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COLLEGE ADMISSIONS ARE STILL BEYOND THE REACH OF THE ECONOMICALLY UNDERPRIVILEGED

- SURAJIT SEN SHARMA

College education is still a dream for almost 20 million of the nation's working poor adults, according to a report released on July 7 by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP). IHEP reports that in 2005, working poor adults between the ages of 24 and 64 earned an average salary of \$19,000 per year compared to an average salary of \$56,000 for non-poor adults. Even with monetary aid, studying at a state university is beyond the means of most working poor adults. The average cost of tuition and fees at universities stands at about \$13,000, which is excessive for those with low incomes.

The government-funded report, "College Access for the Working Poor: Overcoming Burdens to Succeed in Higher Education," is built upon data from the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal sources.

IHEP's findings include the following:

- Heavy work and family responsibilities prevent working poor adults from attending college full-time even when they consider education their highest priority. In 2003-2004, only 37% of working poor adults enrolled full-time, while more than 50% of non-working or poor adults with less work enrolled in full-time courses.
- The financial aid that working poor adults receive is inadequate for college costs. According to statistics from the 2003-2004 academic year, working poor adults receiving financial aid had to

shell out \$4,000 in personal resources to continue their education over the year.

- Patterns of part-time enrollment favored by working poor adults reduce their chances of receiving financial aid. The average grant received by 54% of working poor adults in 2003-2004 was \$3,000; an average grant of \$3,500 was received by 67% of non-working poor adults.
- Part-time enrollment poses a barrier to completing and performing well in academic courses. It was observed that 50% of working poor adult students left college without completing their courses or receiving credentials.

Recommendations made in the report include, among others:

- Provide tax relief for working poor students
- Offer additional institutional support for working poor students
- Focus on supporting single parents who are working poor adult students
- Provide extra institutional support for first-generation working poor adult students

The report can be downloaded at:
www.ihep.org/Pubs/PDF/College_Access_for_the_Working_Poor_2007_Report.pdf

SUPPORT FOR DREAM ACT STRENGTHENS IN CALIFORNIA

- AMIT AGARWAL

Students from across California accompanied by immigrants' rights activists gathered at San Francisco's Civic Center to show their support for the DREAM Act. The students, who went on a week-long fast, came from such far-flung areas as

Orange County, Los Angeles County, the Central Valley, and San Jose.

The nation provides undocumented students access to public education at K-12 schools. After

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completing high school successfully, some wish to acquire college educations. However, when they apply for state or federal financial aid, authorities turn them away. Under current law, undocumented students admitted to colleges in the U.S. are denied financial aid for higher education. These students may include bright and talented individuals who have the potential to become lawyers, teachers, doctors, or other in-demand professionals. The passage of the DREAM Act would provide benefits to such students, who, although they were brought up in the U.S., do not have the benefits of citizenship. Many of these students were brought by their parents illegally into the United States as children.

If the DREAM Act becomes law, approximately 65,000 immigrants who graduate from high school each year will be eligible for legal residency. The eligibility requirements laid out by the act are as follows:

- The student must have entered the United States before turning 16.
- The student should have stayed in the country for at least five years prior to the date of enactment.
- The student needs to have graduated from a U.S. high school or obtained a GED.
- The student must demonstrate “good moral character.” (He or she cannot have a criminal record or a history of drug charges.)

Eligible students would be granted six-year temporary “conditional status,” which would allow them get driver’s licenses, attend college as in-state residents, and acquire Social Security numbers. To qualify for green cards, students must have either attended college or served in the military for at least two years during their six-year provisional terms.

NEWS IN BRIEF

HOUSE PASSES COLLEGE COST REDUCTION ACT

The College Cost Reduction Act has passed in the U.S. House of Representatives by a large majority (273 to 149). The bill cuts almost \$19 billion in subsidies to student loan providers and transfers the funds to Pell Grants and other federal student aid. Although most Republicans voted against the bill, 47 joined the Democrats in supporting it. Rep. Howard P. McKeon and a number of other Republicans said that the bill would hurt small lenders, driving them out of business. Author of the bill Rep. George Miller, supported by his fellow Democrats, said the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007 (H.R. 2669) was the most important piece of legislation in higher education funding since the G.I. Bill was passed in 1944.

SENIOR AIDES TO PRESIDENT RECOMMEND VETO OF H.R. 2669

According to a White House statement of administration policy (SAP), senior aides to the President have recommended that he veto H.R. 2669, the College Cost Reduction Act of 2007, if it is presented to him in its current form. The statement contends that the House student loan budget reconciliation bill “fails to target aid to the neediest students currently in college and creates new mandatory federal programs and policies that are poorly designed and would have significant long-term costs to the taxpayer.” The White House highlighted a number of problems with the bill. It said the bill does not allocate

enough Pell Grant funding and that the reduction of student loan interest rates, a costly proposal, would benefit students only after they leave school.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WARNS COLLEGES NOT TO LIMIT LENDER CHOICE

The U.S. Department of Education has sent letters to remind more than 900 higher education institutions not to limit their students’ choices of lenders. Jeff Baker, policy liaison at the Education Department’s federal student aid office, said that in the future, colleges could be fined or disallowed from participating in the FFELP if they do not adhere to the department’s student loan policies. Dated June 29, the letter is the first strong statement to college campuses by the Education Department relating to preferred lender lists.

INDIANA GOVERNOR APPOINTS MEMBERS TO STATE COLLEGE BOARDS

Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels has named a number of higher education leaders to boards of the state’s colleges and universities. The new members will replace those whose terms have expired. Indiana State University’s board will add Norman Lowery and Joyce Rogers as members. Ron Carpenter will be an alumni member, while Amy Huntsinger will be a student trustee. The governor appointed Kellie Conrad as student trustee at Ball State University. University

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of Southern Indiana also saw new appointments. Jeff Knight and Ted Ziemer have been named as board members, while Jaime Johnson has stepped in as a student trustee. Ian Barrett of Vincennes University will also serve his college as a student trustee.

NASSGAP REPORTS INCREASE IN STATE STUDENT AID

According to a report released by The National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP), state financial aid spending escalated by about 7% in 2005-2006 to

\$8.5 billion. However, taking into account inflation, student financial aid spending has actually slowed down. Funding for need-based grants has increased by 5% and now totals \$7 billion. Apart from grants, financial aid, including loans and work-study aid, witnessed a 15% rise. Nearly 65% of undergraduates in California, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas received need-based grants. The full report, which can be accessed at www.nassgap.org, named New York as the state that received maximum aid (\$937,079) in 2005-2006.