Gov. Markell signs DSU Inspire Scholarship Bill

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Gov. Jack Markell has signed legislation that will establish the Inspire Scholarship Program benefiting students from the First State who enroll at Delaware State University.

With DSU President Harry L. Williams, DSU Board of Trustees Chair Claibourne Smith and a group of legislative sponsors standing behind him, Gov. Markell signed House Bill 399 that could provide Delaware students who qualify tuition assistance to attend DSU. The signing took place on Oct. 4 in the University's Martin Luther King Student Center.

The DSU Inspire Scholarship Program is modeled after the Student Excellence Equals Degree (SEED) program, which provides tuition scholarships for students to attend Delaware Technical & Community College or University of Delaware to obtain an associate's degree. DSU was excluded from the original program because it does not offer an associate's degree. The new DSU program would provide tuition assistance to approximately 140 students in the same amount that SEED scholars receive.

Gov. Jack Markell shakes DSU President Harry L. Williams's hand prior to signing the Inspire Scholarship Bill.

"This effort can make more widely available the exceptional opportunities Delaware State University has to offer," Gov. Markell said. "DSU can be an important engine for job growth in the area and has earned a growing reputation for its research on campus and economic opportunity for students."

Under the program, DSU Inspire scholarship recipients would receive the same amount of funding as SEED recipients for six semesters – the same length as the SEED scholarship. Eligible students must have and maintain a 2.75 GPA and perform 10 hours of community service per semester. SEED students must maintain a 2.5 GPA and do not have a community service requirement.

DSU President Harry L. Williams said that HB 399's enactment into law represents a great day for the University.

"The improvement of retention and graduation rates is a top priority of Delaware State University. The Inspire Scholarship

Program will help achieve that goal by providing more financial support to students from Delaware," Dr. Williams said. "As an institution of higher education created and supported by the First State, this legislation helps DSU fulfill its role as an outstanding educational asset in Delaware that can make the dreams and aspirations of its young people becomes a reality."

Dr. Williams added that the legislative action by Gov. Markell and the General Assembly confirms the state's strong support for all of its state-assisted colleges and universities.

House Bill 399 unanimously passed the state House of Representatives on June 30 – the last day of the General Assembly. However, a procedural issue prevented it from voted on later that evening by the state Senate.

Senate President Pro Tem Anthony, who raised the procedure issues, called for a special Senate Education Committee hearing on Aug. 11 to consider the bill. At the end of that hearing, the committee unanimously voted to move the bill on for Senate consideration.

The state Senate subsequently unanimously passed the bill during a Sept. 21 special session.

Dr. Williams thanked the bill's primary sponsors—Rep. Scott, Sen. Bushweller, Rep. Carson, Rep. Bennett and Sen. Ennis-- along with the bill's 21 other sponsors for renewing pride in Delaware State University.

"We know the state has not turned its back on this great University," said Dr. Claibourne Smith, Board of Trustee chair and former DSU interim president. "It is committed, like we are, to our public mission—educating the young people of Delaware so they may have the best chance possible to prosper in whatever pathway they choose."

With Gov. Markell's signature enacting the legislation, University officials will now review individual financial packages of the incoming Delaware freshmen enrolled at DSU who could be eligible. They will also communicate with eligible DSU students and high school seniors to encourage them to apply for the Inspire Scholarship for fall 2011.

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