

TICUA Policy Update

February 9, 2017

Governor Haslam and Adult Reconnect

During Governor Bill Haslam's State of the State address he announced an expansion of his free community college program. Through the Drive to 55's Adult Reconnect program, he announced that free community college will now be available for all Tennesseans. Previously, free community college was only offered through the Tennessee Promise which required the recipients to be recent high school graduates.

The Reconnect scholarship is restricted to students who are declared independent by way of the FAFSA, have not received a previous degree, and be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours. The scholarship is available to all TCAT's, community colleges, and four year colleges offering Associate degrees. It is anticipated that 24,000 students will be taking advantage of the program which begins in the fall of 2018 at a cost of nearly \$10 million. Currently enrolled students will be eligible upon the inception of the program. As with Tennessee Promise, the Reconnect program is a last-dollar scholarship; the Pell Grant and other state aid must be counted prior to Reconnect dollars being received. The scholarship amount for the four year institutions is capped at the average community college tuition and required fees rate.

The original concept did not include four year colleges and universities. The Governor's office called TICUA prior to the State of the State address about the program and TICUA addressed the need for portability to eligible four year campuses. As well, House Education Chairman Harry Brooks objected to not including TICUA members during a briefing about the program from the Governor. Haslam quickly agreed to amend the program to include eligible four year campuses.

More information on Reconnect: <https://www.tn.gov/nexttennessee/topic/nt-one-pagertennessee-reconnect>

STRONG Act

Governor Haslam announced a new initiative for National Guard Reservists entitled the STRONG Act. This scholarship program allows a member of any National Guard branch to receive free tuition at a public university or a scholarship equivalent to average of the public university tuition at a TICUA member institution.

This four-year pilot program requires the Reservist to be in good standing with the National Guard, not have previously received a BA or BS degree, and maintain a 2.0 GPA. The scholarship is a reimbursement program and pays for hours completed each semester. As well, the program is capped at 120 credit hours.

More information on the STRONG Act: <http://www.tn.gov/nexttennessee/topic/nt-one-pager-tennessee-strong-act>

TSAA Improvement

During his State of the State address, Governor Haslam released his proposed budget for FY2018. The budget includes a \$10 million improvement to the Tennessee Student Assistance Award (TSAA), the state's only purely need-based student aid program. This grant serves students with family incomes around \$30,000 and less. Increasingly, the grant is only serving students who receive a zero Estimated Family Contribution on the FAFSA. Under Haslam's leadership, the TSAA has nearly doubled in funding during his tenure as Governor. It is estimated that nearly 7,400 TICUA students will receive about \$30 million for the current academic year through this critical program. If the proposed increase is approved by the General Assembly, more TICUA students will be served through about a \$3.5 million share of the improvement.

D.C. Visits

Numerous TICUA presidents made visits to the offices of Tennessee's delegates to Congress during the recent NAICU Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The visits were capped off by the first ever Congressional Independent College Caucus reception in the Kennedy Caucus Room. The topics covered included the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, student aid funding, tax reform, accreditation, immigration, and the higher education agenda of President Donald Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. TICUA will brief the presidents on the visits at the upcoming TICUA Annual Meeting in Nashville on February 21st and 22nd.

TICUA 61st Annual Meeting February 21 and 22

"Capitol Conversations: Charting the Future" is the theme of the upcoming TICUA 61st Annual Meeting to be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, February 21 and 22, 2017. This year's policy focus will include sessions with Education Chairs Senator Dolores Gresham and Representative Harry Brooks, Finance Chairs Senator Bo Watson and Representative Charles Sargent, House Speaker Beth Harwell, and Lt. Governor Randy McNally, Governor Bill Haslam, and Bob Moran of US Senator Lamar Alexander's office. The TICUA Legislative Reception will conclude the events on the 21st. The morning of the 22nd will include the President's Open Forum Breakfast and a conversation with TNDOE Commission Candice McQueen and TN State Board of Education Executive Director Sarah Heyburn. Once again, this year's events will be held in the conference facilities of Waller, Lansden, Dortch & Davis in the Nashville City Center.

Register today by going to http://www.ticua.org/meetings_resources/annual_meeting