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Illinois Community College System

Illinois Community College Proposal to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission Monetary Award Program Task Force

Providing MAP funding to the community college sector separate from the other higher education sectors could rectify some problems that historically have resulted in a lower level of MAP grants being awarded to community college students than those from other sectors. The MAP grant awards have never reflected the high rate of enrollment at Illinois community colleges or the great need by many students enrolled in this system. These changes could also help the State of Illinois reach its goal of a greater credentialed work force by 2025.

In the reference materials sent to MAP task force members, the Institute on Research for Higher Education prepared a report titled: *A Story of Decline: Performance and Policy in Illinois Higher Education*. Specifically, the report notes that:

- “...55% of Illinois’ workforce (ages 25-64) will need to hold at least an associate degree by 2020. To reach that goal, Illinois must increase its production of associate and bachelor’s degrees by 5.4% annually.
- Over the next two decades, Illinois’ Latino population is projected to increase dramatically. Given that Latinos in Illinois underperform in higher education, the growing Hispanic population presents a huge challenge in the State’s higher education system.
- The economic downturn has brought large cuts to higher education for several years in a row. For fiscal year 2011 alone, Illinois has a projected budget shortfall of \$13 billion, or 47% of the State’s general fund budget. And despite an increase in state income taxes that was approved in January 2011, Illinois’ fiscal challenges are unlikely to end soon.”

It is common knowledge that the fiscal challenges did not end and are not expected to recover soon. Community colleges are cost effective, and community colleges have the most racially diverse population in higher education. Low-income students and students in need of remediation generally enroll in community colleges in order to remain in their home communities and because of the support services provided by the community college. In addition, Illinois community colleges serve 79% of all Latino students, 70% of all African American students, and 66% of all minority students in public higher education.

Historically, the MAP grant process has discriminated against community college students. Though unintentional, the MAP criteria and timing favor applicants with certain advantages over those whose personal circumstances add barriers to academic success. It is time to rectify that educational injustice.

In order to move the state forward toward meeting the completion agenda that 60% of all working citizens between the ages of 25 and 64 have post-secondary credentials by 2025, and to make higher education more affordable to more students while minimizing the debt load for students, the Illinois Community College System proposes the following:

- MAP grants to community college students should be set aside, allowing the cut-off date to be lengthened for community college students.
- The allocation to community colleges should be increased to \$65 million annually. Assuming that the average MAP grant for a community college student is \$1,000, this increase will allow 20,000 more eligible students to begin post-secondary education and will open the door for more first generation students.
- The community college system could include a completion or performance component by using a portion of the funds to encourage certain populations, such as those close to completion, those showing high performance, or those choosing the most needed job skills.

By making these simple changes to the allocation of MAP funds for community college students, more students and a more diverse student population will be able to secure post-secondary credentials, increasing the return on investment for the state MAP dollars and assisting the State in reaching our completion goal by 2025.

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