MU Health part of hospital joint venture

By Jodie Jackson Jr.

Monday, February 2, 2015 at 2:00 pm

The joint venture formed in December by University of Missouri Health Care and Nueterra has submitted a letter of intent to build a 10-bed, $40 million surgical hospital in south Columbia.

The proposed 51,300-square-foot hospital, off Ponderosa Street at the northwest corner of Highway 63 and Discovery Parkway, would be a new campus for the Fulton Medical Center. MU Health and Nueterra teamed up in December as Fulton Medical Center LLC to purchase Callaway Community Hospital in Fulton.

Ryan Hobart, spokesman for the Department of Health and Senior Services, said a letter of intent gives advance notice of the project and that an application for a Certificate of Need may be filed 30 days after submitting the letter.

The Certificate of Need process was established in 1980 to contain health care costs, improve quality of care and increase access to health and medical care. The nine-member Missouri Health Facilities Review Committee decides whether to issue a certificate to allow a project to proceed.

The review process aims to “prevent unnecessary duplications” of health care services and to “evaluate competing interests” of other health care providers. The proposed surgical hospital would be five miles from Boone Hospital Center on a 58-acre tract currently owned by P1316 LLC of Columbia.

Officials with BJC HealthCare, which leases the 397-bed Boone Hospital Center from Boone County, declined to comment on the intent to build a new hospital. According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, BJC has opposed projects that propose to offer only specific services and especially those with a focus on surgeries.

The Letter of Intent describes the project as a single-story building. The building will be all new construction, and all equipment will be newly acquired. The hospital is anticipated to have 10 beds and two operating rooms. There will be no long-term beds.

Nueterra and MU Health, which operates 361-bed University Hospital, together formed Fulton Medical Center LLC and in December purchased 37-bed Callaway Community Hospital.
Mary Jenkins, MU Health spokeswoman, said MU Health is a minority owner in the Fulton Medical Center venture. Nuerterra, which operates Callaway Community Hospital, owns a stake of about 65 percent and MU Health owns the rest. She referred other questions to Nuerterra.

Nuerterra is the nation’s largest private-sector organization specializing in joint ventures with health systems, hospitals and physicians, Jenkins said.

Amy Leiker, Nuerterra vice president of global marketing, said Nuerterra didn’t have information on employment numbers, details of the Certificate of Need or the specific surgical and other medical services that would be provided at the new hospital.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

UPDATE: Four named finalists for dean of Missouri School of Journalism

Monday, February 2, 2015 | 9:09 p.m. CST; updated 10:34 p.m. CST, Monday, February 2, 2015
BY THOMAS CARTER

This article has been updated to include more information about the four finalists.

COLUMBIA — Four finalists have been named in the search for a new dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, according to the Journalism School's website.

The finalists are:

Sonya Forte Duhé, director and professor of the School of Mass Communication at Loyola University, New Orleans. Duhé received a doctorate in journalism at MU in 1993, a master of science in journalism from Northwestern University in 1984 and a bachelor of arts in journalism from Louisiana State University in 1983.

Duhé is a former award-winning television news reporter and anchor. In August 2009, she began working at Loyola, where her research includes applied broadcast research and science journalism including risk and crisis communications. She will be on campus Feb. 11-14.
David Kurpius, professor at the Manship School of Mass Communication and associate vice chancellor for enrollment management at Louisiana State University. Kurpius’ research focuses on local television news and the connections between journalistic practice and democratic life. In 1997, Kurpius joined the LSU faculty, where he teaches broadcast journalism and public affairs reporting.

His professional career includes a number of years at commercial television stations. He will be on campus Feb. 15-18.

Esther Thorson, professor and associate dean for graduate study at the Missouri School of Journalism and research director for the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute. Thorson, who has written more than 100 pieces on news effects, advertising and media economics, is the only female Fellow of the American Academy of Advertising and serves on eight journal editorial boards.

Her other projects focus on the choice of news sources for the 18- to 34-year-old demographic and the effect of the Internet on traditional media use for news. Her campus interviews are scheduled for Feb. 22-24.

Thor Wasbotten, director and professor of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Kent State University. Wasbotten has been director since July 2012 and has journalism degrees from the University of Oregon and the University of Southern California. Before joining Kent State, he was assistant dean for student media and online operations at The Pennsylvania State University and also a senior lecturer of journalism.
His professional career includes stints as news director or station manager at network affiliates in Idaho, Arizona and Oregon, as a partner and managing director of compliance for Blue Heron Research Partners, an independent investment research firm, and president of Real Media Strategies, a market research company. He will be on campus Feb. 25-28.

The finalists were announced Monday by Provost Garnett Stokes and Deputy Provost Ken Dean. The candidate chosen will succeed Dean Mills, who has been dean of the Journalism School since 1989. He announced a year ago that he would retire. Barney Calame, a School of Journalism alumnus and a member of the committee tasked last fall to find a new dean, said he thought the search process was well organized and well executed.

"The next big step will be for anyone and everyone to have a chance to listen to the candidates and ask them questions," Calame said.

The committee sent an unranked list of recommended candidates to the provost and deputy provost, and the pair whittled that list to the current four. MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin will have the final say on who is named the next dean.

Each of the candidates will participate in an open forum on campus. The times and dates of those forums have yet to be scheduled.

Princeton Review strips UMKC of top 25 rankings

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The Princeton Review for the first time stripped a college of its rankings Monday after learning that the University of Missouri-Kansas City knowingly submitted false data.
The company first said it was pulling the school's 2014 rankings as being among the top 25 best college and business school entrepreneurial programs for graduates and undergraduates. The Princeton Review later announced it also would strip the rankings for the three previous years at the university's request.

UMKC Chancellor Leo E. Morton said in a written statement that the school revised its application process in 2014 and "has great confidence in that year's rankings submission," but he noted that the school understood why The Princeton Review took action.

"Even one inaccurate data point is one too many, and our integrity is paramount," Morton said in the statement. "With that in mind, we have requested that The Princeton Review withdraw our rankings from 2011, 2012 and 2013, based on the inaccurate information provided for those years."

Robert Franek, a senior vice president for The Princeton Review, said in a written statement that the company was "extremely disappointed" to learn about the problems.

"Schools earn a spot on our entrepreneurship ranking through school-reported data," Franek said. "Every school signs an affidavit to ensure their information is accurate. We take these affidavits and this news very seriously."

Stripping a ranking is a step that the 34-year-old Princeton Review had never taken since releasing its first ranking in 1992. The move came after the University of Missouri System, which governs the Kansas City campus, on Friday released a report by international accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Gov. Jay Nixon requested the report after The Kansas City Star last year investigated the validity of claims made by the Henry W. Bloch School of Management. It confirmed problems with the numbers of student clubs and mentorship programs and enrollment figures for the entrepreneurship program. For instance, the man responsible for submitting rankings applications told auditors that a "wish list" of clubs was assembled and that a graduate student was instructed to post them on the university's website, making it look as though those clubs existed.

The report also was critical of an article in an academic journal that ranked UMKC as the No. 1 school in the world for research in the field of innovation management. The report found that the article was edited in part by the former head of the Bloch School department receiving the top ranking.

Morton said UMKC had taken steps to prevent future issues, including appointing someone to lead a special faculty committee to oversee ranking applications.

"UMKC and the Bloch School are committed to ensuring that the academic integrity of this institution is maintained and strengthened and we are confident that the months ahead will show we have achieved that," Morton said.
Study: College completion gap between rich, poor widens

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO

NO MENTION

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The gap in bachelor-degree attainment between the nation's richest and poorest students by age 24 has doubled during the last four decades, according to a report released Tuesday.

The percent of students from the lowest-income families — those making $34,160 a year or less — earning a bachelor's degree has inched up just 3 points since 1970, rising from 6 to 9 percent by 2013.

Meanwhile, college completion for students from the wealthiest families has risen dramatically, climbing from 44 to 77 percent.

"It's really quite amazing how big the differences have become between those from the highest and lowest family incomes," said Laura Perna, a University of Pennsylvania professor and executive director of the Alliance for Higher Education and Democracy, one of the two organizations that published the study examining college costs and degree attainment.

The study comes amid renewed debate on college affordability spurred by President Barack Obama's proposal to make two years of college free. If adopted in every state, the proposal would benefit a projected 9 million students each year. It would cost taxpayers an estimated $60 billion over 10 years — a price the Republican-controlled Congress is likely to be hesitant to embrace.

Among the report's other findings: The percent of students from all income levels enrolling in college has increased, shrinking the gap in enrollment between rich and poor "somewhat" during the last four decades. There was a 46-point gap between the two groups in 1970 compared with a 36-point gap in 2012.

Yet completion gaps are growing: While 99 percent of students entering college from the highest income families — those making $108,650 or more a year — graduate by 24, just 21 percent of student from the lowest income families finish by that age.

Perna said there are a number of factors contributing to the widening divide, including access to the information and support needed to enter college and graduate; college readiness; and the availability of higher
education that meets people's needs, particularly for students who might have children, limited access to transportation and full-time jobs.

She also noted that the likelihood of finishing a degree varies dramatically by type of institution. Students from the poorest families are overrepresented in public two-year institutions, which tend to have lower completion rates, while those from higher income families are abundant in doctoral-granting institutions.

The Obama administration has expanded the availability of Pell grants and supported a tax credit for tuition costs, yet the study finds that the amount of the maximum Pell grant award has not kept up with the rising cost of college. College costs were more than two times higher in 2012 than in 1975 at the start of the Pell grant program, which provides aid to low-income students based on need.

Pell grants covered 67 percent of college costs in 1975 but only 27 percent in 2012.

"We sometimes think that low-income students are taken care of because of the federal program. But you can see it covers so much less than it was first established," said Margaret Cahalan, director of the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, the second institution involved in the report.

The study shows the burden of paying for college has increasingly shifted from state and local governments to students and families. That, Perna said, should prompt an important question: Who should pay for college given the individual and societal benefits?

"Students only have so many resources they can use to pay the costs," Perna said.

Michael Kramer, 29, is the first in his family to attend college. The son of a country club maintenance supervisor and a factory worker, he went straight to jobs in retail and plumbing after graduating high school, unable to afford college. He eventually enrolled in a community college while working full time and is now taking out loans to help finish his bachelor's degree at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"We're a country that says everybody should be getting higher education, and nowadays, to get any decent job, you need a bachelor's degree," Kramer said.

Yet for low-income students like him, Kramer said the high cost of college often means making a difficult choice between fulfilling basic food and housing needs and obtaining a post-secondary education. "It's a continuous cycle that they get stuck in," he said.
What Obama's 2016 Budget Means for Higher Ed

By Paul Basken, Brock Read, Madeline Will, and Brad Wolverton

NO MU MENTION

In the weeks leading up to the release of his 2016 budget, on Monday, President Obama had already previewed many of its key elements—including proposals to make community college free and streamline higher-education tax credits. But a few surprising details still emerged on Monday. For more on those developments, and on the uphill battle the president’s plan faces in Congress, see an analysis by The Chronicle's Kelly Field.

It's worth being very explicit about that uphill battle in Congress, by the way. Below, you'll read about proposals that may never gain traction and funding requests that may be only partly fulfilled. With that said, here's a quick look at other ways the budget would affect academe:

A move to bolster Title IX enforcement.

The budget leaves little doubt that curtailing campus sexual assault is among the president's top higher-ed priorities. He's seeking a 31-percent increase in funding for the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights, which is charged with enforcing Title IX rules that require colleges to investigate and resolve complaints of sexual misconduct.

With that budget boost, the office would hire 210 new full-time staff members, increasing its ranks from 544 to 754—a number that might be better equipped to handle the more than 90 investigations that are currently open. That is just part of the ramping up—and professionalization—of what is becoming an entire industry that investigates and oversees sexual-assault complaints. —B.R.

Science research could make strides.

Mr. Obama asked Congress for a 3-percent increase next year in federal spending on research, calling the request a measured effort to bolster America's scientific capacity after years of tight budgets. The president's proposal would allocate $66.9-billion to basic and applied research in the 2016 fiscal year.

The administration would prefer even greater increases, said John P. Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. But the proposal "reflects the reality that we continue to have to govern in an era of very tough choices," he said.
Under the plan, the National Institutes of Health would get $31.3-billion, an increase of $1-billion over its current level. The NIH, the largest single provider of research money to American universities, has seen its budget shrink by nearly 25 percent since 2003, when adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Obama also asked Congress for $7.7-billion for the National Science Foundation and $5.3-billion for the Department of Energy’s Office of Science, both representing one-year increases of about 5 percent.

The question becomes: Will Congress—with both of its chambers now controlled by Republicans—stand in the way? “These are pretty big asks,” said Matthew Hourihan, director of budget policy at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, “and I’m not so sure that Congress is going to be willing to go this far.”

But even that forecast suggests greater optimism than in past years on Capitol Hill, where Mr. Obama’s budget suggestions often have made little headway. His prospects may be helped this year by a rebound in the nation’s economic health and by encouraging comments from some members of the new Republican majority. They include Sen. Thad Cochran of Mississippi, the new chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who has expressed support for NIH spending in the past, and Sen. Richard C. Shelby of Alabama, chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over the NIH, who has also spoken favorably of the agency. —P.B.

Once more, the humanities hold steady.

If the president gets his way, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities would both see slight bumps in the 2016 fiscal year. Both endowments would receive just shy of $148-million—a 1.3-percent increase from the $146-million each got last year.

Even that modest increase is a step up from Mr. Obama’s last budget, which left allocations to both endowments unchanged from the year before. But it’s not cause for humanists to celebrate, said Stephen Kidd, executive director of the National Humanities Alliance, an advocacy coalition.

The NEH’s "capacity has been eroded by cuts over the last three or four years," Mr. Kidd said. "This increase fails to even keep up with the rate of inflation over that time. We’re pleased to see any increase, but this level of increase fails to rebuild the lost capacity that has been caused by those cuts."

Meanwhile, the Institute of Museum and Library Services—which provides leadership to the country’s 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums—would receive a 4.2-percent increase in federal support under Mr. Obama’s budget, to roughly $237-million in the 2016 fiscal year from its current funding level of nearly $228-million. —M.W.

A college-sports loophole faces elimination.

The proposed budget would eliminate the charitable deduction for personal seat licenses in college sports, which many universities require fans to purchase before they are allowed to buy tickets to football and basketball games. Hardcore fans don’t need the incentive, but the change could lead to fewer contributions. —B.W.
The key theme for higher education in President Obama's 2016 budget plan, unveiled on Monday, is affordability. Through a combination of tax breaks and subsidies, the president aims to make the cost of college less of a barrier to attending.

The budget fleshes out proposals that the president previewed in the weeks leading up to Monday's release: It would simplify and expand the nation’s higher-education tax credits and ensure that the maximum Pell Grant award keeps pace with inflation.

And it would, as Mr. Obama first suggested last month, make community college free for millions of students. But not wealthier ones, it turns out. (More on that later.)

In a conference call with reporters on Monday, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan argued that the president’s plan would help more students graduate from college, reducing income inequality and strengthening the economy.

But in Congress, the budget will face an uphill climb, to say the least. Republican leaders have already dismissed Mr. Obama's community-college and tax-reform plans as too costly. And even before the budget was released, lawmakers from both parties forced the president to jettison his plan to raise revenue by taxing withdrawals from 529 college-savings plans.

That was one of several tax increases Mr. Obama had hoped would cover the cost of the community-college proposal. Republicans have also balked at other such increases, which would concentrate on businesses and millionaires. According to the budget, making community college free to an estimated nine million students would cost taxpayers $60.3-billion over 10 years.

A Rhetorical Shift
Over all the budget for the 2016 fiscal year, which begins in October, contains relatively few surprises for academe. Most of the new ideas were announced in advance and have already been thoroughly vetted by the news media and policy wonks.

Other proposals in the budget—such as expanding and remaking the Federal Perkins Loan Program and providing Pell bonuses to colleges that graduate large numbers of low- and moderate-income students—appeared in last year’s plan and went nowhere. Likewise the president's proposal to enlarge the First in the World innovation program and make available to all borrowers the Pay as You Earn program, the federal government's most generous income-based loan-repayment plan.

The only real surprise was a proposal to count military aid in the federal share of the 90/10 rule, which requires for-profit colleges to receive at least 10 percent of their revenue from nonfederal sources to be eligible to receive federal student aid. That idea has been embraced by some Democratic lawmakers, but it too is unlikely to advance in a Republican-controlled Congress.

The budget does contain some new details on the previously announced proposals, though. One stands out: Individuals in families with adjusted gross annual incomes of $200,000 or more would not qualify for free community college.

When Mr. Obama announced the plan last month, he said it would make community college free to students who attended at least half time, maintained a 2.5 grade-point average, and made steady progress toward a degree. He made no mention of income caps.

In the call with reporters on Monday, though, an administration official said the plan always included the income cap, even if that feature hadn't been highlighted. He argued that it would have little impact on the program’s cost, since few students attending community colleges come from families whose income sits above the cutoff.

Still, it’s a rhetorical shift from the president’s earlier claim that a two-year education would be free to all "responsible" students.

**Streamlining Student Aid**

In other areas, the budget would provide $2-billion to double the number of federally registered apprenticeships over five years, and $200-million to provide technical-training grants to community colleges. It would increase spending on TRIO, a federal program that aims to help needy and minority students prepare for college, by $20-million.

And it would simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, stripping more than two dozen questions from the form, including ones related to assets and untaxed income.

Of all the proposals in the education budget, that’s the one most likely to get Congressional buy-in. Sen. Lamar Alexander, Republican of Tennessee and chairman of the Senate education committee, has proposed shrinking the Fafsa to the size of a postcard, and many other lawmakers think the form is too complicated.
But even that idea will get some pushback. In this case, the opposition will come from financial-aid administrators, who have warned that oversimplification could compel states and institutions to create their own forms to assess need, ultimately complicating the process of applying for aid.

Obama Seeks Funding Boost

February 3, 2015

By Michael Stratford

WASHINGTON -- President Obama sent Congress a budget request Monday that would increase federal spending on many higher education programs and also aims to reap savings for the government by changing some student loan and repayment options.

The administration's budget features several big-ticket policy proposals that have been announced in recent weeks or previously proposed. Among them: free community college for some students, streamlining higher education tax breaks and a bonus grant program to reward colleges that graduate large numbers of low-income students.

Many such proposals in the budget are largely aspirational in a Republican-controlled Congress with little appetite for more federal spending. But some proposals in the budget, especially those surrounding simplifying and streamlining student aid programs, may well get some traction, as they dovetail with similar efforts by Senator Lamar Alexander, the Republican who chairs the Senate education committee.

The administration's budget provided new details on its $60.3 billion plan for tuition-free community college. The program, it said, would be available for students who maintain a 2.5 GPA and have adjusted gross incomes below $200,000. The matching grants in the program would be doled out to participating states based, in part, on enrollment levels and graduation and transfer rates.

The budget again seeks billions of dollars over the next decade for a program that would reward colleges with bonus grants for graduating large numbers of Pell Grant recipients, an initiative that has been included in past budget proposals but ignored by Congress. And it also calls for $200 million for
new innovation grants to colleges as part of the administration’s First in the World program. That Education Department doled out $75 million in grants last fiscal year, but Congress cut the program to $60 million for the current year.

**Changes to Pell Grants**

The budget calls for an increase in spending on Pell Grants that would allow the maximum award to increase to $5,915 for the 2016-17 academic year. The maximum grant for the upcoming year is $5,775.

The administration also wants to see several changes to Pell Grants, including more stringent requirements on the academic progress of recipients as well as limits on Pell money that goes to students who repeatedly enroll in programs without earning any academic credits.

A department official said in an e-mail that such an academic progress policy for Pell Grants "could, for example, require students to complete and pass an increasing percentage of their total course load as they progress in their academic program."

It also called on Congress to fully expand the Pell Grant program to students without a high school diploma through the “ability to benefit” program. Earlier this year, Congress restored only part of the funding for that pathway.

**Changes to Income-Based Repayment and Perkins Loans**

The administration also wants Congress to streamline and scale back some of the benefits associated with federal income-based repayment programs. The changes would result in $14.6 billion in savings over the next 10 years that the administration is proposing be redirected to the Pell Grant program.

The Education Department has previously backed such reforms to income-based repayment, and the proposal is similar to a bipartisan effort in the Senate to streamline loan repayment options.

Similarly, the administration is calling for an overhaul to the Perkins Loan Program that would yield $7.1 billion in cost savings that it wants to use for Pell Grants. The Perkins proposal calls for the government, not colleges, to disburse loans directly to students, and it would tie colleges’ eligibility for the program to certain student outcome metrics. A version of this program was first proposed by the administration in 2010.

Other campus-based aid programs, like Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and Federal Work Study, would see funding at the same level as this year under the administration’s proposal.

**FAFSA Simplification**

The administration also put forward details on its proposal to reduce the number of questions on the federal student aid application by 30 questions, out of the current 108 questions. The plan would eliminate questions about savings, assets, untaxed income, investments and net worth. Because that would reduce some students’ Pell eligibility, the budget calls for reducing the expected family contribution threshold for Pell by $600.
A bipartisan group of lawmakers, led by Senator Alexander, has proposed reducing the FAFSA application to a two-question document.

An Education Department official said Monday that the department had administratively simplified the form as much as it possibly can and that additional changes to the form need Congressional approval.

**No New Funding for Ratings**

After unsuccessfully requesting $10 million last year to develop its college ratings system, the Obama administration has scaled back that funding request to zero for the upcoming fiscal year.

The ratings system will move ahead in the coming months, officials said, but it will be funded out of existing money in the department’s budget. Some members of Congress, including Senator Alexander, have said they want to block the administration from using any federal funds to carry out the ratings system.

“It doesn’t cost a huge amount to do ratings,” a department official who declined to be identified told reporters Monday. The official added that only “a couple of our staffers” were working on the ratings project and that it would not require any new full-time equivalent staff positions to complete.

**Tightening Rules on For-Profits**

The Obama administration is also, for the first time, asking Congress to limit the federal money that flows to for-profit colleges. The budget proposes including federal educational benefits for service members and veterans as part of the 90 percent cap on the share of for-profit colleges’ revenue that comes from federal taxpayers. The cap currently includes only student loans and Pell Grants.

Critics of the for-profit education industry have said that the current law gives colleges a strong financial incentive to enroll veterans and leads to aggressive recruiting tactics. A Department of Education analysis last year showed that more than 100 for-profit colleges would fail the so-called 90/10 rule if it were expanded to include veterans’ benefits.

Some Senate Democrats have repeatedly sought similar changes to the 90/10 rule in recent years, but those bills have not gone far amid Republican opposition. The proposal stands an even slimmer chance now that Republicans control the Senate.

**More Money to Fight Campus Sexual Assault**

The Obama administration is also asking Congress to fund a 31 percent increase in the budget of its Office for Civil Rights, to deal, in part, with more federal investigations of colleges accused of mishandling sexual assault cases.

An influx of complex and high-profile complaints relating to campus sexual assault over the past several years has stretched thin federal civil rights investigators, who are now taking longer to resolve those cases, the department said. The average time it took the department to close a Title IX investigation relating to sexual violence increased from 289 days to 325 days between the 2010 and 2014 fiscal years.
As of this week, the department has 98 open Title IX investigations relating to sexual violence at 95 colleges. Five of those cases were opened in 2011 or 2012, and 24 of them were opened in 2013. The remaining cases were opened within the last 13 months.

The department said it would use the additional funding to hire an additional 192 investigators and 8 support staff to handle complaints and conduct proactive investigations.

The proposal comes after Senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Claire McCaskill, both Democrats, questioned whether the department has enough resources to effectively combat campus sexual assaults.

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Replenishing Research

February 3, 2015

By Kaitlin Mulhere

**NO MU MENTION**

WASHINGTON -- Science and research advocates welcomed President Obama's 2016 budget proposal Monday, which would give the National Science Foundation a "vigorous, healthy budget," according to its director.

Overall, the president’s budget would increase federal spending on research and development by 5.5 percent across a series of agencies.

In announcing the proposed budget, staff of the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy highlighted how money for research would support biomedical science, advanced manufacturing and data collection for climate change.

The proposal -- and the president’s decision to ignore sequestration budget caps for discretionary spending -- drew largely positive reaction from higher education and research associations.

The fiscal year 2016 budget proposal includes a 5 percent increase for the National Science Foundation, up to $7.72 billion from an estimated $7.34 billion for the current fiscal year. Within that budget is a 4
percent increase in research funding and an 11 percent increase in the significantly smaller portion of NSF money that goes toward education.

The president’s budget would increase money for the National Institutes of Health as well. The NIH would receive $31.3 billion in total research and development, an increase of nearly $1 billion from fiscal year 2015 levels. About 90 percent of that increase would go toward individual research projects in the form of competitive grants, according to Jo Handelsman, associate director for science at the White House science office.

More than $650 million of the NIH budget would go toward research to combat antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and roughly $200 million of the budget would support a precision medicine initiative to improve disease treatment. Both are issues the administration is highlighting, along with $2.7 billion to support climate science and $2.4 billion for advanced manufacturing.

The Department of Agriculture would also see a boost in grant money under the proposal. Basic research funding there would increase 11 percent, including $550 million for competitive grants. About $450 million in grant money would be awarded through the Agriculture and Food Research Institute, and there would also be new money available for grants for land-grant universities, Handelsman said.

NSF Defends Its Projects, Peer Review

The National Science Foundation’s budget represents a quarter of the total federal budget for basic research. But in recent years, the foundation has come under scrutiny from the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. The committee’s chairman, Republican Rep. Lamar Smith from Texas, has questioned how the agency awards money and criticized some grant projects, especially those in the social sciences.

While comments Monday never explicitly broached the ongoing tension between some conservative lawmakers and the science foundation, NSF Director France Córdova defended the foundation's peer review process and selection of projects. Córdova called the NSF’s review process the "gold standard" and one that had been emulated around the world.

“The large number of Nobel prizes and other significant prizes that have gone to NSF grantees demonstrates that our processes have been able to identify the best ideas and the most innovative thinkers,” she said.

In her budget briefing, Córdova focused on $144 million that would go toward projects to better understand the brain, $75 million that would help the study of food, energy and water systems, and $58 million that would help improve resiliency to extreme weather events such as hurricanes. She also spoke about a $15 million effort to increase diversity in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

Of the foundation’s seven research areas, the largest amount of money is used for geosciences and for math and physical sciences. Both categories would receive roughly $1.37 billion. The fund for social,
behavioral and economic sciences is the smallest, but its $291 million proposal would be an increase of 7 percent -- the largest percentage growth of any category.

The NSF budget also would devote $135 million to undergraduate teaching in STEM and $400 million to support graduate research fellowships in STEM areas.

In 2014, the NSF awarded 11,000 grants. The foundation estimates that number would increase to 12,000 during fiscal year 2016. The funding rate, though, would remain steady at 23 percent, since the number of research proposals is also expected to increase.

Praise for the Plan

Initial reaction to the research and development budgets was mainly supportive. United for Medical Research, a coalition of universities and research groups, said it welcomed the proposal. Sequestration and inadequate funding over the past decade has hurt the NIH’s ability to make advances in the life sciences, the group said.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities called the proposal a “much-needed shot in the arm” to spur innovation.

“By ending sequestration, the president’s budget would enable growth in basic research and higher education programs, which together serve as the foundation for the long-term success of the nation,” the association said in a statement.

But both the APLU and the Association of American Universities criticized one part of the research proposal -- an 8 percent cut to basic research at the Department of Defense. The AAU, which represents 60 leading research universities, called the cut "inconceivable."

A White House official noted that the $2.1 billion request for defense basic research in fiscal year 2016 is an increase over the $2 billion that was requested last year; that level, too, would have represented a significant budget cut, which the higher ed groups also fought. Congress, however, chose to provide more than the request for fiscal year 2015, at $2.3 billion.

In other higher education-related agencies, the National Endowment for the Humanities would receive $147.9 million, a $1.9 million increase over current funding.