

The Higher Education Opportunity Act

Expanding Access and Investing in Minority Students

In addition to addressing rising college prices and removing other obstacles families face on the path to college, the Higher Education Opportunity Act also builds on the Democratic Congress's commitment to investing in minority students. The legislation focuses on expanding college access and preparing minority students for competitive and innovative jobs – a key part of strengthening our workforce and our economy. H.R. 4137 would:

Expand need-based aid for minority students

- For the first time, makes the Pell Grant scholarship available year-round. About 47 percent of all African-American students and 37 percent of all Hispanic students receive the Pell Grant each year.
- Strengthens the Work-Study program and expands community service opportunities in the program. The Work-Study program helps colleges and universities pay the wages of eligible undergraduate and graduate students working part-time to help pay for college.

Strengthen critical college readiness and support programs

- Increases the authorization level for the GEAR-UP program to \$400 million. The program helps prepare low-income elementary and secondary students to succeed in college.
- Provides flexibility for GEAR UP grants to support students during the transition to their first year of college and strengthens parental involvement activities in the program.
- Increases the authorization level for the TRIO programs – Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Services – to \$900 million. The TRIO programs seek to increase high school completion and college participation and graduation rates among low-income and first-generation college students. African-American students make up nearly 50 percent of all TRIO participants.
- Raises minimum grant awards for TRIO and ensures that participating students complete a rigorous course of study.

Make key investments in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and other minority-serving institutions and graduate programs

- Expands authorization levels for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Historically Black Graduate Institutions, and Hispanic-Serving Institutions. HBCUs enroll 14 percent of all African-American students and HSIs enroll almost half of all Hispanic college students.
- Creates new graduate programs for HSIs, HBCUs, and Predominantly Black Institutions; establishes Centers of Excellence in Teacher Education at Minority-Serving Institutions; and strengthens the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program.
- Creates partnership programs for MSIs to help attract young students into science, engineering, technology, and mathematics fields.

Simplify the student aid application process and improve consumer financial literacy

- Allows low-income families to apply for federal college aid using a simpler, two-page form.
- Helps families plan for their college expenses by receiving estimates of their financial aid package in the years before they apply for aid.
- Boosts financial literacy for students and parents in the TRIO, GEAR UP, and other college outreach programs.
- Enhances financial literacy of college students and provides critical consumer protections to help safeguard borrowers from risky college loan arrangements and predatory lending tactics.