



WORKFORCE PELL

The JOBS Act & the Pell Flexibility Act

THE STATUS QUO

Under current law, federal higher education funding is skewed sharply toward traditional academic education at the expense of programs that prepare students for the world of work.

Among the biggest obstacles to a level playing field is Pell Grant eligibility. Some 7 million Americans received Pell Grants in 2017-18 – \$28.2 billion in needs-based funding to cover tuition and other college costs.

As is, Pell funding is available only for students aiming to earn academic certificates or degrees. And Pell Grants cover only programs that are at least a semester in length.

But many of the best job training programs offered at community colleges are shorter than a semester – eight or 10 or 12 weeks. And they are often offered by the college's noncredit continuing education division – for students more interested in learning skills than earning two- or four-year degrees.

These shorter programs are a boon to students and employers.

Many if not most community college students are in a hurry to get into the workplace and start earning. Many want to focus on skills in demand in the job market, not sit through general education courses that may or may not be relevant.

Employers are also in a hurry. They need workers now, not a year or two down the road. Many are focused more on skills – can the worker do the job at hand? – than academic credentials.

And many companies that want to work with colleges to design job training programs find it easier to work with the college's noncredit division. It's usually more flexible and nimble than the academic side of the college and can move in a more timely fashion – setting up a new program in a matter of months rather than the years it often takes to get approval on the credit side of the house.

THE JOBS ACT

The Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students (JOBS) Act sponsored by Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Tim Kaine (D-VA) would make Pell funding available to students enrolled in short community college job training programs that lead to industry-recognized credentials and jobs in demand in the local labor market.

Under current law, Pell funding covers only programs that offer 600 or more clock hours of instruction over 15 weeks. The JOBS Act would make funding available for programs as short as 150 clock hours over eight weeks.

As is, HEA provides no funding for noncredit job training programs. Nor do most states – or the support they provide for noncredit offerings pales in comparison to spending for degree programs. The JOBS Act would provide funding for noncredit programs that meet agreed-upon quality standards.

Only job training designed with input from employers would be eligible. Offerings must lead to credentials in demand in the local labor market. And the bill requires programs to meet a variety of quality assurance provisions, including several from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

The JOBS Act would make up to \$3,097 available per student in the 2019-2020 school year – half the maximum Pell award that will be available to traditional academic students.

Along with Sens. Portman and Kaine, the JOBS Act is cosponsored by Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI).

The White House has also endorsed expanding Pell to students enrolled in short-term noncredit job training program – this is one of the administration’s core principles for HEA reform.

The bill is available [here](#).

THE PELL FLEXIBILITY ACT

The Pell Flexibility Act, introduced by Indiana Republicans Sen. Mike Braun and Rep. Jim Banks, is also designed to support short job training programs offered at community colleges.

But its reach is more limited than the JOBS Act. It would fund considerably fewer programs and only on a temporary basis.

Unlike the JOBS Act, which would fund programs as short as 150 clock hours, the Braun bill would require at least 320 clock hours of instruction.

Unlike the JOBS Act, which would fund scores of programs at most or all of the nation’s 1,100 community colleges, the Braun bill would provide funding for only 100 institutions, and only eight programs per institution.

Unlike the JOBS Act, which would make permanent changes to Pell eligibility by amending federal law, the Braun bill would create a pilot program that sunsets in seven years.

The bill is available [here](#).

SIDE-BY-SIDE

PROVISIONS	JOBS Act	Pell Flexibility Act
Minimum clock hours	150	320
Minimum program length	eight weeks	15 weeks
Eligible institutions	any accredited public or nonprofit institution of higher education	limited to 100, to be chosen by the education secretary
Eligible programs	unlimited	eight per institution
Sunset	none	after seven years