

COLLEGE ACCESS AND COMPLETION

To help our nation out-innovate, out-educate, and out-compete the rest of the world, President Obama set an ambitious new goal for America: by the end of the decade, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. This Administration's landmark investment in Pell Grants, the largest federal scholarship program, is the centerpiece of our proposal to help ensure that more Americans enroll in college and earn a degree. This year, the Administration is proposing tough choices to sustain the maximum \$5,550 Pell grant while responding to increased demand in the program.

The President's 2012 budget request and *Pell Grant Protection Act* would make key investments and enact reforms that will lead to better outcomes for students.

- **\$123 million for a “First in the World” competition.** To improve student outcomes, we need to spur the field to come up with innovative solutions to address the completion challenge and improve higher education productivity, build evidence of what works through rigorous evaluations, and scale up and disseminate those strategies that prove successful. This initiative, funded through FIPSE and modeled after the i3 program, would direct the highest level of funding to programs with the strongest support in evidence, but also provide significant support for innovative and promising programs that are willing to undergo rigorous evaluation. The first year of this competition would include priorities for projects that demonstrate the potential to (1) reduce the net price paid by students, improve learning outcomes, reduce time to degree, or reduce instructional costs and/or (2) improve college access or completion rates, including projects that focus on students with disabilities.
- **\$1.25 billion for College Completion Incentive Grants.** The Pell Grant Protection Act provides \$50 million in 2012 and \$1.25 billion over five years for a new College Completion Incentive Grants program that would encourage States to make systemic reforms in their higher education systems and would reward institutions that produce successful outcomes. Participating States would set goals for increasing the number of college completers and for closing gaps in achievement among vulnerable student populations, align high school graduation requirements with participating institutions' expectations for academic preparation, create stronger articulation agreements, ease student transfers, and match Federal funds or provide their own performance-based funding for institutions. Payments to institutions would be based upon demonstrated success.
- **\$150 million in funding for State access and completion initiatives.** The budget maintains mandatory funding for the College Access Challenge Grant program, which provides formula aid to States to bolster their access, persistence, and completion activities.
- **\$920 million for Federal TRIO Programs.** The request would provide a \$67 million increase in discretionary funding to support college preparation and completion activities for participants in the Federal TRIO programs, which provide supports for low-income and first-generation college students.
- **\$86 million for College Pathways and Accelerated Learning.** Part of our proposal for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, this program would help increase graduation rates and preparation for college matriculation and success by supporting college-level

and other accelerated courses and instruction in high poverty-schools. Funds could be used to support strategies like expanding the availability of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, implementing dual-enrollment programs that allow students to take college-level classes while in high school, and “early-college high schools” that allow students to earn a high school degree and an associate’s degree or 2 years of college credit simultaneously.

- **\$323 million for GEAR UP.** This budget maintains funding for States and partnerships to provide early college preparation and awareness activities to entire cohorts of low-income students. Over 756,000 students will continue to be served by the GEAR UP program, which features partnerships with local businesses and nonprofit organizations, and requires matching federal funds with local contributions to encourage program sustainability.