UM System to fund intercampus courses

Tuesday, June 17, 2014 at 2:00 pm

The University of Missouri System announced funding for 34 intercampus courses, with 15 awards presented to faculty for a total of $250,000 for developing cooperative programs, the UM System said in a statement.

As outlined in its strategic plan, UM System administrators have an obligation to identify and share best practices and bring the campuses together to collaborate in ways, the statement said.

In the past, one of the major obstacles to sharing courses had been that when students from one UM campus took courses from another UM campus, the home campus lost tuition fees. This program alleviated that barrier by differentiating between the host and home campus. "Course-sharing just made sense to implement across our four campuses given the depth of our faculty," said Hank Foley, UM System executive vice president for academic affairs, research and economic development. "This not only gives our students more opportunities for learning but it allows our professors to engage in essential activities like research, creating new courses, and advising students."

This initial effort involved more than 23 different academic departments or schools on all four UM campuses, including nursing, physics, English, history, sociology, engineering, education, biology, social work, accounting and philosophy, the statement said. The selected courses will be designed with the campus instructional design units and will be offered as early as this fall.
Both sides in trial about paying NCAA athletes testify

NO MENTION

The NCAA began making its case for keeping the current model for college sports, with the women’s athletics director at the University of Texas testifying that paying basketball and football players would tear apart the foundation the school’s athletics are based upon. But another person testifying at an antitrust trial in Oakland, Calif., said the NCAA has become hypocritical. The testimony came as the trial that could fundamentally change the way big college sports are operated neared its midpoint in federal court. Former UCLA basketball player Ed O’Bannon and 19 others seek an injunction that would allow players to band together to sell the rights to their names, images and likenesses for use on TV and in video games.

Christine Plonsky said Tuesday she couldn’t imagine a scenario in which some of her University of Texas athletes were able to make money from their appearances in televised games, as hundreds of athletes in other sports only get tuition and room and board for their efforts. “I don’t believe that our university would approve of an activity where a segment of our student-athlete population was professionalized,” Plonsky said. “I know we strongly believe our student-athletes should not be professionalized in any way.”

Taking the stand after six days of witnesses called by plaintiffs in the antitrust trial, Plonsky said Texas regards athletes as students first, even for those in the high profile football and basketball programs that bring in tens of millions of dollars a year.

Plonsky’s testimony came after a Drexel University professor and author of a book on the influence of money on college sports gave the opposite viewpoint on the stand, saying the NCAA’s contention that athletes in big money sports are students first is self-serving and designed only to perpetuate a myth of amateurism.
“The NCAA makes the assertion there can be this large college sport enterprise which can be run professionally and engender commercial interest and that can be professional, but the participating cannot,” Ellen Staurowsky said. “That hinges on whether athletes are students first or second. The emphasis is really on their role as an athlete, secondarily the student role.”

Staurowsky said there is a big difference between how the NCAA defines amateurism and what amateurism really is. She said that the organization’s definition of amateurism has shifted over recent years as billions of dollars have been poured into college sports.

NCAA President Mark Emmert is expected to testify Thursday. (AP)

James in no hurry to make next career decision • LeBron James is leaving. For a family vacation, that is. The Miami Heat star said that’s his first order of business, and during the time away from basketball he’ll start the process of moving past this season and looking toward the future. He can become a free agent this summer if he so chooses.

“I just want to win. That’s all that matters to me,” he said Tuesday after emerging from the final team meeting, in which coach Erik Spoelstra urged his players take plenty of pride from the season, even though the end result was an NBA Finals loss to San Antonio. “I haven’t even begun to even think about what my future holds or what I have in store. I will sit down with my team at some point, my family as well. Today definitely wasn’t the day. If my family is happy, then I’m happy and able to perform at a high level.”

If so, then they’ve been happy during his first four years in Miami: James has been to the NBA Finals all four seasons in which he’s played for the Heat, capturing two championships, and no one in the league over that span has logged more minutes, made more field goals or won more games than the four-time MVP.

James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh can all become free agents, though none have made decisions on whether they’ll opt out. They came together amid much fanfare in 2010, and this summer might be similar in many ways for that trio, the Heat and the NBA as a whole — with all eyes on what they’ll do.

“I feel more at ease this time,” James said, adding that “2010, it was out of control. It was the craziest summer I’ve ever been a part of. ... I’m definitely in a better place right now even though in 2010 I got put out in the postseason earlier than I expected or didn’t accomplish what I wanted to, and I have kind of the same feeling now.”

James said that at some point, he, Wade and Bosh will gather to talk about their plans. They have until June 29 to inform the Heat whether they will exercise their rights to become free agents — moves that in all three cases would not prohibit them from returning to Miami. (AP)
Woods improving • Golfer Tiger Woods is making progress in his recovery from back surgery and starting to extend his swing, his agent said. Woods already has missed two majors this year while he recovers from an operation on his back that took place March 31, and it is not known when he next will play in a tournament. Woods has slipped from No. 1 to No. 4 in the world rankings, and is at No. 207 in the standings for the PGA Tour playoffs — the top 125 get into that series, which starts Aug. 21. (AP)

Gatlin wins in 100 meters • American sprinter Justin Gatlin won the 100 meters at the Golden Spike meet in Ostrava, Czech Republic, clocking 9.86 seconds to improve his own world-leading time of the year. Gatlin had set the previous world-leading time of 9.87 at the Beijing World Challenge meet last month. (AP)

Musselman joins LSU staff • Louisiana State University men’s basketball coach Johnny Jones hired Eric Musselman as associate coach. Musselman, 49, was the head coach of the NBA’s Golden State Warriors from 2002-04 and the Sacramento Kings in 2006-07. More recently, he had been an assistant at Arizona State. (AP)

Cavendish prevails • Mark Cavendish edged Juan Jose Lobato and Peter Sagan in a thrilling final sprint to win the fourth stage of the Tour de Suisse, in Ossingen, Switzerland. Tony Martin remained in the overall lead in the cycling event that ends Sunday. (AP)

‘Tough Love’ for Higher Ed

NO MU Mention

June 18, 2014

By Michael Stratford

WASHINGTON -- As policy makers here ponder new ways to hold colleges more accountable for how well they serve students, they should start by
laying down some tougher minimum standards that institutions must meet to receive federal benefits, according to a new report published Wednesday by the Education Trust.

The policy paper -- titled “Tough Love: Bottom-Line Quality Standards for Colleges” -- calls for the federal government to demand better performance from a wide range of colleges and universities in exchange for the $180 billion it pours each year into student loans, grants and higher education tax breaks.

The authors, Michael Dannenberg and Mary Nguyen Barry of the Education Trust, a nonprofit that advocates for educational equity, propose an accountability system that sets requirements for how well colleges must enroll low-income students, graduate students, and produce graduates who can pay back their loans.

“No longer should federal higher education money flow unabated and unquestioned to institutions that neglect their public duty to educate successfully the students they admit and to enroll low-income students at least at a bare-minimum level,” they argue in the report.

Specifically, under the proposal, four-year colleges would face penalties if they were among the lowest-performing 5 percent of institutions in each of three categories: percentage of Pell Grant-eligible students; graduation rates; and loan repayment rates. The authors dub such low-performing institutions in each category, respectively, as “engines of inequality,” “college dropout factories,” and “diploma mills.”

The proposal’s metrics are similar to those that the Obama administration has floated as possible standards for the college ratings system it is currently developing. But instead of universal ratings, the Education Trust paper calls for a focus on the worst-performing institutions in each category. “We support the president’s college ratings proposal in concept,” Dannenberg said in an interview. But, he said, it’s a challenge figuring out how to do that accurately.
“We need virtually all colleges and universities to improve,” he added. “It’s much easier to measure universities at the extreme of quality. Others have spent a lot of time figuring out how to identify the best of the best. We’re challenging the worst colleges to improve their performance.”

**Scrutiny of For-Profit Colleges, ‘Tough Love’ For the Elite**

In raising concerns about the worst performing institutions when it comes to completion rates and loan repayment behavior, the report echoes many other calls for greater institutional accountability in recent years. For instance, Senate Democrats and the Obama administration have scrutinized for-profit colleges on such measures.

And indeed the report’s list of the worst colleges for student loan defaults (those having a three-year cohort default rate higher than 28 percent) are largely for-profit institutions. For-profit colleges similarly represent a large share of the lowest-performing colleges in the graduation rate category (those failing to graduate at least 15 percent of all first-time, full-time freshmen).

But the report also tackles a far-less discussed metric for holding colleges accountable: access for low-income students.

The paper calls out colleges that fall into the bottom 5 percent of institutions enrolling Pell-Grant-eligible students (that is, those with a student body with fewer than 17 percent of such students). Nonprofit institutions, particularly elite research universities -- such as Stanford, Yale and Princeton -- are at the top of that list.

“We think that many of these institutions are serving all kinds of public purposes and serving them well -- research for example -- but they need to do a better job on low-income student access,” Dannenberg said. “Colleges are supposed to serve as engines of economic mobility, they’re supposed to correct inequalities, not calcify them.”

He added that he thinks federal pressure in this area can be particularly effective, citing the questioning several years ago by Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa about how elite colleges were spending their large
endowments. The scrutiny, he said, was partially responsible for the wave of wealthy institutions to offer far more generous loan-free financial aid packages.

Still, under the proposal, such elite colleges -- and any other institutions failing the access metric -- would face less severe sanctions than those colleges that perform poorly on the graduation and loan repayment (or default) rate metrics.

All institutions that fail the metrics would have several years to improve. After that point, the federal government would start to take away institutional grant and tax benefits (including the charitable interest deduction) from low-access institutions.

Low-graduation and low-loan repayment institutions would be subject to the same penalties in addition to a loss of federal student aid eligibility.

Promising Too Much?

NO MU Mention

June 18, 2014

By Charlie Tyson

WASHINGTON -- Calls for free college, long a goal of the left (and, long ago, a reality in some states), went somewhat mainstream Tuesday morning.
Flanked by an array of former governors and congressmen, Morley Winograd – who once served as a top adviser to former vice president Al Gore – unveiled a new nonprofit that has armed itself with an unusual proposal. The group wants to create federally funded full-tuition scholarships for students at two-year and four-year colleges.

Dubbing itself “Redeeming America’s Promise,” the coalition, led by Winograd, makes several promises of its own. Most prominent is the pledge displayed repeatedly in the group’s promotional literature: the assurance that the federal government could subsidize tuition without raising taxes or increasing the nation’s debt. (Read the group’s plan here.)

The coalition’s proposal has already attracted skepticism. Barmak Nassirian, the director of federal relations and policy analysis for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, said calls for “free” higher education were often misleading.

“The minute I hear the word ‘free,’ I want to hang on to my wallet,” Nassirian said. “Education really isn’t free; it’s a service that costs money … ‘free’ is an appealing political PR label, but it’s not really financial policy.” Redeeming America’s Promise, however, maintains that decisive action is necessary to address college costs.

“We face the slow death of the American dream,” said James Blanchard, former governor of Michigan and a member of the coalition, at the press conference Tuesday.

A Plan With Promise?
The plan’s major component is the establishment of a scholarship program, which the coalition says would be administered by the Department of Education. The American Promise Scholarships would give, on average, $8,500 a year to students at four-year colleges and universities and $2,500 a year to students at two-year institutions. This amount is roughly equal to the average annual in-state tuition cost for public four-year colleges ($8,893) and community colleges ($2,285), respectively.
Students with family incomes of $160,000 or less would be eligible for these scholarships. To receive a four-year scholarship, a student would have to graduate high school with a 2.75 grade-point average. Students could not receive more than four years’ worth of funding.

**Tuition at public institutions differs across states.** For this reason, individual states would set the value of the four-year scholarships, according to the coalition’s plan. Some states could set the value of the scholarships below the $8,500-a-year figure for students in the state. Other states could set it above the $8,500 figure, as long as the overall costs to the federal government did not exceed $8,500 per student. The plan did not detail how the states would negotiate which ones could have larger scholarships.

Public institutions, in effect, would not be allowed to charge more for in-state tuition than their state’s scholarship value. If, for example, Vermont set its scholarship value at $9,000, the University of Vermont – which currently charges $14,184 a year for in-state tuition – would have to “make up the difference from sources other than the student’s family,” the coalition’s report states.

Students could apply the federal funds to an out-of-state public institution or to a private institution, but wouldn't have as large a share covered.

The group argues that the federal government could pay for the bulk of the scholarships by redirecting existing higher education funds. Money that currently goes to tuition tax credits and Pell Grants could fund the scholarships, the coalition says. Families that do not pay tuition would not need to claim a tuition tax credit. And fewer tax deductions claimed by families means more money for the federal government. The group estimates that the scholarships would allow the government to recoup $25 billion that would otherwise go to tuition tax credits.

In addition, with scholarships covering tuition, fewer students would apply for Pell Grants, the coalition argues. The money that would otherwise be spent on Pell Grants could also go to the American Promise Scholarships, the group says. The group stressed that Pell money would still exist for students
who needed it. The plan does not specify how much Pell money might shift, although it notes that if applications fell by half, the government would save $17 billion.

Redeeming America’s Promise also aims to introduce a loan system. College students would be able to borrow up to $10,000 a year for living expenses in income-based repayment loans. Students would incur no interest while enrolled. Upon graduation, their total debt would be reduced by 5 percent for each year it took to complete the degree: 20 percent of the principal amount for a bachelor’s degree would be written off immediately.

**The Difficulty of Redemption**
The plan from Redeeming America’s Promise aims to fix nearly all of higher education’s access and affordability problems at once. Its proponents say the scholarships, combined with the income-based repayment loans, would reduce debt and encourage low- and middle-income students to attend – and graduate from -- college. Winograd also argued that tying the four-year scholarships to a G.P.A. cutoff would encourage a “culture of success” in high schools. In addition, the plan would spur state institutions to cut costs, the coalition holds.

Winograd’s coalition includes several prominent Democrats, such as Blanchard, the former Congressman Robert Carr, and the former Democratic National Committee chairman Don Fowler. Michael Castle, a Republican who served as governor of Delaware and later as a Congressman, also voiced his support at the Tuesday press conference.

Although a number of former lawmakers have signed on to the plan, sitting politicians will likely prove more difficult to convince. The plan would require legislation -- a fact Winograd and others acknowledge. Their coalition hopes to start a “grassroots, cyber-roots movement” that builds enough strength to force a response from Congress, Winograd said at the press conference Tuesday.

Some observers in higher education, however, doubt the feasibility of the coalition’s ideas.
Dan Madzelan, the American Council on Education’s associate vice president for government relations, said the coalition’s funding calculus – the group’s claims that money from Pell Grants and tax credits could finance the scholarships – sounded “a bit optimistic.”

Pell Grants finance not only tuition but also books and supplies and room and board. Madzelan said there might be some reduction in Pell expenditures under the coalition’s plan if there are a significant number of applicants paying zero tuition. But students – even those paying no tuition – will likely continue to apply for Pell Grants to meet needs unrelated to tuition.

In addition, a substantial share of Pell recipients are non-traditionally aged college students, rather than members of the “Millenial” generation about which Winograd has written at length.

The other proposed funding source for the scholarships – tuition tax credits – might also be more limited than the coalition expects, Madzelan said. Students receiving $8,500-a-year grants can apply that money to private institutions. At a high-priced private institution, a family might still pay enough tuition to qualify for tuition tax credits, thus depleting the pool of resources the coalition envisioned.

Madzelan, who worked for years in the Department of Education, added that he was unsure whether some aspects of the plan – such as the requirement that state institutions lower their prices to match the scholarship, or make up the difference somehow – would pass legal muster. For this pricing requirement to work, Madzelan noted, the government would have to mandate certain actions from state legislatures, because legislatures are often involved in setting tuition for public institutions.

“It’s difficult to see how Congress can force states to do things,” Madzelan said. “States would have significant issues around unfunded mandates. It’s hard to require expenditures of state funds – telling states there are certain things they have to do without Congress providing resources for carrying
those things out.”

Such a requirement could “pretty easily sidestep into price control,” he said. The G.P.A. requirement for the four-year scholarships could cause problems as well, Madzelan observed, because not every high school uses grade-point averages – let alone a four-point scale.

Nassirian, from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, said the coalition’s proposal “has the advantage of simplicity and neatness” but seemed “more like back-of-the-envelope calculations rather than any kind of serious analysis of policy consequences.”

The coalition’s use of averages, such as its $8,500 figure for the four-year scholarships, struck Nassirian as wrongheaded.

“Averages mask all kinds of variances,” he said. “There are all kinds of other averages going on here that they’re oblivious to, such as the fact that not all public four-year institutions are created equal, nor are they equally priced.”

A related issue, Nassirian said, was the coalition’s assumption that some states would set the yearly value of the four-year scholarship at less than $8,500, and others would set it higher, to reflect differences in tuition across states while keeping overall costs at a national average of $8,500 per student.

“Anyone who’s below that level will want to maximize their revenue, so that’ll pull up pricing” to the $8,500 mark, he said. For this reason, the law would cap tuition at $8,500 a year for public institutions – bad news for flagship universities with more costs.

Pete Boyle, a spokesman for the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities – a group that represents private institutions – said the plan could lead students to choose institutions that aren’t right for them. “If you see a Duke at one end of the spectrum and a free public education at another end of the spectrum, are you still doing your due diligence to make sure the education is the best fit for you?” he wondered. “[And] I don’t know how the publics will be able to handle an additional influx -- especially the
flagships, which are already stuffed with students.”

Redeeming America’s Promise did not reply to questions about various criticisms of its plan.

Nassirian said the idea that a college education – a “terrifyingly expensive proposition” -- could “suddenly become manna from heaven” was “a bit too simplistic, more of a message than policy.”

“Free happens to be a number that appeals to human beings because, you know, nice and round,” he said. “Certainly the system we have is overly complicated just because of the decades-long evolutionary path it has taken. There is a tendency to want to simplify it in elegant ways that appeal to one’s sense of order and rationality. But my first concern about any kind of a radical overhaul of the devil I know is concern about unintended consequences and concern that, first, let’s not do any harm.”