Retreat sought answers for low morale, distrust among University of Missouri engineering faculty

By Rudi Keller

Tuesday, June 7, 2016 at 2:00 pm

To combat low morale and “historical distrust of the administration” among faculty at the University of Missouri College of Engineering, more than two dozen senior administrators from the school and the campus spent four days last week at a retreat in a St. Louis hotel.

At a cost of $54,000 plus expenses for Huron Consulting Group and three nights at the Moonrise Hotel, the retreat will result in a strategic plan with priorities and implementation goals tied to specific dates and guidelines, Dean Elizabeth Loboa said. The retreat was held from Tuesday through Friday and funded by donations from the Dean’s Engineering Advisory Council, Loboa said, with no financing coming from the college’s regular budget.

“It was very intense,” Loboa said. “We’re pretty exhausted, but we’re excited about where we are going.”

Loboa took over as dean on Oct. 15. She met with each faculty member individually and held group sessions for the college’s staff, she said.

Those conversations, along with an efficiency and efficacy analysis of the college and internal audits, looked at operations of the college, she said.

The first question she asked every faculty member was to identify the college’s biggest challenge, Loboa said.

“The highest response rate could be linked to college culture and morale,” she said. “The perception I got from a lot of faculty was there was not as much openness, transparency and collaboration as there could be in this college.”

The retreat included Loboa; the engineering college’s 11 chairpeople; and campus officials Provost Garnett Stokes, Chief Operating Officer Gary Ward, Vice Chancellor for Advancement Tom Hiles and Vice Chancellor for Research Mark McIntosh. Loboa also invited School of
Medicine Dean Patrick Delafontaine, and attendees heard from visitors Dave Munson, dean of engineering at the University of Michigan, and Kathy Banks, dean of engineering at Texas A&M.

It will be difficult to take the retreat seriously since no rank-and-file faculty members participated, Sudarshan Loyalka, professor of nuclear engineering, wrote in an email. Holding the retreat in Columbia using university facilities would have saved money and allowed for faculty participation, he wrote.

“No faculty at large were invited to this planning, and no documents that might have been distributed have been shared with them,” Loyalka wrote. “Eventually, there will be more of an appearance of shared governance than a reality.”

University leaders have ordered 5 percent cuts to all departments to help close a budget shortfall that is expected to be more than $46 million. The shortfall is largely because of a decline in student enrollment, with about 2,600 fewer students set to attend the Columbia campus this fall than last year.

Huron’s consultants framed the discussions of the retreat with sessions on why the college needed to change and on problems that create dysfunction within a team. Holding the retreat in St. Louis allowed participants to focus on the issues without distractions, Loboa said.

Omitting regular faculty did not mean there was no faculty input, Loboa said, as she provided specific data to Huron about faculty opinions gathered during her discussions.

“The challenge I have is going beyond that,” she said. “Who do you include without making others feel they are being excluded and isolated in some way?”

Loboa said the priorities and implementation are intended to address some of the biggest problems identified by faculty: the lack of a strategic plan and ineffective leadership.

“This is critical to all the next steps that this college takes,” she said. “I do not know when or if a strategic plan has been done for this college.”

Audit finds weak oversight led to embezzlement from University of Missouri

By Rudi Keller
Poor purchasing oversight in Columbia and a superintendent indifferent to mounting deficits allowed a University of Missouri employee to embezzle more than $740,000 over 15 years while working as an office assistant at the Southwest Research Center in Mount Vernon, an internal MU audit found.

Carla Rathmann, 54, of Mount Vernon, pleaded guilty Monday to mail fraud and credit-card fraud in federal court in Springfield and agreed to repay $716,665. The internal MU audit found Rathmann had submitted $573,048 in false invoices, made $159,321 in improper purchases on her university-issued credit card and withdrew $11,475 from a bank account that should have been closed years ago.

The fake purchases resulted in payments to four companies created by Rathmann and her husband, Tom Rathmann, and in one year represented 34 percent of all nonpayroll spending at the research center. Because of ongoing deficits, resulting in large part from Rathmann’s activities, the center closed its dairy operation in 2015.

Tom Rathmann has not been charged with a crime in state or federal court.

The university is leaving decisions on charges to law enforcement, spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said Tuesday. Federal prosecutors can’t comment on Tom Rathmann’s case unless charges are filed, said Don Ledford, spokesman for the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Missouri.

The theft is one of the largest embezzlements in MU history. In 1994, administrative assistant Christy Tutin admitted stealing more than $650,000 over a four-year period, thefts that went undetected until she confessed.

Rathmann first took a job at the research center, operated by the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, in 2000 and began making improper credit-card purchases in 2001. She and her husband began creating fictitious companies in 2005 to receive payments for falsified invoices.

From fiscal 2008 to fiscal 2014, Rathmann diverted $59,000 to $123,000 annually through her various schemes, the audit showed.

The audit portrayed Richard Crawford, superintendent of the center from 2001 to 2011, as indifferent to mounting deficits, blaming them on difficult-to-control personnel costs. In 2011, co-workers questioned Rathmann’s work hours, but the superintendent dismissed it, and an internal university investigation was unable to substantiate the charges that she only worked 15 to 20 hours a week.

Under that superintendent, who was not named in the audit, “it is highly probable managerial reviews of fiscal activity were not occurring or not occurring effectively; otherwise, the fiscal improprieties may have been detected.”
Two interim superintendents held the post from 2011 to 2014, when David Cope was named to run the research center. Soon after his arrival, “he became suspicious of Ms. Rathmann’s financial activities for various reasons, including her unwillingness to share financial information with him,” the audit said.

Rathmann was placed on administrative leave Sept. 16. The next day, an initial review reported a loss of $5,019 for credit-card purchases, and Rathmann was terminated at the end of the month.

MU police and the Missouri State Highway Patrol joined the investigation, and by October investigators identified $42,845 in credit-card losses. In December, Cope realized that costs for propane had dropped dramatically in Rathmann’s absence. That triggered additional investigations by the highway patrol, the UM Office of General Counsel, internal auditing and the FBI.

In addition to the embezzlement, the audit found that Rathmann falsified hours for her husband in 2006 and authorized payments for unearned compensatory time when he left the university’s employment in 2006.

The federal charges were filed because Rathmann used the mail and credit cards to defraud the university, Ledford said.

“Her fraud scheme involved mailing checks, sending checks through the mail that were part of the fraud scheme to her shell companies,” Ledford said.

The university expects to recover about $650,000 of the loss from insurance, a news release said. Rathmann faces up to 30 years in federal prison when sentenced.
MOUNT VERNON, Mo. — A Mount Vernon woman pleaded guilty in federal court Monday to embezzling more than $716,000 from the University of Missouri’s Southwest Research Center over a nine-year period.

Carla Rathmann, 54, waived her right to a grand jury and pleaded guilty before U.S. Magistrate Judge David Rush to one count of mail fraud and one count of credit card fraud.

According to a statement from the U.S. Attorney’s office, Rathmann admitted that she embezzled a total of $716,665, primarily by submitting fake and fraudulent invoices and bills to the university, but also by illegally using a university credit card for personal expenses.

“The University of Missouri detected the embezzlement and worked closely with law enforcement to investigate,” Tammy Dickinson, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, said in a statement. “The university’s cooperation was instrumental in determining the full scope of the fraud scheme.”

Rathmann was hired as an administrative officer at the Southwest Research Center, near Mount Vernon, in January 2000. Her responsibilities included receiving bills, paying bills, various accounting duties, payroll and more. She was fired in 2015 after officials learned that she had used her university credit card to pay for personal expenses.

According to the statement, in 2005 Rathmann created and registered three shell companies with the Missouri Secretary of State’s Office. Rathmann admitted that these companies — R&R, R&R Argi and Garrett Farm and Oil — did not produce a single product or provide a service of any type. Either Rathmann or her husband were the owners and registered agents for these companies.

"From Jan. 24, 2005, to June 18, 2014, Rathmann issued bills or invoices in the names of these shell companies to the University of Missouri for products or services ostensibly
provided to the Southwest Research Center. In reality, none of these companies provided a single item or a service to the Southwest Research Center. The invoices or bills submitted by Rathmann to the University of Missouri for payment were entirely false and fraudulent.

"On numerous occasions, Rathmann, in her capacity as an administrative employee for the University of Missouri at the Southwest Research Center, approved the fraudulent invoices and bills. After she approved the payments, the University of Missouri wrote checks to Rathmann's fictitious companies, which were deposited into her bank account."

According to the statement, the University of Missouri paid Rathmann $570,521 for the products and services that were never delivered or provided.

Rathmann also used the university credit card to make unauthorized personal purchases, including her dog's surgery, remodeling her home, dental expenses, propane for her home, gas for her vehicle and herbicide for her home.

The first unauthorized use of the credit card occurred on Feb. 19, 2002; the last on Aug. 20, 2015. In between these purchases were numerous other personal purchases she made using the credit card that totaled approximately $146,144.

By pleading guilty, Rathmann agreed to forfeit to the government a $716,665 money judgment, which represents the proceeds derived from the fraud scheme.

Sentencing plans

Under federal statutes, Carla Rathmann is subject to a sentence of up to 30 years in federal prison without parole. A sentencing hearing will be scheduled after the completion of a pre-sentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.
MU summer enrollment hits record high

Overall, summer enrollment is up to 13,697 students

The university is still expecting a big drop though in its fall enrollment

BY MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS
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Good news rolled in for the University of Missouri with a report Tuesday that its summer session opened this week with enrollment at an all-time high.

The university said 13,697 students enrolled for summer classes, up 2.2 percent from last year’s total of 13,396.

The record summer enrollment follows a report in March that the university expected freshmen enrollment to drop for fall 2016. The university expects about 1,500 fewer freshmen on the Columbia campus in the fall.

MU officials have attributed that drop to increased competition from other colleges and universities, a decrease in the number of high school graduates in the region and, to some degree, the fallout from November’s protests, led by a predominately black student group demanding inclusion, equity and an end to systemic oppression on the Columbia campus.

The racially charged protest, which generated national attention, led to a student hunger strike, the football team’s threatened boycott of a game and the resignation of University of Missouri System president and the chancellor of the Columbia campus.

On Tuesday, though, Kim Humphrey, interim vice provost for enrollment management, said in a news release that the university was “very pleased to see that students continue to recognize the educational opportunities available to them at Mizzou.”
“Our summer enrollment continues to grow at a healthy rate. Our mission to educate the future leaders of the state and nation continues.”

This summer’s total enrollment included an increase in undergraduate enrollment and students participating in online classes.

MU summer enrollment reaches all time high

COLUMBIA – MU’s summer school reached a record for enrollment, despite the controversy surrounding the university from the past year, according to MU spokesperson Christian Basi.

“These numbers are very encouraging for this summer,” he said.

Basi said he is optimistic about MU’s numbers, despite a steep drop in enrollment for next fall.

The summer numbers are up 301 students to a total of 13,396. Basi said the students enrolled in summer classes can be divided into two categories: returning students and new students trying to get ahead.

Basi said the category of returning students is a lot larger, reflecting MU’s ability to retain students and showing that many current students were not deterred by the events at MU last year.

“It indicates that our students are returning. That they’re continuing their education here at Mizzou, and that they believe the campus is safe,” he said.

Dartrez Muex, a sophomore at MU, said his decision to take summer classes and stay at MU was not affected by last year’s incidents.
“Wherever you go, you’re going to face challenges,” he said. “I’d like to finish what I started here.”

Basi said MU is looking forward past next fall to recruiting for fall 2017. He said, when students have a chance to visit MU’s campus, they’ll be more likely to decide for themselves to attend.

Record-high summer enrollment numbers at Mizzou

COLUMBIA, Mo. - The University of Missouri reported record-high summer enrollment numbers Tuesday, despite an expected decline in fall enrollment. Summer session opened over the weekend, and the school is reporting a 2.2% increase from 13,396 students last year to 13,697 this year.

Interim Vice Provost for enrollment management Kim Humphrey said, "We're very pleased to see that students continue to recognize the educational opportunities available to them at Mizzou. Our summer enrollment continues to grow at a healthy rate. Our mission to educate the future leaders of the state and nation continues."

Undergraduate enrollment was also up 4.7% or 413 students from last year.

Mizzou Online also saw an increase this year of 13.25%, putting enrollment in the program at 8,112. That accounts for on campus and distance learning students.

Kim Siegenthaler, the Director of Mizzou Online said, "Mizzou continues to expand our online offerings to help our campus students take classes that might not fit into their regular schedules, simultaneously providing high-quality instruction to distance students who know that a Mizzou education will provide them with the best skills for their chosen areas."
MU touts record summer enrollment

Tuesday, June 7, 2016 at 10:54 am

The University of Missouri opened summer classes this week with what officials said is MU’s highest summer enrollment.

Summer enrollment is up 2.2 percent, with 13,697 students enrolled this summer compared to 13,396 last year, according to a news release. Summer undergraduate enrollment was up 4.7 percent, and online enrollment was up 13.25 percent, the release said.

MU officials have projected an enrollment decline of about 2,600 expected this fall, citing numerous factors including demographics and the fallout from unrest on campus last fall.

Record Summer Enrollment at MU

Watch the story: http://mms.tveys.com/PlaybackPortal.aspx?SavedEditID=bb7b386d-1606-4e76-acae-249e1f36df47
Students, parent react to gun shot on MU campus

COLUMBIA - People have mixed reactions on the safety on MU campus after a man shot himself in the leg on campus Tuesday.

Leslie Cooney, a sophomore biochemistry student in MU, said she found out what happened from the MU alert system, but she hoped the message could be more specific.

"I'm concerned because I work on campus now, but I lived on campus from my freshman year. But I've never felt unsafe. But it's always good to know where exactly on campus it is so you don't go to that location," Cooney said.

The initial MU Alert email stated, "MUPD is investigating shots fired. See the MU Alert webpage for updated information as it is confirmed. Do not call MUPD unless there is an emergency."

Gunvant Patil is a post-doctoral research assistant in the division of plant and sciences, and he also found out about the incident from MU alert.

"I received the email as well as text message, but didn't get the time to read that message. I'm not exactly sure about what exactly happened," Patil said.

He said the MU campus is quite safe in general.

Tuesday also marked the first day of the Summer Welcome program on MU campus. Many future students and parents came to the campus.

Since the students haven't registered yet, many of them didn't receive the MU alert.

A woman, whose daughter will be attending MU this fall, said she was confused.
"I always thought this would be a relatively safe place for her, but now my question is what does a gun doing on campus period. Why would you need a gun especially on summer time?" she said.

MU police said officers found Michael Stout with a gunshot wound. Maj. Brian Weimer said Stout came to campus to demonstrate a smoothie machine, and while he was in his car, showed his gun to a friend and accidentally fired a round into his left leg.

MU Alert sent out a message about the shots fired at 3:30 p.m.

Police: person accidentally shot on MU campus

COLUMBIA, Mo. - Campus officers confirmed a man shot himself Tuesday afternoon at the University of Missouri. The victim, Michael Stout, is a vendor who was demonstrating how to use a smoothie machine. Police believe he was showing his friend a gun in his vehicle when it accidentally went off, hitting Stout in his left leg.

Officials say it happened around 3:32 p.m. near the loading dock of Plaza 900, a dining hall at 900 Virginia Ave., near College and Rollins.

MU officers sent an alert telling people to avoid calling the department unless there was an emergency. An all-clear message was issued by 3:39 p.m.

Stout went to University Hospital for treatment, but as of Tuesday night he is no longer an active patient. He is not a current Mizzou employee or student.

MUPD say that Stout did violate MU's policies, however since there is no law- they didn't arrest him, and will not be pressing charges.

MUPD told ABC 17 that any charges in a situation like today would all depend on the prosecuting attorney. MU currently does not allow any firearms on campus grounds, unless in the line of duty.

Under current Missouri law, a concealed carry permit does not allow anyone to carry concealed weapons into any higher education institution without the consent of the institution or school leader.
SB 731 was heard at a senate committee, that bill would remove the current ban on carry concealed weapons in higher education institutions. The bill never came up on a vote in the senate floor.

Vendor shoots self in leg on University of Missouri campus, prompts alert

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) - A vendor who was on the University of Missouri campus to demonstrate a smoothie machine accidentally shot himself in the leg and prompted a campus-wide alert of shots fired.

University police Maj. Brian Weimer says officers responded at 3:32 p.m. Tuesday to a loading dock near a dining hall where Michael Stout was suffering from a gunshot wound.

Weimer says Stout was in his vehicle when he showed his firearm to a friend and accidentally fired a round into his own leg.

Stout is not a university employee or a student. He was transported to University Hospital for medical attention.

The university sent out an all-clear at 3:39 p.m.
UPDATED: Man accidentally shoots self outside MU dining hall

MARILYN HAIGH, 14 hrs ago

COLUMBIA — A gun was accidentally fired near the loading dock of dining hall Plaza 900 Tuesday afternoon, according to an MU Alert.

Michael Stout, a vendor visiting campus to "demonstrate a smoothie machine," was showing a gun to a friend in his vehicle, and accidentally shot himself once in the leg, according to a MU Police news release.

Stout was taken to University Hospital, where he was treated and released Tuesday evening. He is not a university employee or student.

At 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, MU Alert tweeted that shots were fired. At 3:38 p.m., another tweet said the situation was clear.

Man shoots himself while showing off gun on MU campus

COLUMBIA - A man shot himself in the leg on MU's campus Tuesday while showing off a gun.
MU police said officers found Michael Stout with a gunshot wound after a shots fired report.

Maj. Brian Weimer said Stout came to campus to demonstrate a smoothie machine, and while he was in his car, showed his gun to a friend and accidentally fired a round into his left leg.

MU Alert sent out a shots fired message at 3:30 p.m.

Six minutes later, MU Alert posted more information on its website, revealing the incident happened when a gun accidentally discharged near the loading dock of Plaza 900, a dining hall on Virginia Avenue.

At 3:38 p.m., MU Alert sent out another update saying the situation had been stabilized and that the scene was clear.

Weimer said Stout, who is not a university employee or student, was transported to University Hospital for medical attention. University Hospital said Stout was scheduled to be released Tuesday night.

It is against MU policy to have a gun on university property, except during regularly approved programs or by "university agents or employees in the line of duty."

Vendor shoots self in leg outside MU dining hall

Tuesday, June 7, 2016 at 3:44 pm

A vendor accidentally shot himself in the leg outside a University of Missouri dining hall Tuesday afternoon, prompting a campus-wide alert.

Michael Stout shot his left leg while inside his vehicle at the Plaza 900 loading dock, 900 Virginia Ave., as he was showing a gun to a friend, MU Police Department Maj. Brian Weimer said in a news release. Stout is not a university employee or student, Weimer said. He was taken to University Hospital for treatment.

Campus officials activated the MU Alert system, which sends out texts, emails and tweets and posts online updates, at 3:32 p.m. warning of shots fired on campus, Weimer said. An all clear message followed at 3:39 p.m.
Missouri law does not allow the carrying of concealed weapons on college campuses. The law contains exceptions for firearms kept inside vehicles as long as those weapons are not removed from the vehicle or brandished while the vehicle is on the campus. It was not clear Tuesday night whether Stout was facing any charges.

One injured as weapon accidentally discharged outside of MU dining hall

COLUMBIA, Mo. — UPDATE:

A vendor who was on the University of Missouri campus to demonstrate a smoothie machine accidentally shot himself in the leg and prompted a campus-wide alert of shots fired.

University police Maj. Brian Weimer says officers responded at 3:32 p.m. Tuesday to a loading dock near a dining hall where Michael Stout was suffering from a gunshot wound.

Weimer says Stout was in his vehicle when he showed his firearm to a friend and accidentally fired a round into his own leg.

Stout is not a university employee or a student. He was transported to University Hospital for medical attention.

The university sent out an all-clear at 3:39 p.m.
Vendor shoots self in leg on Mizzou campus

Police are investigating a report of shots fired at the University of Missouri campus. A weapon was accidentally discharged in the loading dock of a campus dining hall known as Plaza 900. No others were hurt.

Vendor shoots self in leg on Mizzou campus

An alert went out to University of Missouri students about a "shots fired" call on campus. The situation is now clear -- as investigators figured out a gun was accidentally fired in the loading dock of plaza 900 -- a dining hall in Columbia.
Vendor Shoots Himself in the Leg on MU Campus


MU technology helps detect early signs of risks for seniors


COLUMBIA - **Two MU studies demonstrate using non-invasive and non-contact sensors with the ability to capture early signs of health changes or problems for aged people.** The bed sensors capture data on heart rate, respiration rate, and overall cardiac activity, and the radar monitors walking speed.

The project began installing sensor equipment into Tiger Place in Columbia in fall of 2005, and MU has a study going on now to test the technology in over a dozen senior houses in Missouri, including private homes in Columbia, Jefferson City, Fulton and Bonneville.

"We're seeing a lot of interest in this technology not just in Missouri, but on a national level, and really an international level as well. Because so many places are suffering with this changing demographic, where our society is becoming more trending towards an aging..."
population," Marjorie Skubic, professor of MU electrical and computer engineering and director of MU’s Center for Eldercare and Rehabilitation Technology, said.

The technology sends out health alerts to clinical staff like nurses and social workers, and clinical staff could determine if they need to intervene.

"If we can detect very early signs of illnesses and health change, people can get interventions that help solve these health problems when they are still small before they become big major health problems," Skubic said.

Skubic said her team found that those residents who have the sensors installed are able to stay in Tiger Place 1.7 years longer than the residents that do not have the sensor.

"It allows us to be less intrusive with our care and still provide great oversight and keep people safe," Eric Minturn, the executive director of Tiger Place, said.

The technology records what the user's normal routine is, and it will put up a red flag in the system if there's a change. The alert would go to the care providers via email.

Skubic said the other technologies out there require people to wear things and press buttons.

"If you are depending on a person to press the button, sometimes that isn't possible. There are plenty of instances of people that have these devices and simply don't wear them or they are not able to press the button if they were to fall," Skubic said.

Most of the funding for this project is from National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health, and the total funding is about $10 million.

Skubic said a company already licensed the technology to sustain the project and it is in the process of commercializing the technology by making it available to senior housing sites and hospitals.

"One of the other things that we would like to do is to test this out and scale up studies with other kinds of populations," Skubic said.

She said veterans, rural communities and large urban groups are potential target populations.

George Hage, a 93-year-old resident in Tiger Place, is in one of the earliest test groups using the technology.

"It was very comfortable, and those sensors didn't affect me. I know they are there, but that's it," Hage said.
Senate Bill Backs Year-Round Pell
No MU Mention

A bipartisan effort to help low-income students and reinvest in biomedical research took a major step Tuesday as the U.S. Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations subcommittee approved a funding bill that would restore year-round Pell Grant eligibility and significantly increase funds for the National Institutes of Health.

The $161.9 billion bill was the Senate's first bipartisan bill to fund labor, health and education programs in seven years. It will be considered by the full Senate Appropriations Committee Thursday, although it is a long way from becoming law. "While we grapple with college affordability, the yearlong Pell Grant will go a long way to helping many of our students get through school faster," said Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland, a Democrat, during the subcommittee's markup of the bill, adding that the legislators heard from all types of four-year universities and community colleges that there was a need to restore summer Pell Grants.

But there were cuts and sacrifices made in order to reach this compromise, she said. Despite restoring Pell Grant eligibility, as well as increasing the maximum grant award from $5,815 to $5,935, the legislation is funding the Education Department at $67.8 billion -- $220 million less than last year. However, TRIO, GEAR Up and Federal Work-Study programs will continue to receive the same funding as last year. These programs help disadvantaged students enter and complete college. Adult Education State Grants and Career and Technical Education State Grants would maintain the same funding as last year. However, the Department of Labor's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act grant, which funds programs traditionally at community colleges, saw a decrease in funding of about $73,000.

The agreement also called for moving $1.2 billion out of the Pell Grant program to fund other programs, including the increases in NIH funding, and Title I, which benefits low-income K-12 school districts. Senator Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, a Democrat, said the move was setting a dangerous precedent. She said it was "troubling given the fact that students are facing massive and crushing debt to maintain higher education." The Pell Grant program has about a $7.8 billion surplus, and some observers were expecting deeper cuts to the program.
"It's been our philosophy to not rob one program and give it to another, and this precedent is not a healthy one that we support," said Cyndy Littlefield, vice president for federal relations for the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. "So that's problematic, but we have an increase in Pell, so that's good, and we have the inclusion of year-round Pell, so that's good."

Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, the Republican who leads the Senate education committee, called the restoration of Pell Grant eligibility the "most important news in higher education out of the Congress this year." The move is expected to help about one million students to continue their education in the summer.

"Simplifying the student aid form will go into effect next year. Those two steps -- year-round Pell and simplifying student aid -- is good news for America's students," he said. "The only caution I would suggest is that this subcommittee ... keep a close eye on the year-round Pell to make sure we can continue to do it."

David Baime, senior vice president of government relations and policy analysis for the American Association of Community Colleges, said the association shares Alexander's concerns about the ongoing fiscal health of the program. But he said the circumstances that helped drive the decision to cut year-round Pell in 2011 are different now. There are fewer students using Pell today, he said, so the program's exploding costs after the recession have eased.

The bill is also providing a $2 billion increase for the NIH, including for research efforts related to cancer and Alzheimer's. The legislation will also help to combat the country's growing opioid abuse epidemic.

"Congress is still in the process of rebuilding the nation's critical biomedical research investment after years of flat funding," said Mary Sue Coleman, president of the Association of American Universities. "A steady upward funding path is the best way for researchers to take advantage of ever-growing scientific opportunities for finding cures and other treatments."