

October 5, 2001

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, Chair
Subcommittee on Twenty-first Century Competitiveness
U.S. House of Representatives
2242 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing on behalf on the Western Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (WASFAA), a professional organization of 1,125 student financial aid professionals from Alaska, Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, the Pacific Islands and Washington.

We urge your support of H.R. 1992, the Internet Equity and Education Act of 2001 which would amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to expand financial aid options for students in our region who participate in distance learning or Internet-based educational opportunities at the post-secondary level.

It has been proven that technology can be used successfully in education but the application of two present rules to distance education are out of date and must be revamped. Specifically H.R. 1992 will eliminate the "12-hour" rule, which bars federal aid to students enrolled in non-standard-term programs that offer fewer than 12 hours of on-campus instruction per week.

H.R. 1992 will also modify the "50-percent" rule which requires that academic programs consist of at least 50 percent on-campus instruction for enrolled students to qualify for federal aid. Both of these make students eligible for smaller amounts of financial aid or totally ineligible.

Some have argued that the bill would open federal aid programs to abuse by unscrupulous institutions offering little or no actual instruction to students but the bill includes increased oversight and gatekeeping. For example, institutions will be allowed to offer more than 50% of their classes by telecommunications if the institution already participates in the student loan programs and the institution's student loan default rate is less than 10 percent for the three most recent years. The waivers apply only to colleges in good standing and requires the college to notify the department so that students in such programs could be more closely monitored.

The number of students taking courses via the Internet are increasing and they need relief from outdated regulations now. Delaying action until the 2003 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act would mean a real-world delay of four or five years including time for new rules to be negotiated.

WASFAA, supports and urges quick House passage of H.R. 1992. Thank you for your assistance and support for education and student aid.

Sincerely,

Addalou Davis
President, WASFAA
Director of Financial Aid
McGeorge School of Law
3200 Fifth Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95817
1.916.739.7158
adavis@uop.edu

Tami Sato
Federal Issues Chair, WASFAA
Director of Financial Aid
Southern CA College of Optometry
2575 Yorba Linda Blvd.
Fullerton, CA 92831
1.714.449.7447
tsato@scco.edu

cc: John Boehner, Chair, House Education and Workforce Committee