



Issues Affecting Students at the University of South Carolina

2008 Annual Report

**Compiled by the members of the University of South
Carolina Student Congressional Advisory Board, 2007-2008**

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Student Congressional Advisory Board Mission Statement

The Student Congressional Advisory Board serves as the voice of USC students to the South Carolina Congressional Delegation. We express the needs and concerns of the student body to their Congressional representatives. The Board will gather information about specific issues pertaining to students and assist South Carolina's Congressional Delegation in finding a better solution for these concerns. We will:

- Address before federal legislators academic, financial, and social issues relevant to student development and achievement,
- Solicit input from institutional constituents such as students, faculty, administrators, and staff,
- Educate the campus community about impending federal higher education legislation and initiatives,
- And serve as an organization by which students can realize their potential for active involvement and influence on national politics.

As advocates, we believe that we can transform South Carolina and the university, bringing positive change to USC students and bettering their academic careers. By doing this, we can enhance their future, benefit our community, and leave a lasting heritage for USC students.

Message from CAB Chairman

Dear Readers,

As representatives of the 27,000 students at the University of South Carolina, the Congressional Advisory Board aims to lobby the United States Congress on important federal government higher education issues. It is our responsibility to inform our representatives to the United States Congress about University of South Carolina students' concerns regarding higher education.

We are not highly trained and specialized lobbyists, but every member of the Congressional Advisory Board cares deeply about the issues we have presented in the following pages. We offer reflection on issues and possible solutions to these problems. We are dedicated to our role of as an essential first step to productive change.

This report covers six topics that are important to USC students: the improvement of financial aid programs, healthcare for college students, campus safety, financial aid for students with a conviction, the institution of a civil service preparation program, and the environmental initiatives on campus. We ask that you carefully consider the issues and, most importantly, the solutions we have presented. This report is not aimed at assisting solely USC and its students, but it has the potential to improve the lives of all South Carolinians and college students nationally.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance on these issues. We thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns with you and look forward to working together to enact positive change for the future of America.

Best Regards,

Cason Brewer
Secretary of Government
And Community Relations

Executive Summary

Financial Aid

- Education revenue for universities has risen from 30% to 38%, which in turn has made tuition rise dramatically.
- The federal government should increase the maximum Pell Grant in according to the inflation rate of tuition for the lowest income students.
- Under current US tax code, any financial funds (including scholarships) received over \$3,500 is considered taxable income. The IRS should provide a tax deduction of \$5,000 for every full-time dependent college student.
- WIA/TAA reform should provide resources to allow students the opportunity to apply the aid to general associate degrees (arts and sciences) and funding for these programs should be expanded to include fields with a high demand for workers like education, nursing, science and mathematics.

Healthcare

- Research has shown that a student's academic achievement during their college years may have a significant correlation with their health, affordable health insurance and prescriptions.
- According to the American College Health Association, there are many students who do not have and cannot afford college health care plans or the extremely high prices of nationwide insurance premiums.
- Requiring a Hard Waiver policy would make health insurance more affordable.
- Exempting colleges, including the USC, from the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 would help alleviate college student's burden of high prescription costs.

Campus Safety

- A government-appointed panel studied the Virginia Tech Shootings and found one of the contributing factors to be confusion about FERPA and HIPAA regulations, two of our nation's key privacy laws.
- Allow colleges to internally share information about potentially dangerous students to prevent dangerous and fatal shootings.
- Prevent changes to the gun ban on campuses because allowing individuals to bring concealed weapons on college campuses would increase the likelihood of a fatal school shooting.

Financial Aid for Nonviolent Offenders

- Senator Dodd's S.2767 asks that the Higher Education Act be reformed to allow judges to have discretion over a convicted student's eligibility for federal financial aid.
- This legislation will keep eligible students from being denied federal financial aid due to confusion on FAFSA forms.
- Judges will have discretion over financial aid eligibility and will make his decision based on the evidence surrounding the conviction. The integrity of federal financial aid will be preserved, therefore.
- For these reasons, the Congressional Advisory Board asks for your support of S.2767.

Civil Service

- The United States Federal Government employs 1.8 million people making it the nation's largest employer. It has a job turnover rate in the hundreds of thousands per year.
- The United States Armed Forces provide scholarships and fellowships such as non-MEL, MEL-1 and post MEL scholarships.
- The United States Federal Government should create a scholarship program similar to those provided by the branches of the Armed Forces for individuals hoping to pursue a career in civil service.

USC Environmental Initiatives

- The University of South Carolina and other state universities are developing their own research facilities by teaming up with national businesses to conquer some the environmental problems facing transportation and energy usage today.
- The focus of green energy in the state of South Carolina is the Hydrogen Fuel Cell.
- Funding is necessary for these projects, and the H-Prize and High Education Sustainability Act are proposing federal funding to facilitate the development of better green energy production and recycling.

Financial Aid

Andrew Dorsey and Buddy Ballew

As a public institution, the University of South Carolina provides educational opportunities that benefit individual citizens and the state of South Carolina. For this reason, this valuable university education should be available and affordable for all academically prepared applicants. There are three reforms to the current federal financial aid system that will work to achieve this goal: capping tuition costs through increased federal financial aid, granting tax exemptions to students, and expanding aid programs for students seeking a two year degree.

Increasing Tuition Costs

The cost of tuition is rising annually. From the mid 1980s to 2005, tuition jumped fifteen percent. Across the nation, only nine states increased appropriations for education, while seven states, including South Carolina, experienced deep cuts in education funding¹. At the University of South Carolina, tuition jumped from \$5548 in the 2003-2004 school year to \$8346 in the 2007-2008 school year². To make public higher education affordable for low income South Carolina families, the federal government should work with the South Carolina state government to cap tuition costs through financial aid.

¹ Zumeta, William. "Financing Higher Education Access in Challenging Times." The NEA 2007 Almanac of Higher Education. Accessed February 2007 at <http://www2.nea.org/he/healma2k7/images/a07p57.pdf>

² "USC board committee prepares 2004-05 budget; recommends 11 percent tuition hike." The University of South Carolina. 2004. Accessed February 2007 at http://www.sc.edu/usctimes/articles/2004-06/usc_budget_tuition_hike.html

Need Based Financial Aid Reform

Need based financial aid is integral to funding a low-income student's education. The primary source of federal need-based financial aid, the Pell Grant, helps students with a gross income of \$20,000 or less fund their education³. The federal government also grants subsidized Stafford loans that allow low income students to repay loans without high interest rates. Other federal programs like the Academic Competitiveness Grant, the Federal Educational Supplemental Opportunity Grant, and the SMART Grant also assist talented low income students fund their college education⁴. The University of South Carolina is partnering with the federal and state government to provide educational opportunities for low income students by implemented the Gamecock Guarantee. The Gamecock Guarantee pays full tuition without loans for qualified students with eligible financial need. Unfortunately, need based grants are unable to cover current tuition costs. Even though tuition has risen over the past five years, the maximum Pell Grant has remained static. Currently, the maximum Pell Grant pays \$4500, which covers only fifty percent of tuition at most public universities. As a result, the average student debt for bachelor's degrees has risen to over \$15000⁵. The solution to this discrepancy between financial aid and tuition costs is to increase the size and availability of the maximum Pell Grant.

Financial Aid Tax Reform

The University of South Carolina's best students often receive public and private scholarships to assist them with tuition and other education expenses. These scholarships help to ensure that gifted South Carolinians stay in South Carolina for their education and career. While

³ "The Pell Grant." 2007. CollegeScholarships.com. Accessed February 2007 at <http://www.collegescholarships.org/grants/pell.htm>.

⁴ "The Pell Grant."

⁵ Zumeta, William. "Financing Higher Education Access in Challenging Times." The NEA 2007 Almanac of Higher Education. Accessed February 2007 at <http://www2.nea.org/he/healma2k7/images/a07p57.pdf>

the average cost for tuition at the University of South Carolina is \$6,185, the current tax code dictates that any amount received over \$3,500 can be taxed. Congress should reform this tax regulation because scholarships are grants for educational expenses, not actual income. A tax deduction of \$5,000 from the annual gross income for every full time college student at both the undergraduate and graduate level would allow students to put their scholarships, grants, and other financial aid to full use. For example, this tax deduction would allow students to fund dormitory and textbook fees. It is advisable to give a \$5,000 deduction to independent tax filers and allow dependent students the same \$5,000 deduction on their parent's tax return.

WIA and TAA Reform

Many small town South Carolinian industries, like textile mills, are closing and leaving citizens unemployed. Federal programs like the Workforce in Action (WIA) and the Trade Investment Act (TAA) provide full resources after federal and state grants for unemployed workers to obtain a two year degree. At the University of South Carolina Lancaster, there are currently twenty nine students receiving assistance from these two programs. Unfortunately, these federal programs only allow students to apply funding to technical degrees. At USCL, only two year nursing and business programs are approved for use under TAA and WIA. Because there is not always a need in the workforce for technical degrees, it is necessary to reform TAA and WIA degree restrictions. Congress could allow students to receive money for a general associate degree as a first step towards a bachelor's degree. Additionally, Congress could provide funding for four year programs with a high workforce need like education, nursing, and mathematics.

Conclusion

In order provide educational opportunities at the University of South Carolina, federal financial aid policy should be reformed through increased Pell Grants, tax deductions, and expanded degree options for WIA and TAA programs. With these changes, the University of South Carolina will be able to provide all academically prepared South Carolinians with a quality education.

Reforming the College Health Care System

Cristina Lopez

College students' health changes their academic abilities. Recent research at Rutgers University has determined that a student's academic achievement during their college years may have a significant correlation to their personal health and access to health care (Beck). Passing the Hard Waiver health policy and exempting universities from the Deficit Reduction of 2005 will promote academic success and improve student retention rates at universities.

University Health Concerns

According to American College Health Association and the National College Health Assessment, the top five impediments that affect academic performance are stress, cold symptoms, insomnia, depression and anxiety disorders. In a 2006 survey conducted at the University of South Carolina, 79% of students stated that in the past 12 months a health-related issue adversely affected their academic performance. The survey also found that 35% of USC students are overweight or obese, 30% have been diagnosed with depression, and 53% reported feelings of hopelessness. 17% of the respondents did not have health insurance. In order to reduce the number of students with these academically inhibiting conditions, the federal government should require university students to have medical insurance by enacting the Hard Waiver policy. ("Just How Healthy")

University Student Retention

Increased health coverage would help to combat the serious problem of retention at universities. "In spite of all the programs and services to try to retain students in school, according to the U.S. Department of Education, only 50% of those who enter higher education

actually earn a bachelors degree (McNeil, Grizzell).” In a 2006 survey of thirty-eight postsecondary institutions by the American College Health Association, 33.7 % of students reported that they had a lower exam grade, course grade or had to receive an incomplete or drop a class due to stress ("ACHA-NCHA"). Such high numbers can be reduced by healthcare. In 1990 Rutgers University offered low income freshmen physical exams and provided treatment and counseling when needed and saw improved health as a result (Beck).

The University of South Carolina’s Health Insurance

Unfortunately, the University of South Carolina’s Thomson Student Health Center is currently unable to adequately provide the primary care necessary to the academic success of its 30,000 students because many students lack health coverage. In order to improve student health, the University of South Carolina is committed to offering students affordable health care coverage. Low cost health insurance for students is necessary because of student’s low incomes. Currently the students at the University of South Carolina are able to buy student health insurance from Pearce & Pearce at lower prices than national companies. The premium for the 2007-2008 University of South Carolina student health plan was \$945 with a \$300 deductible. In comparison, Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina’s yearly premium is \$990 a year with a \$5,000 deductible. (“Health Insurance for the Well Informed”).

Increased student health coverage improves students’ academic success and is also beneficial for the surrounding community. The health care industry is encouraging colleges to sponsor health plans because emergency rooms near large universities are overburdened by uninsured students. Chickering Group, a student health insurance provider that is part of Aetna, stated that uninsured college students created between \$100 million and \$300 million of uncompensated inpatient medical expenses in 2004 (Farrell).

The Hard Waiver Policy

The federal government should enact a hard-waiver policy that requires university students to either buy the university sponsored health plan or provide proof of health insurance. The Hard Waiver policy will benefit students under the university coverage because the cost of the university health plan premium will decrease by 33% while the benefits of the health insurance will increase by 33%. If the University of South Carolina became a hard-waiver policy school, its premium would drop from \$945 to \$633 per year (Farrell). Additionally, students will be able to apply their federal aid to the university health plan as an optional fee.

Deficit Reduction Act of 2005

Because the cost of health care is limiting to students, it is important to provide prescriptions to students at a low cost. On February 8, 2006, President Bush signed the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 which eliminated the group discount policy that allowed many universities to purchase discounted prescriptions for their campus pharmacies (“Fact Sheet”). For example, the University of South Carolina was able to sell students prescription oral contraceptives for \$120 per year. Due to the Deficit Reduction Act, the cost of the same prescription for students has increased to \$480 per year. Many female students’ good health is dependent upon this prescription, so the increased cost negatively affects academic performance. The federal government should make universities exempt from the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 in order to provide university students with the affordable prescriptions that allow them to excel academically.

Conclusion

Health care is essential to a student's academic success. To ensure health care coverage, a Hard Waiver policy should be passed. In addition, colleges should be exempted from the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 to improve student health through affordable prescriptions. If these reforms are passed, students will be more academically successful and more students will complete their college degrees.

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Campus Safety

Benjamin Bullock

Campus safety at the University of South Carolina is an increasingly important issue. Recent shootings at Virginia Tech and the University of Northern Illinois have raised alarm about campus safety among the university's students, parents and administrators. The University of South Carolina must protect its students by identifying and preventing safety threats. In order for the University of South Carolina to achieve this goal, our nation's major privacy laws must be reformed and firearms control laws must be maintained.

Privacy Laws

The Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA) was passed in 1974 to protect personal information in students' records. As a result, records will not be disclosed to outside parties under most circumstances. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) was also passed to protect citizens from private information being used in fraud. Both laws guide universities and colleges about divulging students' health and academic information. However, there is confusion about how universities should handle private information about potentially dangerous students. According to the report investigating the causes of the Virginia Tech shooting, "There is widespread confusion about what federal and state privacy laws allow. Also, the federal laws governing records of health care provided in educational settings are not entirely compatible with those governing other health records."⁶ Additionally, it may have been possible for the Virginia Tech shooting to have been prevented by communication between

⁶ *ibid.*

university departments. “University officials . . . explained their failures to communicate with one another or with Cho’s parents by noting their belief that such communications are prohibited by the federal laws governing the privacy of health and education records.”⁷ The panel’s findings show that one of the major causes of the Virginia Tech shooting was confusion regarding national privacy laws. Because of this inability to communicate, the university was unable to prevent the shooting.

The University of South Carolina must protect its students and prevent similar safety threats. However, the university also suffers from an inability to communicate between departments. Because mental health records at universities are both student records and medical records, they are covered by two conflicting privacy laws. As a result, universities have two different procedures regarding potentially dangerous students. They can disclose information to the authorities and risk a privacy lawsuit, or they can withhold the information that could prevent a dangerous incident on the campus. Of course, universities choose non-disclosure to protect themselves legally. The Virginia Tech Panel recommends that privacy laws should be revised to clarify how schools should notify police departments about student threats using private information. The panel recommends that leeway be given to schools to determine what constitutes an emergency disclosure of private information. Additionally, a “safe harbor” option should be enacted to protect schools from liability for disclosing information that protects its students.⁸ These reforms will allow the University of South Carolina to better protect its students.

Guns On Campus

State politicians are proposing to allow individuals with concealed weapons permits to carry firearms on campus in an attempt to curb violence on university campuses. Currently,

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. Chapter V: Information Privacy Laws, Pg 68-69

almost every university has a strict policy prohibiting carrying guns on campus. At the University of South Carolina, there are strict penalties for possession of a firearm on the university campus. The benefits of this policy are clear. A Department of Justice study released in 2005 found that 93% of violence against students occurs off campus.⁹ Gun violence on university campuses is almost entirely restricted to isolated incidents. Allowing guns on campus would increase the probability of a gun crime and make campuses more dangerous for students. The most prudent response to recent gun crimes is to continue the prohibition of guns on campuses.

Conclusion

In order to make the University of South Carolina a safe environment, Congress needs to give colleges the necessary tools for preventing dangerous incidents. Privacy laws should be amended to allow universities to prevent violence by communicating information about potentially dangerous students. Gun control laws on university campuses should be upheld because they limit the number of gun crimes at universities. These measures will help the University of South Carolina to protect its students and faculty members from dangerous situations on campus.

⁹ Baum, Katrina and Patsy Klaus. "Violent Victimization of College Students: 1995-2002". U.S. Dept. of Justice. Jan. 2005 <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/vvcs02.pdf>>

Financial Aid for Nonviolent Offenders

George Parrish, Robert Sinners and Mary Stonecypher

Currently, university students lose their eligibility for federal financial aid if they are convicted of an alcohol or drug related crime. However, Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) has sponsored a piece of legislation, S.2767, that would end to this automatic loss of aid eligibility. S. 2767 was recently introduced into the Senate and is now in the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. The bill amends Section 484(r) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to say that a student loses federal aid eligibility only if the federal or state court suspends his eligibility.

Drug Offender Exclusionary Provision

The initial language of the Higher Education Act of 1965 did not address a non-violent conviction's impact on financial aid eligibility until the Drug Offender Exclusionary Provision in 1998. The Drug Offender Exclusionary Provision states that non-violent criminals, including minors in simple possession of alcohol or in simple possession of marijuana, will have federal aid removed. A report in by the U.S. Accountability Office found that as a result of the Drug Offender Exclusionary Provision each year 20,000 students are denied Pell Grants, and between 30,000 and 40,000 students are denied federal loans (Bradley).

The Financial Aid Application

Investigating non-violent convictions is a complicated process. The 2001-2002 FAFSA application required applicants to declare whether they had ever been convicted of possessing or selling illegal drugs. If the respondents answered yes, they were sent another form asking for further information. If they did not respond to this letter they were automatically excluded from

federal financial aid. A first conviction leads to one year without financial aid, a second conviction suspends financial aid for two years, and a third conviction will remove financial aid opportunities indefinitely. FAFSA applicants that do not answer the question can cause a backlog. In 2000 the backlog was so serious that these applications were processed without a response to the drug question (Wright). A 2006 amendment sought to change this process after a congressionally appointed advisory committee in 2005 stated that the drug question was irrelevant to federal financial aid and caused eligible students to not apply for federal aid (Klein). Students are still required to answer a question about drug convictions, though applicants that were convicted before becoming a student may still be eligible for federal aid (Klein).

University of South Carolina students would be better served by a law that does not rest on complicated forms. With Senator Dodd's bill students with a non-violent conviction would have their federal aid eligibility decided by the judge that convicts them of the drug offense. The judge would be presented the details of the conviction and the defendant would have an opportunity to state his concerns personally. The judge would have the discretion to either show mercy to the student and allow him to continue to receive federal aid or punish the student to the extent of the law and remove federal aid eligibility. Justice would still be served by this system because bureaucratic inconsistencies would be eliminated and financial aid eligibility will be entrusted to an impartial judge.

Conclusion

The current method of implementing the 1998 amendment to the Higher Education Act is both impractical and unforgiving. With Senator Dodd's S.2767 a judge will be able to personally decide just financial aid ramifications of the student's conviction. The integrity of the grants will

be preserved because the judge will have the discretion to remove financial aid eligibility.

Reforming the Higher Education Act will fairly provide students with federal financial aid.

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Civil Service

Justin Cromer

In 2007 the federal government, excluding the Post Office, was the largest employer in the nation with 1.8 million employees (Federal 1). Government agencies hire hundreds of thousands of individuals each year to fill vacated jobs and new positions. The federal government needs well qualified, motivated college graduates to fill these gaps. Through an internship with scholarships and supplementary guidance, students pursuing a career in civil service can gain the expertise and experience necessary to become a valuable employee of the federal government.

Federal Government Jobs

The executive branch's departments and independent agencies make up 98% of all federal employment. The remaining 2% of federal employees are employed by the executive and judicial branches of the federal government (Federal 3). The executive branch is expanding, thereby creating a need for more qualified employees. For instance, as a response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President Bush created the department of Homeland Security in 2002. Currently the Department of Homeland Security employs 149,000 Americans (Labor 5). Filling these new positions with capable employees is crucial to the success of the Department of Homeland Security and to the preservation of national security.

There are two hiring policies in the federal government: a competitive civil service application process and an excepted civil service application process. Competitive civil service jobs hiring policies are governed by civil service laws that ensure that applicants receive fair and equal treatment throughout the hiring process. Excepted service jobs' are not governed by

Congressional regulations, but instead set their own hiring regulations. Some examples of excepted service jobs are the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (usajobs.gov).

The United States Armed Forces

Over 5 million people are employed to protect our country in the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines and Navy, including 1.3 million active duty members (Defense 4). Military employment is estimated to remain steady or increase until 2016. To fill these positions with the most qualified employees, various branches of the military offer enticing scholarship packages to high school graduates. The army provides numerous scholarships and grants in exchange for a service commitment. These opportunities include non military education level (non-MEL) fellowships, Army senior service college fellowships (MEL-1), and Army senior fellowships (post MEL-1). To be eligible to compete for these scholarships, the prospective applicants must be involved in active duty. There are numerous other college scholarships available for high school graduates agreeing to work for a branch of the military after graduation. The stipulations on these scholarships provide guidelines for university majors and career choices and require various military training during free time (Army). These scholarship programs prove to be extremely beneficial for the various branches of the army because they provide the military with well-qualified, educated personnel.

Civil Service Program

If the federal government created a scholarship and fellowship program similar to the military's model, the federal government would entice more qualified individuals into a career in civil service. In exchange for a scholarship, a student would be expected to study a specific major that fills a government need. The applicant would be required to complete a mandatory

internship to obtain experience and then commit to a specific time period of civil service upon graduation. This program would help the federal government to be efficient by filling its job vacancies with bright college graduates that have been specifically educated for their career in civil service.

Conclusion

The federal government often faces challenges in hiring employees for new positions that require specific expertise. A program for high school graduates hoping to pursue a career in civil service would alleviate this quandry. In exchange for a college scholarship, these talented students would work in the federal government to help maximize the efficiency and productivity of the various government agencies and programs. A civil service scholarship program would benefit both the individual receiving the scholarship and the United States government.

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USC Environmental Initiatives

Mitchell Trott, Martha Morris

The University of South Carolina is acting as a flagship university in energy conservation and renewable energy developments. Government support and incentives will help the university and the surrounding community to achieve environmental sustainability by using solar panels and other conservative measures. This government support will help the University of South Carolina to fulfill the Environmental Protection Agency's goal for universities and colleges to actively participate in the smart growth and other sustainable practices that serve the economy, the community, and the environment. Congress' investment in environmental projects with the University of South Carolina will help to research and introduce the use of solar, wind, biomass, and other sustainable energy options.

The University's Goal: Green Energy

The first step in environmental research at the University of South Carolina is green energy. Green energy allows for the population to retain modern conveniences while preventing the destruction of the environment. While current energy production methods pollute the environment at an exponential rate, green energy is aimed at producing energy without damaging the environment. Government grants should be given to the University of South Carolina to fund research and to provide an example to other universities of the feasibility of green energy usage.

Pending Initiatives

The University of South Carolina has extensively researched green energy production and is putting several new initiatives in place. The university is a participant in The American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which aims at reducing harmful

emissions of schools by “80% by mid-century at the latest” (American College). USC is responsible for many programs which are a part of the ACUPC Commitment. 15% of energy is from renewable resources and all new buildings are “built in accordance to at least the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED Silver standard or equivalent”(American College). The university is pursuing providing public transportation through a bike fleet program with one hundred bikes. The university is researching changing the meal containers in the university cafeterias to eliminate the usage of polystyrene. Molded polystyrene is 95% air and is nearly impossible to recycle, so the dining services at the university are looking for environmentally friendly and cost-effective alternatives to the “to-go” option. The university is already using the Green Quad, which is a residence hall built to use 45% less energy than other residence halls. It uses a hydrogen fuel cell to power part of the building and has specially designed features like lights that automatically turn off when the room is unoccupied and a turf roof that cools the building and reduces water runoff.

The University of South Carolina continues its research with its Innovista program for fuel research. The primary renewable resource that is being used in South Carolina is hydrogen. University President Andrew A. Sorensen has said that alternative fuel research is the university’s main research focus and source of momentum. “The New York Times recently reported that South Carolina was the leading national force in driving research and making the hydrogen economy a reality” (Parks). At the beginning of the venture there were very few alternative fuel companies, but now the university is ranked “19th among 155 comprehensive universities nationally and 14th among public universities for the number of start-up companies created in 2006” (Top 20) The reason for the ranking of the University is due to a “\$400,000 grant to fund a web-lab incubator space for fuel cell innovation” (Future Fuels) in June of 2006.

The university is home to the only Industry/University Cooperative Research Center. Also known as the Fuel Cell Center, the IUCRC gives companies cost-free interaction with professors and students and access to new information from the lab. So far, research has been applied to improve energy efficiency for Segway scooters, forklifts and televisions cameras.

Funding for Research

These exciting research advancements are only possible with funding from grants. For example, Ingenuity SC granted the University of South Carolina \$400,000 for a technology incubator. The technology incubator provides the resources needed to keep companies in South Carolina. The grant has successfully brought fifteen companies to Innovista for research. A notable addition is Gecko Energy Technologies, which is the first company that intends to produce a product in Columbia, South Carolina. Currently, they are testing several different prototypes of an emergency worker tool which runs on a fuel cell and provides light and powers cell phones.

Opportunities for expanded funding include Representative Bob Inglis' H-Prize legislation. The H-Prize would grant millions of dollars to a company that demonstrates advancements by developing prototypes or transforming technologies using hydrogen fuel cells in cars. If the bill is passed it would provide companies with as much as \$50 million: \$20 million in advancements of not more than \$1 million per prize, \$20 million in prizes for prototypes of not more than \$1 million per prize, and \$10 million in prizes for transforming technologies. This funding would speed up the progress of putting hydrogen fuel cells on the road.

In December 2007 Senator Murray of Washington introduced the Higher Education Sustainability Act (HESA) as an amendment to Title VII of the Higher Education Act of 1965. The Act would provide funding to universities that are implementing energy sustainability

initiatives. The Act would establish a system to evaluate the effectiveness of each university's programs. It also provides annual funding to universities that are doing the essential research on alternative fuels, clean energy and other projects. Grants would be awarded to between 25 and 200 institutions across the nation. The bill is a comprehensive plan to make universities the forefront of green energy technology and sustainability, which would in turn make the United States the center of green research.

Benefits of Green Energy Research

Investing in the usage of energies like hydrogen fuel cells or wind power is an economically sound decision. By funding the University of South Carolina's green energy initiative, numerous benefits will be created for the entire community. Potentially, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions could be reduced and negative environmental impact will be limited. Its green energy research gives the University of South Carolina an opportunity to serve the community and to provide leadership as a public institution.

Conclusion

The University South Carolina asks Congress to fund initiatives that will allow for universities to reduce their waste production, lower their consumption of energy, and research methods of environmentally friendly energy production. Grants like the H-Prize and HESA provide the require funds necessary for materials and labor costs. Making research more affordable for the University of South Carolina benefits not only the university, but also creates a positive impact on the world.

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