

TICUA Policy Update

March 6, 2015

SARA Legislation Moves in the House

On Tuesday the House Education Administration and Planning Subcommittee unanimously passed the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement bill. If ultimately successful, the bill will allow Tennessee to apply to become a member of NC-SARA which promises to significantly reduce the administrative burden and cost of offering online programs in other states. The bill will now move onto the full House Education Administration and Planning Committee. The Senate has referred its version to the Finance, Ways and Means Committee.

Two Firearms Bills Gain Traction

There are two firearms bills brought by the National Rifle Association that seem to be gaining support in both the House and Senate. The first bill deals with prohibiting local authorities from banning guns in parks and recreational areas. The other, and of greatest concern to TICUA, is SB1058/HB994 which allows for an employee to take civil action against an employer who “discharge(s) or takes adverse employment action” against an employee solely for transporting or storing a firearm in an employer parking lot. This would require a change in most campus faculty and staff policy handbooks.

Education Committees Pass TSAA Improvement

The Senate Education and House Education Administration and Planning Committees both passed the Governor’s recommended \$10 million improvement to the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA), the state’s only need-based student aid program. The budgets will now go to both chambers Finance, Ways, and Means Committee for review.

Tennessee Public Institutions Anticipate Low Tuition Increases

During this week’s budget hearings, UT President Joe Dipietro indicated that the public higher education tuition increases will remain below 4% for the foreseeable future. At UT they have instituted the 3-3-0 planning model – 3% tuition increases; 3% cap on salary increases; and 0 or no additional state appropriations. Dr. Dipietro indicated that this would put the University of Tennessee system \$154 million short in annual revenue within a decade. He described this as an “unsustainable model,” therefore they are implementing a strategic planning process that can create new ways of thinking about cost, efficiencies, and revenue.

Lottery Revenues Strong

Lottery Corporation president Rebecca Hargrove testified before the House Education Administration and Planning Subcommittee that the lottery revenues are ticking upward. She anticipates that the revenues available for the scholarship program may be up as much as 2.5%. This should provide ample funds to support all existing Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship programs in 2015-2016.

Possible New International Student Reporting

Bill (SB1039/HB670) has been filed that would require campuses to report to the Tennessee Department of Safety the number of M1 and F1 visa holders on campus. The sponsors include Senator Bill Ketron and Representative Judd Matheny. If passed, the bill would create two reporting cycles per enrollment term. They would like to simply know the number of visa holders who begin a term and then how many complete that same term. The bill arose from a frustration in getting the same information from INS at the federal level. The sponsors decided to go directly to the campuses to obtain the data.

TICUA has expressed concern about adding unnecessary reporting demands on the campuses since they already report robust data to the federal government through SEVIS. It's not completely clear what use the data will have to the Tennessee Department of Safety since they will only be receiving aggregate numbers. It's uncertain what would happen if there is a difference between the enrollment/completion numbers reported during any given enrollment period. TICUA is continuing conversations with the sponsors.