

A statement describing an emergency that could affect thousands of students in 2004 who will be attempting to graduate from two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

This statement could be issued by Governor Musgrove to the SREB Executive Committee as outlined in the separate paragraph on page 3.

The statement would become the body of a letter from Governor Musgrove to the Executive Committee.

No college student should be denied an opportunity to graduate next year because of budget cuts at colleges and universities. The budget cuts in many areas of state governments are the largest most persons have ever seen. The budget cuts have real consequences, including real consequences in education for students, teachers and faculty.

One of the most serious education consequences may be long-term damage to colleges and universities if we eliminate needed programs that cannot simply be re-instated or re-started after the infrastructure and personnel are disbanded. Governors and legislators will face in 2003 and 2004 issues about postsecondary education priorities and funding. These issues may be even more difficult next year, but one of the potential problems for students in 2004 can and must be solved in 2003.

It is unacceptable that any student on track to graduate in 2004 at a two-year or four-year college would be denied the courses they will need to graduate because of budget cuts. It is unacceptable because we have the technology to make it possible for most students to get the courses needed to graduate. It is possible for students to get these required courses even if they are not available in classrooms on their campuses.

We have the technology and we have in place an *Electronic Campus* with 8000 courses from more than 300 colleges and universities in the SREB states that can make it possible for nearly all students to find the needed course or two required for graduation.

The budget cuts have created an emergency that the students didn't cause, but students can have the opportunity, working with their advisers, to find a needed course or courses on the *Electronic Campus* to graduate. Colleges and universities have the opportunity to make this possible for their students. Students have a real stake in terms of time and money in graduating and not having to attend an additional semester. The president of a large SREB state university has estimated that as many as 450 students at that university might not graduate on time. He estimates the cost in out-of-pocket expenses and lost wages for these students and their families to be over four million dollars. That is more than \$8,000 per student.

This is an emergency, and there are potentially thousands of students who may lose significant time and

money if we don't use the technology and the *Electronic Campus* to share the capacity we have. We see very real benefits for students and for colleges and universities by sharing. Universities that are not able to offer a course for a student to graduate may in fact be offering electronically another course that students elsewhere in the state or in other states need to graduate. This sharing will help students and not hurt institutions. We can agree on the procedures and policies for colleges and universities that are necessary to share these courses in this emergency so that students can graduate on time.

Time is of the essence because to help students graduate next year, we have to agree on a plan and the details by the fall of 2003. We may not be able to help every student get the courses needed to graduate. Every institution may not be able to participate. The cuts in college and university budgets may mean that there will be fewer online courses. Even so, there will be thousands, and if there are fewer courses, it will make it even more important to have easy, convenient sharing of them to help students in this emergency. We have the potential to help thousands of students--students in their final year of college--who may lose valuable time and considerable money because they can not take in a classroom on their campus the one or two courses they needed to graduate. This is simply unacceptable. We have the technology. We have the process. We have the *Electronic Campus*. We have the history of our states working together and sharing in these kinds of times through the Southern Regional Education Board.

The first step in helping students to graduate on time in 2004 is for states to agree that this is their intent. The preceding statement could be used to craft a letter for Governor Musgrove to the Executive Committee describing the situation and the proposal that we work to solve it. If the response of the Executive Committee is that we should proceed with a proposal and plan. We can share this with all SREB Board and Legislative Advisory Council members. This includes all SREB governors. We will work to bring to the Annual Meeting of the Board a strong statement of intent along the lines of this statement. We will rely heavily on the *Electronic Campus* State Partners, postsecondary education members of the Board and college and university leaders who want to help craft policies and agreements to make this happen.