders. The legislation would also ease the process of applying for a student loan under such a system, allowing the secretary to designate emergency "lenders of last resort" on a collegewide basis, rather than student by student.

Under current law, students seeking a loan from a lender of last resort would have to petition the Education Department individually and prove they had been denied a loan by at least two lenders. Colleges and student groups had warned that process could place an excessive burden on borrowers. In addition, the bill would raise the limits on how much undergraduate students can borrow in federal loans, reducing those borrowers' dependence on costlier, and potentially scarcer, private loans. More than a dozen lenders have recently announced plans to quit making private student loans, including Bank of America, which joined that exodus on Thursday. Others have stopped lending to students with poor credit scores or those attending colleges with low graduation rates. Legislation similar to the House-passed bill has been introduced in the Senate, but it has not yet been brought up for a vote.

### **Virginia's Governor Signs Laws Responding to Shootings at Virginia Tech**

*Source: <http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/04/2429n.htm>*

Virginia's governor, Timothy M. Kaine, signed more than two dozen bills on Wednesday that seek to improve communication among mental-health professionals who work at colleges and state agencies, and strengthen security on public-university campuses in the hope of avoiding another tragedy like the shootings at Virginia Tech that claimed 33 lives almost one year ago.

Several of the new laws will require Virginia's public colleges to adopt certain policies and practices, if they do not already have such measures in place. Among other things, the laws will require colleges to:

- Notify parents if a student receives mental-health treatment from a counselor or other health staff member on a campus, and if the student is identified as posing a threat to himself or herself or to others. [This bullet point has been corrected since this article was originally published. --Editor]
- Install, by the start of 2009, comprehensive emergency-notification systems.
- Establish threat-assessment teams, which will also coordinate violence-prevention programs on a campus.
- Develop and maintain a written emergency-management plan.
- Establish procedures to communicate with and disclose educational and mental-health records to parents who can claim a student as a dependent for tax purposes.

The new laws also say that both public and private colleges in the state may request student records, including those related to mental-health treatment, from any secondary, elementary, or other school the student attended.

In signing the bills, the governor touted the millions of dollars in increases for mental-health services that were included in the budget he signed last month. However, the state has not allocated any additional funds to assist colleges and universities with putting the new requirements in place.

### **The Public View of Politics in the Classroom**

*Source: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i30/30a02201.htm>*

The older Americans are, and the less time they have spent on a college campus, the more likely they are to believe that professors are politically biased.

That's the chief finding of a question from a survey conducted through The Chronicle/Gallup Panel that asked Americans: "How often do you believe that college professors use their classrooms as a platform for their personal politics?"

Only 29 percent of those age 25 to 34, and who are more likely to have spent time on a college campus in recent years, responded that professors "often" use their classrooms to espouse their political views. But that response grew to 41 percent of those between the ages of 45 and 54, and to nearly 60 percent of those over age 65.

*The Chronicle* talked about the survey findings with professors who study political bias in the classroom, including several scholars at George Mason University, where it is a popular research topic. The results, they said, may show that accusations that liberal professors are trying to indoctrinate students have gained traction, particularly with Americans who do not have much personal experience in college classrooms.

Indeed, the poll also shows that Americans who have not earned college degrees are much likelier than others to believe that professors use their classrooms as political bully pulpits.

### **Education Dept. to End 'Hardship' Loan Plan**

*Source: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i27/27a01702.htm>*

The Education Department announced last week that it would end a "hardship" provision that would have reduced interest payments for low-income college graduates by more than \$1-billion over the next decade. Student-aid advocates largely agreed with that decision, saying the provision had often benefited students who needed help the least.

Department officials had planned to let the hardship provision exist as an alternative for borrowers alongside a new income-based repayment plan approved last September by Congress. But the officials reversed themselves after their own budget experts surprised them by estimating the decadelong price tag at \$1.1-billion.

Student-aid advocates participating in an advisory panel drafting regulations for carrying out the legislation that includes the income-based repayment plan expressed sympathy. They said the hardship provision often benefits relatively high-earning college graduates, like doctors, by giving them annual loan forgiveness that can be worth more than a Pell Grant, the government's main subsidy for low-income college students.

The current hardship provision allows college graduates with federally subsidized loans to defer interest payments on those loans if their total debt is more than 20 percent of their income, and if their income minus their loan payments leaves them with no more than 220 percent of the income considered poverty level in the United States.

### **Affirmative Action Fight in Colorado**

*Source: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/03/11/qt>*

Opponents of affirmative action announced Monday that they believe they have more than enough signatures to place a proposed ban on the ballots in Colorado, [The Denver Post](#) reported. The ban, similar to those passed in California, Michigan and Washington State — and to proposals for several other states this year — would apply to public colleges and other state agencies. Supporters of the ban in Colorado said they have 128,744 signatures, far more than the 76,047 required, but defenders of affirmative action plan a series of challenges on both signatures and the language of the proposal.

### **Publishers Sue Georgia State Over Digital Coursepacks**

*Source: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/04/16/qt>*

Three publishers sued Georgia State University Tuesday, charging that digitally distributed course materials were violating their copyrights, [The New York Times](#) reported. The case could be the online equivalent of litigation waged by publishers years ago against printed coursepacks — although those suits were generally filed against copy shops. Georgia State told the *Times* that it hadn't seen the suit and couldn't comment, but the publishers' lawyer told the newspaper that the university had asserted its rights to use the material. The lawyer said that several other universities, contacted with similar complaints, had agreed to change policies. Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Sage Publications filed the suit.

## U.S. News Adds Surveys That Could Alter Methodology

Source: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/04/09/usnews>

The magazine has sent out surveys to 1,600 high school counseling offices asking them to evaluate colleges, and the results may be used in next year's rankings. Or not. *U.S. News* isn't deciding how to use the high school data until after the results come in. In addition, the magazine is asking a series of new questions of college presidents, having them identify "up and coming" colleges, inviting them to offer suggestions on changing the relative weights the magazine uses in its rankings, and giving them a series of possible additional measures and asking which should be added to the methodology.

Taken together, these changes could result in significant changes to the magazine's controversial and much debated methodology. And the magazine — following a year in which more college presidents criticized it and fewer participated in its surveys — is reaching out to educators for advice. But already the possible changes are themselves causing more controversy. Some high school counselors are calling for a boycott of the survey, and a leading critic of the rankings says that the possible changes show once again how flawed the rankings are.

The magazine also has just sent out this year's survey to college presidents asking them to rank institutions. This year's survey also includes additional questions:

- Presidents will be asked to name up to 10 colleges they think are "up and coming." Morse said that this is a response to complaints that the magazine's reputational survey — among the most controversial parts of the rankings — is slow to respond to improvements by colleges.
- Presidents will be asked for advice on changes the magazine should consider in [its methodology](#).
- Presidents will be given a list of possible additional categories on which colleges could be ranked, and which could be used in the methodology for best colleges. These items include: ethnic diversity, admission yield, economic diversity, total endowment per student, learning outcomes, job placement data, and spending efficiency.