

Joel Harrell:

I know it's been a long day for many of you and we're going to go ahead and get started. I know we're standing between you and food, drinks, dance, conversation, whatever it might be, and we don't want to do that. As I said it's been a long day so we want to get through our task for this afternoon. Welcome to this session on Minority Serving and Under Resourced Schools. It's our pleasure to be here to visit with you a little bit to talk about the work that's going on with the Minority Serving/Under Resourced Schools Division team, and to (more importantly) hear from you.

This session that we do each year is one that addresses a couple of things. Number one, we want to make certain that we share with you any updates about any changes that have happened with our team. Number two, we want to be able to give you an opportunity to bring any emerging issues, challenges to the forefront and have some dialog and conversation about those in a limited kind of way. And then number three, we want some feedback from you.

This is one our primary opportunities for feedback from you relative to how we can improve upon the delivery of services that we provide through our training, _____ assistance, workshops, etc., and thus for. We don't expect to do a lot of talking. We expect to do a lot of listening. We hope you came in a talkative mode. If not, we'll do something to lubricate your tongues or whatever to get you going a little bit.

Let me first of all stop and do some introductions in terms of folks. We're always pleased to other folks from within FSA, Ed, and around to join us. Our team that you're going to meet here in a few minutes – Well I'll wait and do those but any other representatives we have here from the Department of Education, OPE, or whomever. We have our Chief Operating Officer, Mr. Jim Runcie who's here with us today. Jim, great. Thank you sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. David Bergeron, the Assistant Secretary of OPE. He's here with us and some other folks from that staff as well who are here. Any other FSA Ed folks in the room besides the -? Hi there. Thank you. Great. Good to have you here. We're always delighted to have as many of you here as possible. This is a new thing for us this year. As you may now, traditionally these have been three separate sessions for HPCU's, travel colleges, and HIS's.

The team thought about a new concept this year. "Let's just bring everybody together and give them an opportunity to interact with each other throughout their groups and to hopefully give them a chance to meet some new colleagues, new friends, and see how

that goes." We're kind of experimenting with this. Give us your feedback if you like it or if you don't like it. We'd love to hear from you. A couple of housekeeping as well: obviously the evaluations, you want to make sure you complete those online when you get back.

Also we've got some sheets of paper that are around that we want you to sign. There are some on the table over here on this side, in the back and whatever. No prizes. I'm sorry, no door prizes but we would like to have some idea of who's here. We did an initial search. There are about 1,100 from minority-serving institutions who registered for the conference. We're pleased at that and we're certainly pleased to see all of you here this evening to visit with us for a few minutes.

Let me just quickly introduced the members of our team and I want to go through a quick brief introduction here and then I'm going to get out of the way and sit down. Our team members who are here today who work with us are John Gritts who is our travel college cluster lead from our Denver office. *[Applause]* John. Dolores Davis who is our Training and Technical Assistance and Compliance team lead, and HPC lead. *[Applause]* Dolores. Raul Galvan our HSI, and AANAPISI as well.

And John also works with the Alaskan American Native Hawaiian group also. And Dolores also works with our PBI group within the cluster that she's working with. And Jim Settles, who is with us also, works with the HPCU, PBI, HSI clusters. *[Applause]* Okay? I just want to briefly do a quick overview about our team and what we're involved in right now. We've gone through some real massive changes this last year.

We've really expanded our role. I was telling someone when I started coming to this conference (I won't say how many years ago) it was a focus primarily on HPCU's but expanded to HSI, travels. Now you'll see we have several other groups who have all come into the family of institutions that we call MSI's. It's a large group of institutions and people out there. You'll see about 709 institutions. So it's a sizeable group. And you see the breakout there in terms of who they are and the categories of those schools, more importantly the amount of Title IV money that are being disbursed within this sector group.

We're not talking about small nickels and dimes here. We're talking about a significant amount of money that you disburse and work with us each day in making sure that students have an

opportunity to be successful at your institutions. We appreciate all your support on that. I always love these toys. The next piece here just talks about sort of what our work is all about. It's really about proactively working with schools. And as we've said all along we talk a lot about compliance issues and we know those issues are important.

And we continue to work with you on compliance issues, but from our perspective we've really raised the bar to the standpoint of now either – Compliance is really what we call – That's low. I'm a country boy from Mississippi. We call that low cotton, you know? That's easy picking. We're beyond compliance now. And we want you to go down this road with us now and which we're focusing in on student completion, on students being successful, and how we can help you to use your Title IV dollars at your campuses to help your students to be more successful.

That's the real big picture for us now. The compliance things: yeah you all got that. You don't need us for that anymore. Okay? Here again, services, technical assistance, on-site management consultation. These are all the things that you know about, the things that we're involved in. As I said, we really want to get some feedback from you as it relates to the training that we're doing, how we do that, the way it's laid out.

We try to do the training workshops each year, one day drive in to make them as inexpensive as possible, except for John _____'s team. He takes a whole week. He just loves to, I guess, hang out and have fun with his group. But other than that it's about a day event and we do that to keep that – We understand that many of you don't – Many people don't get the opportunity to come to this conference or the opportunity to go to other professional associations, _____, or other original conferences.

Those one-day workshops become real critical from the standpoint of providing that information. I promised that I would be brief, which the team says, "There's no way that's possible."

[Laughter]

I said to them, "Yes it is because I have a cold that I've been fighting so that's going to help me to sit down." At this point I'm going to ask Raul Galvan if he would come up and. Roll and Dolores and John are going to lead us through the rest of the session this afternoon. Thank you again for being here. I hope I get a chance to visit with each one of you individually, if not this

afternoon, before you leave. Thank you. Roll, do you need this?
[Applause]

Raul Galvan:

Okay, good afternoon. One of the issues that we faced this last year while implementing the regulations that came into play were the verification processes as far as the veteran's **middle** data for the IRS middle data. And also the IRS transcripts that were required for students that were selected for verification. The IRS forms were no longer accepted with the exception of that small time period when we were able to accept the paper forms as well.

The thing that we saw is that this was all totally new. We did alert students of the changes that were coming up. We sent letters to the students' addresses. We put the information on the web as well. In turn, when we started receiving the verification from students it's as if that we were at that point releasing information to them because no matter what we did, a lot of times this information didn't get to them, or they didn't open the mail, or read the information. It just created some chaos.

What we did at that point is that students that apply at the college a lot of times apply late. So for students that were applying late, instead of waiting for them to apply for financial aid and then determine whether or not they were going to be selected for verification, and then in turn ask them to submit their transcripts, what we were doing is every student that was applying late we would ask them to automatically request a transcript from the IRS.

What this did is for all the students who were selected, we already had those transcripts on the way and we didn't have to wait that much longer. Because it seems that when students were actually requesting transcripts when they were told, "You need to bring this in to us," it was extremely late. There was a time delay for them. Their financial aid was not getting there on time. And then we had some students who were potentially getting dropped for nonpayment.

This helped us immensely to get students to actually submit their transcripts whether they needed it or not. It helped then in the long run. The other thing we did is students that were being selected for verification at the end, if they did not do a transmittal at the first time when they did, we asked them right away, "Okay, now go back and do your transmittal at this point." That helped us as well because for those students we were able to assist them immediately at that point and not have to wait for all these transactions to take place after the fact.

So we had to kind of look at the process of what we did and what made more sense and what was actually going to help the students in the long run.

Female Speaker: Our planning processing was very different this year. We tried to anticipate a lot of things. But I think the communication gap created issues for us. There were a lot of unknowns for us as aid administrators; however, as we gained knowledge or learned about new opportunities for our students – And we told the students, "We are a part of this process with you. This is our first year and this is your first year." So it was a partnership.

And we asked for the feedback. "Let me know if you're having challenges or if you're having problems." This registration process was the very first time that we have allowed students an opportunity to register. Not everyone – it was about 300 students of 8,500 – that made an exception for in the financial aid office to say that, "We will allow you to enroll for the fall semester until you receive your tax information."

Many of these students were students who applied for amended tax. There was an amended tax process where they were unable to get the tax transcript. Luckily we coded those students differently so we were able to reach out to those families to say, "We understand what you're going through." But I think as schools we do have to look at our rules and regulations and decide what's best for all of us? Could we afford to lose 300 students? No, we could not.

Could we afford for 300 students who are enrolled to not pay? No. But at the end of the day these were students who had mitigating circumstances that we really did have to work through. One of my major heartburns was the Pell LEU. And I'm saying –

[Laughter and Applause]

And I'm sharing that because I just don't think it was sufficient notice for the students. I personally wished that we could've at least allowed one year of grace to allow us to notify students properly. When you have a prospective graduate who's not able to cross the finish line for financial reasons, the institutions have to identify resources. And you know how limited they are. They're very limited in August. The whole Pell LEU process was very challenging and I thank the Department of Education for providing us with information.

But I've got to tell you it was overwhelming at the wrong time. We received so many ICER's for people that we probably will never see in our lives, but we had to work those records as if the student may enroll at our institution because there were so many people on the list. And the other part that was very difficult for us; even when we thought we got a handle on it then NSLDS continued to send out new information and new ICERs which confused the students.

So sometimes just communicating with us to find out how is this new processing going for you? And we think we may have a slight handle on it now. But it is a process that we're still exploring and examining. If someone has a solution, please let me know. We have coded the records. We reduced the Pell. We've notified the student. But every time a new ICER is released with some information – I think when we sent in our disbursements the students received a new ICER. I mean from NSLDS a new post-screening came out.

Well it was confusing to us because you have \$500.00. Now you're at \$550.00. We've already looked at you one time. We were looking at the students over and over again. I have other thoughts but I'll let my other colleagues share their information.

[Laughter]

Raul Galvan:

Can I just ask if anybody else had that same issue here?

[Applause] Okay, so we also would like to hear from you all, not only on the issues but on any best practices to resolve these issues. There are two mics. You're more than welcome to go up to the mic and also comment.

Female Speaker:

Well aren't you nice. So you can take more notes? I see you over here. One of the challenges we had was making sure that our students knew about the changes. We had a big push just before we allowed the students to go home. We prepared letters for their parents. We wanted the parents to understand that the verification process was changing and that we would not be able to accept a tax return – a signed tax return any longer.

This really piqued everyone's interest when we were saying, "Okay you're going to take this letter home. We want you to know about it." We also had a meeting with our students in November to let them know about the changes and how it was going to impact them so they would be in a better position to try to explain this to their

parents. We have some parents who are very, very involved and we have other parents where most of our students tend to have to navigate that entire financial aid process independently of any support.

So we were explaining it to them and we wanted them to understand what was going on and how to talk to their parents. We also, in our lab, allowed the students to come in and with their parents on the phone we would help them to navigate the FAFSA process. They would know how to retrieve the IRS data and also work with them if they had a problem and we were notified they were not eligible to receive it, then we could help them to find out what the situation was going to be and how we could continue to help them.

The other piece that we really enjoyed was our financial aid awareness month. With the financial aid awareness month we were able to tell the students, "Okay now. No FAFSA no file. No file no money. No kidding."

[Laughter]

With this being said to them on a regular basis, it wasn't that we wanted to put the fear into them but we wanted them to understand how important it is. We know you're busy. And our students are very busy trying to do well in school. We're just another piece, another challenge for them to have to take care of every year. But we did work with that push to have our students get their FAFSA applications done very quickly.

One thing we did, once we received that lovely "Dear Colleague" letter telling us that we could indeed accept a tax return, after we had told everyone that you could not submit a tax return, we then just pulled all of our files that the counselors were working that were their little tickle files that they had to go back to. We started calling the families on the phone. We go the phone and said, "Look, there's been a blessing from the Department. We will be able to accept your tax return. Please send it to us as soon as possible and we can complete verification for you."

We were able to complete so many files just from following up with the parents to let them know, "We can help you with this. There is something we can do to help you," because a lot of parents wait until after the 15th to file, or just before the 15th to file. So our students were sitting in limbo and they just didn't know what was going to happen with them and for them through our office. That really helped us a great deal.

Communicating with the parents is really, really key. Calling them on the phone, taking the time to explain what this process is. It takes a lot of time. It really does. But it does help to foster a good relationship between the financial aid office, your school, and the parent who's going to send their child to your school. With the IRS retrieval tool, I really want to thank the Department for the work that they did to pool together the IRS so that that information could come into the FAFSA and we would not have to verify the form.

I really – We were very excited to see it work. I know it was a challenge for you. I've sat in a lot of sessions similar to this one where the discussion was made, "Well how are we going to get the IRS to release it? And what year are we going to use? Are we going to use the current or the prior, prior, or prior-prior-prior?" So, so much – But I really appreciate the work that was done because with that tool it really has helped us to streamline that verification process in our offices and get information to our students right away.

I'm interesting in knowing how you may have assisted a student when you realized that they indeed were unable to secure information through that IRS data retrieval tool, what you did with the letters that came in with students that came from the IRS to say, "We can't release the information to you." Any feedback, any other things that we can do to help students I'm really interested in knowing so I can take it back to Talladega.

John Gritts: Okay, that was it. That's mine.

[Laughter]

Female Speaker: *[inaudible comment]*

John Gritts: Yeah, I took a lot of notes on hers. A lot of the challenges that we face in tribal colleges is similar to everyone. Explaining this new verification requirement to **stomp** out or students who stomped out like ten years ago who are used to submitting tax returns; that's a challenge for us. But what we've done is pretty much similar here. We sat down with them and we sent out letters and notified them. But we've been sending out letters.

Communication is the key. You send out letters as early as March and April but you have students who are walking in in August saying, "But I've never gotten your letter. No one told me this."

The same thing. I mean we've heard it all. We've documented each of our communications with our students so that we know, "This is the address that we sent it and you were informed on this day." Some of the verification, tax transcript requirements that we're facing is third-party tax preparers. We go in and we help students complete the request online but for some reason their address doesn't match up and it just kicks you out after the third attempt.

So we usually inform them to bring in a copy of their tax return so that we can see the actual address so we can submit that request for them. One of the requirements at our institution is that for any student who is receiving a disbursement, whether it's a tribal scholarship, Pell Grant; we require that each of these students attend a financial aid orientation before picking up this disbursement. And that way they know the do's and don'ts of the financial aid, like course repetition, repeating a course (same difference), changing of majors (how that impacts their time frame).

We go through all of this and it's not a long orientation. We try to narrow it down to 30 minutes. And that way students are informed and they're aware of their situation. I have some other stuff on here so I just wanted to see what other institutions have implemented or done.

Audience:

Good evening. My name is Kim. I'm from a California community college, low cost institution. One of the things this year (and I want to thank Mr. Galvan for his one day training). That was very helpful, especially when you're discussing satisfactory academic progress, which has a large impact because we have become more invasive into the students' academic performance than ever before.

I don't know if they appreciate it but one of the things, especially when it comes to borrowing, students that want to borrow and they're not doing well academically, and how that translates into their default rate. And now with the new CDR's and all of those things and the interventions that you have to employ without the resources to do it, but you have to do it, the students aren't very receptive of all of these interventions.

There are their loans. And I'd like to know if any other schools are doing anything. We really are putting in a large amount of effort in order to make sure that the student borrows with success as opposed to just borrowing because they're eligible. We've got the

academic side of the house going, "But it's not your job," but that's too bad. We're still ensuring that the students equate academic performance with their borrowing, that there is a reasonable expectation that they're going to complete their programs in a timely manner.

That's a whole new dialog on your campuses. I don't know how other schools are handling that. But I'd like to hear the feedback as well. Just the ideal of the IRS data retrieval and all of those things. People think that big brother is watching them: some communities, some students, especially students from minority backgrounds. They're not sure exactly what we're trying to do here. And the sensitivity that we have to now employ in our discussions with students and their parents about this process has changed so much.

Again, all of the workshops and the trainings and the support that we can get to ensure that it's okay that we employ some of these new ideas and new challenges to our students to help them as well as our campuses understand. Any feedback we can get from the Department that supports us in this and says it's okay for the office to do that is always very helpful when we take it back to our academic senate or whoever it's going to be. Thank you.

Female Speaker:

One of the things that we do: we have – Our orientation with our freshman class is very, very intense. It's very intense. They are floating around having the time of their lives while student affairs and student life is trying to make them so happy for being there. And then they get to see the financial aid people.

[Laughter]

And we really have to just be very, very honest with them. It is a question and a discussion about investment in your future and debt, how you can create debt. You can just see the eyes go, "Oh yeah." We want them to understand and we're very, very nice about it. I don't want you to think they come into our session and we look like the big meanies. (Some of the things we may have learned from the feds, but we won't say that.) We do let them know that they are making a decision to commit to an education, to do everything they have to do to succeed, that we are there to help them.

We talk about satisfactory academic progress. We explain to them, "Yeah you may have a bad semester, but that is not the end of everything. But you have to commit to do better." We talk to them about the resources that are available on the campus so that if

they're having a challenge with a class then they'll know where to go to get some help. We're very lucky to have some students on our campus who really like helping the people in the financial aid office. They are always ready to help us. And when you had the issue about did you get your letter, we have a student who will – He'll be in the office and, "You didn't get your letter? Well I got my letter so I don't know why you didn't get your letter."

[Laughter]

You know it kind of takes away that, "Well nobody ever told me," sort of thing because we have students who are really taking up for us, because we're taking the time to build that relationship with them. We want them to be engaged with us so they know we're not doing this 'cause we just want to do it. They're federal regulations. And the other piece that we bring to their attention is the President's budget. You hear it on the news and how everybody is trying to find ways to save money.

And these are the ways the Department is identifying how to save money. And you have to do your part to be eligible to receive what you qualify to receive from the Department. The citizens – This is my greatest line: "The citizens of the United States of America are very, very committed to your success. They are happy to see you achieve and earn your Bachelor's degree. We are here as tax payers together to see you become the graduate of (said institution) and unless you do what you are supposed to do it is our responsibility to represent not only the tax payers, but the President of the United States to see to it that you are doing a good job academically."

[Laughter and Applause]

And you know, they kind of go, "Ooh." You know? That's my song and dance. Everybody will shake my hand. But you've got to get those students to understand from the onset, "You have taken out a loan. It will have to be repaid. And we want you to have a degree when it's time for you to repay it." That's part of what we do.

Audience: You know it's amazing. We pride ourselves that we now have the three minute FAFSA. But we have the three month verification process.

[Laughter]

You kind of touched on it. And there's a simple answer and it's called prior-prior. Why are we not putting out awards now for the fall? Why do we wait until April or May and give that student no more than three months to prepare? We're not an institution that meets full need. So it's not like we're laying it all out and they've got all the money. That student has to go out and find some money through outside scholarships, other alternatives.

If nothing else, write in the legislative authority is go with prior-prior. We don't need Congress to take any action. We need the Department to take the action. And if we need to, why not set up some schools as samples and give us the ability to say, "We here at Saint Mary San Antonio will allow you to use prior-prior year." And let's see what that data shows. When half our student population is Pell eligible, right now then we can use the data retrieval because it's out there.

The parents have already filed their tax returns. That's what we're proposing, is going with a prior-prior, and let's move on. And not just sit back and wait for those students. Thank you.

Audience:

I'm Brian Scott from the University of Arizona. I'm here to vote for prior-prior as well. And what we were thinking – I wasn't meaning to talk about this, but since they brought it up, what we were thinking is what we could do is we could have students in high school complete their FAFSA in October and have real award letters available for those students before Thanksgiving or before Christmas so that the families are sitting down going over real awards that they're going to get and not estimates of what they might get.

And also we think this would go hand in hand with the new shopping sheet that the parents and students will be having to look at. Now what we're trying to do as far as the data retrieval, we learned our lesson. What we have to do is start the data retrieval at the point of application. We're going to start having students – That's going to be our message to them. "When you fill out the FAFSA you mark data retrieval, period." And then we're going to send them some more messages, I would say around the March time frame saying, "We need you to go back and do data retrieval."

This year I think the Department is not going to allow us to use those hard copy tax returns in order to do that. So what we're thinking is we've got to do that very early and we've got to do it persistently. The other thing that we had difficulty communicating with all our students was the information about **PACE**. That was

clearly not understood and we are still trying to communicate that to students. If anybody has any better ideas about how you're communicating PACE to students we certainly would love to hear it. Those are the big things that we have tried to do at our university in trying to combat the transition to the data retrieval.

David Bergeron: As Joel said and introduced me I'm David Berg – I'm actually the acting Assistant Secretary. After I say what I say we'll see if I still am.

[Laughter]

I said that for the benefit of my friends in the front row. Now I appreciate the comments about prior-prior year. As those of us who've been around this for a while know, when a previous administration recommended it as a policy matter we got pretty badly beaten up by financial aid administrators across the country, just in general. We are well aware of the fact that we have the legislative authority to move forward with that at the point where we feel comfortable doing that.

The data retrieval process is relatively new, right? None of us have been working with it a long time. And when we did it initially there were a lot of people who said, "It'll never work. It'll never work." And it's worked much better than any of us, I think, thought it would. It gives us a lot more confidence and comfort in thinking that there's a lot more possible. And as we think about this issue of consumer information, providing information to students and families and parents earlier in the process, it really drives you to think about those kinds of things.

So we are. But we recognize that we need to move forward very carefully. We can't afford to mess this up. There are too many people who are impacted. So there's lots of work that needs to be done. But understand, we're all hearing you and think this is something we really have to give serious consideration to. Jim, Jeff, and I talk about this more than we publically normally admit. I appreciate that feedback 'cause it's real important for us to hear from you all.

You're the type of institutions we're most concerned about messing up by something we do. We appreciate the feedback.

Joel Harrell: You're going to make me work right?

Audience:

Sorry. I just want to touch on the denied PLUS loans for this year. That process really, really impacted enrollment. It impacted our students in particular. And I was just trying to think of ways – I'm not sure how we can improve the process because if your credit is not good, your credit is not good. But when the decision came out to have the families reapply I didn't want to misinform families because I don't know their credit history and you don't know their credit history.

But I was just thinking maybe if there was a code one through three or one through five – maybe that person's very close – and we can encourage that family to contact the Department of Education. "Perhaps you may qualify to be approved." But for me to go back and ask all of my denied PLUS loan applicants to go back through the process again, that was not a good choice for me. I wanted to help but I was a little stuck. I wasn't sure who to notify, how to do that process, because again, I tried to look at those people who were approved the year before.

Of course that was a targeted group. But even some of my first year families were in this situation who probably could also benefit or get an approval of the PLUS loan. So there is some more work to be done with that. I would like to see the IRS data retrieval enhanced. I love that tool. It's a beautiful tool. I'd just like – maybe the address. There's something with the address we need to enhance. If we can get at least 50 to 70 percent of our students selected for verification to use that tool it could make a difference for us.

But if the tool is so strict and you can't use it, it's not benefitting us and it's not benefitting our students. So I'd love to see that process enhanced. I would also like for the IRS to consider not shutting down in a critical month when we're processing aid.

[Laughter and Applause]

That was really difficult. That would help out tremendously. And I heard a little – I'm not sure. I thought I heard this in the opening session but I may be wrong. The interim disbursements – I don't do it at my institution and I will not do interim disbursements. For my families that I serve, if I release money to them, I will never get the documentation. But I know that DOE – I know that it is an option, but as you think about the options that are presented to us, if it's going to be more difficult at the end of the day to collect the documents we need, then the interim disbursements are not really the answer for us.

We need to really look at enhancing the other processes such as the IRS data retrieval. And if someone knows how students are able to get their tax transcripts faxed, let me know. We have gotten a few, but I want to know that actual process. We've gotten a few of the tax transcripts faxed to our office, but if you have a solution, a secret to that, please share it. I'd like to say overall the Department has done a really good job with trying to improve the financial aid process.

They really have. And as a partnership I think we're great partners. But I just think that we need to communicate more and keep our students engaged in the process. We do a session called Know Before you Owe and I know the Department talked about that. But our Know Before you Owe may be a little different. We talk about repeat courses. We talk about anything that could lead to a balance on your account – withdrawing.

And also in that session – We attended one of DOE's sessions that taught us something and this is what we did. In that session we have a student that we ask ten questions. Things like: what is Beyoncé's baby's name? Who is Kimberly Kardashian dating? And then we ask questions like: Who is your loan servicer? Then we ask: How much loan debt are you currently in? And here's the key, but five and five.

The students did not know the five questions that they needed to know but it worked for them, because we didn't have to say it to them. At the very end they smiled and said, "I really need to invest more time in me. And those things are important for my future."

[Applause]

Audience:

Just a quick question. I'm thinking about 2013/2014 now. As my daughter would say, "I kind of feel a little okeydokey coming up." The verification worksheets no longer exist of course. And we get to choose whichever way we want to do it. Wow. Now how is that going to work? The audit? I guess I'm just interested in how is everybody else going to deal with that? Are we going to have five different verification worksheets: one, two, three, four, five? Are we going to implement them all together on one sheet? Just best practices on that.

Joel Harrell:

That's a real good – You played right into what I was thinking about because I'm walking over to the gentleman who's going to give us some insight into this now. I want to make sure we all – I

love all of us dearly but we have such a need for forms. It's like if we don't have a form we're going to freak out that we don't have a form to give a student. And what I heard this morning was an opportunity for us to remove some of that within the verification process by not having the standard form.

But Jeff came in a little later on. I didn't get a chance to introduce him but if you would just take 60, 120 seconds just to make sure everybody understands what we're saying to schools, what your responsibilities are, and what we're not saying to you. I believe it's a unique opportunity to further streamline the process and to do some things to enhance it in terms of the delivery systems. If you would, just a couple of minutes to make sure –

I know you said it this morning but I want to make sure we all understand what is required, what's not required, and what you should be looking at facing those new applicants.

Jeff:

And I have to do that in less than 120 seconds?

Joel Harrell:

That's right.

[Laughter]

I appreciate it Joel and the comment is a good one. I think she asked a question of the rest of you and I think we'd all like to hear. But just to repeat we want to move to (we announced this a couple of years ago) to a customized verification process where we're not asking everyone who we select for verification to verify everything. And at your request (you and the broader community) we're taking it in stages so we have these five groups.

Because of that we don't believe that we made a decision. We're not going to create a worksheet because we'd either do one big one with all of those items, or five of them, one for each group. And you can do that if that's the way you want to go, or your software people and so on. To Joel's point (and I mentioned it this morning) we don't think that every student should be asked for everything when at least for our rules schools can select their own _____ beyond what we provide.

If we put somebody in group one then we don't think that those people should be asked to prove their high school or their identity. If we put somebody in group three that's child support paid, that's the only thing we want verified and we don't think everything should go. But I'm interested – I think we're all interested. I know

it's early. We just announced this a few weeks ago and we mentioned it again this morning. In answer to her question about have you guys given some thought about how you're going to do this?

Are you going to create worksheets, one of them, multiple of them? Are you just going to use what they did back in the day when I was doing financial aid: tracking letters and just have those kinds of documents? I think that's what we want to have a little bit of discussion on.

Kevin Barnes:

Kevin Barnes, Philander Smith College Little Rock Arkansas. Our initial plan is to do a tracking letter type thing because the way we look at it is if you are in a – I know we're not admissions officers but if we were admissions officers we're not going to send a letter to every person who's applied for admission that says, "These are all the things that we need," if some of those things have already been satisfied. We're looking at that in the same way in the financial aid office to create a type of checklist or –

Not a checklist but in basic terms saying, "You, Student A, this is what you need. Student B, this is what you need," based on the type of letter. So for instance if your institution, for admission, requires a test score, a high school transcript, and something else, if you've already received the high school transcript you're not going to send them a letter that says, "I need your high school transcript."

If there are certain things that we don't need we're not going to put it out there just in general for you to have to worry about. That hasn't been fine-tuned. It's not something that's a working project, but that's the way we're attempting to approach it as far as verification is concerned.

Joel Harrell:

The gentleman in the back.

Gary Nicholes:

Did you have a comment? Oh. My name is Gary Nicholes and I used to work at Fresno City College. Now I'm up at Par Alto Community College district. At Fresno City College we did a lot of outreach to our community, working in the high schools, but it wasn't very effective until we partnered strongly with Fresno Unified School District through the FAFSA Pilot Program.

Having them have that data of rejects with the signatures and all that information plus the students with verification. We got that information earlier on to send them to their high school counselors

to ask information about that. So they are working with trusted individuals there at the high school to help us do our jobs in the financial aid office 'cause we couldn't do it all. The students didn't trust us yet. They were already at the high school still in the spring terms and they're working there with Gloria Ponce-Rodriguez who is a great advocate for Fresno Unified and working with them still.

We provided service trainings for the high school counselors, in depth trainings, and also in our community so we could go out and use those partners to tell people more about the data retrieval tools. "What's out there? What is this verification piece all about? Why are they checking up on me? Why do think I'm lying to them?" To disprove all the rumors and the fears about going along with it, we had their trusted partners in our community working with our students and parents pairing universities to let them know about this information and getting the information out so they weren't unexpected. "What is this now?"

They knew about it in several different avenues, coming from the FAFSA workshops, from the colleges, working with Fresno Unified and other school districts in the area, letting them know what are some of the concerns? What are some of the problems? What are the common mistakes? And letting those counselors know those in depth counselors are not just having an overall view of, "Okay this is the FAFSA line by line," but what are the everyday things that happen in the financial aid office when the students are coming from the high schools asking us, "What does this award letter mean?"

The counselors are able to explain it to them. And what we did is I was very fortunate with my boss. Even though they weren't Fresno City College students we helped the student regardless, like all of us do normally at community colleges. If they were going to Fresno State or out of state, we could tell them the general process. At least they knew that in advance instead of just looking at a whole global system and kind of just wondering, "What is this financial aid all about? What documents are we going to have to submit?"

That has helped us tremendously. And through that FAFSA – And I know they've included more partnerships with the FAFSA Pilot Project. So I think that's going to enhance working with the outside communities as well. Also I'm fortunate to work with the Native American community. Part of what is disheartening to see is the dis-enrollment because of the casinos that are coming on. More and more tribes are dis-enrolling their members.

When I was going through, and for my undergraduate, I was a member of a federally recognized tribe. But once the per capita money came about they started dis-enrolling. My grandmother lived on the reservation all of her life, died there. And if I didn't have to go to my grandfather's side I'd be a non-federally recognized Native American. And I have a lot of students that come to my door that are in this category that want to know about BIA funds, what's going on with them?

And it has to be that they have to be federally recognized. So if you have outside resources that I can present them to, show them to, that they can get help that falls into this category, they would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

[Applause]

Francisco Valines: I'm Francisco Valines with Florida International University. And I just want to go back to what we're talking about with verification and forms. FIU is a quality assurance program school. I've been in financial aid for 30 years and I think everywhere I've been I've either been at a QA school or brought it to the institution like I did to FIU. And what I can tell you from that experience is that creating your own forms for the various items isn't rocket science and it isn't going to blow you up.

It actually will make your process a little more efficient. That's what we do in QA every year. I probably have – I think we have four forms now for verifications and depending on what you select you for (because in quality assurance we determine our own selection criteria) you'll get one of those four forms. They're all very different and they're all very specific. It really streamlines your process because you don't have to have someone make sure that they have all these 12 items, that every single student has that and that's what you're having to go through your process.

And for some items, like the child support, it's a two minutes process when you get the form and you're done. Think the process through as you go through this and you look at those five different groups that you're going to need to collect data for, depending on the group the person's in, and I think you'll find that you'll be able to come up with something that's a pretty tight process for you that'll help you get through that a little quicker.

Joel Harrell: I know Raul, I said I wasn't going to say anything. I know. But thanks Frank for the comment. We're wrapping up folks. About

five or ten more minutes. A couple of points I wanted to make along Frank's line: it's the issue about data and using data to drive your processes. Based on what I know anecdotally and through data about your institutions and the students you serve, I am convinced that if you use a little data, a little work, you can pretty much figure out what you need to be asking your students.

Come on folks, this is not rocket science. You have students coming from certain backgrounds, certain income levels. You know what the issues are okay? I hate to – And I can – I've been on both sides of this. I wasn't a federal bureaucrat all my life Jim. I spent – all right. I've been through registration. I understand. You need to spend time analyzing. Look at your student population. We're giving you the opportunity to do this now with data and stop asking your students all this crazy stuff that you don't need just because it's easier for you.

[Applause]

Okay? It's easier for you and you don't want to take the time to use the data to figure out what are the -? I would be willing to bet the whole \$425,000,000.00 Powerball that I could come to each one of your institutions and within two weeks I could tell you who you ought to be putting emphasis for verification and what data. I guarantee I could do that within two weeks just based on looking at your ICER history over the last three or four years.

It's not that hard folks. Stop sending stuff out just because it's easier and having the students to figure it all out because you don't want to figure it out on the front end. It's a data opportunity for you to be able to do that. Two quick things and then we're going to get to you ma'am. One of the things I wanted to be able to do is to get some feedback from you today about our workshop series. We're not going to be able to get a lot into that but you see the names on the board – the contact information.

Let those folks know what you like about our summer workshop series, what you want us to continue, and what improvements we need to make. Those are held across the country. We try to do them geographically to make sure that we hit all of our client groups. They're one day opportunities to keep the cost down. Give us your feedback. Please let those folks know. E-mail or today, let us know. Give us the feedback. We have the data. We go through.

People often ask us, "Joel, why do you guys keep training on this same thing?" Well we keep training on a lot of that because based on what we're seeing in terms of compliance information, there are still challenges. And also, turnover: we also know that within this population of institutions there's a significantly high turnover rate in terms of staff. That's why we keep going back, training on some of the same things, because the faces change and the data changes and the information changes.

So let us know if we're on target. Let us know if we're not. Please phone, e-mail. Those folks are – If you see them here during the conference give us some feedback on that. One last question on my part and we'll go here. One of the things, as I said earlier, we want to make certain that all of our minority-serving institutions understand the critical nature as it relates to students being successful and completing their programs.

The President's 2020 goals are predicated heavily – heavily – upon the institutions in this room ratcheting up what you are doing in terms of graduating and helping students to be successful. If we're going to get there, this is the group of institutions that are going to have to ratchet it up. I'm just curious. I hope that there is no institution in the room, or one that you know about, that has yet embraced this idea that student success, student completion, really is the goal that we should be talking about and that somehow or other your institution understands how that relates to what you do with Title IV, how it relates to loan indebtedness, how it all goes together at the end of the day.

If you're in an institution and you're leadership hasn't figured that out yet, please come up and see me.

[Laughter]

I'm serious. Come up and see me because I want to talk with you so we can go talk with them, because if they haven't figured that out yet we have a lot of work to do. That is so key to this whole process, that we focus on the student success, completing that program because that drives so many other things that we're dealing with. It is critical, and as I said, this is the population of institutions, the populations of students, that are going to help us to reach those goals. We've got to make sure that we're on target with that. Yes ma'am. Yes, you.

Audience:

To piggy-back with Gary, my name is Gloria Ponce-Rodriguez, Fresno Unified School District. I'm an administrator and alumni of the FAFSA Pilot Project. We've created a lot of artifacts for the

extended group, the 100 extended group. But what I want to say and to piggy-back behind Gary is that he forgot to mention that because of the data and the hard work Fresno City submitted the third-highest FAFSA applications for the State of California. The first was Riverside, Long Beach, and Fresno City.

However, because of the collaboration, hard work, and the data, we're able to track our students. Fresno City had the most accurate FAFSA's in the State of California and had the most Pell awards in the State of California. But I did want to mention that because that is important. And that is because of the data. And that's how we're able to identify those students in making sure that we are providing those services.

Also the IRS retrieval – I kind of stole this from I think UC-San Bernardino. They have this IRS retrieval video that I put on our district web site along with the financial literacy. You may want to partner with your local high schools and put some of your information for the high school students and partner. I think that would be a great strategy for you because I used to work at Norfolk State University.

And working in general student financial services I had to send maybe about 100 to 150 kids home every semester because they come saying, "I have financial aid." First generation, low income, under-represented communities: those are the ones that we really need to really aggressively help. We need to help them. They don't know the process. And it's really heartbreaking to see those kids come to school and then they have to go back home.

And sometimes they don't have money to go back home. I have taken kids home to my own house because they had to get transportation back to their state. So it is very important to collaborate. And that hard work does pay off. I can tell you that. Thank you.

[Applause]

Joel Harrell:

Thank you. Do you have a question? All right we have about – Boy for Mr. Baker.

Audience:

Mr. Baker, this morning in the opening session you made a comment and I made a note immediately that you all are working with our software providers with regard to the verification codes. How far along are you with that discussion and just where are you

with that? What can we expect, 'cause I'm going to be calling my provider when I get back.

Joel Harrell: And tell them that Mr. Baker said that they –

[Laughter]

Mr. Baker: Let me be clear – and thank you for the question. We've had calls. We have what we call software developers workshops or conferences usually using a webinar approach, but also calls. So we have had calls with the big software providers that we have on our list. And we tell them about things. We did tell them about the movement to these five groups and that those are the flags that will be on the ICER. We have to be a little bit careful. These are private companies and we don't tell them what to do or how to do it, how to charge you and all that kind of stuff.

So we just say that, "We want you to know that the ICER's are going to have these things. You will be, I'm sure, working on whether you're going to offer something to your schools or not." We've done that. We recently had a call maybe ten days ago about the fact that we weren't going to have a worksheet, although we didn't announce that, but telling them that we are going to have this text that schools could use.

We've informed them of all of that. I just got two e-mails since I've been here from software providers saying, "When are you going to give us this text?" We should get that out probably by the end of next week.

Joel Harrell: We always try to keep to the schedule in terms of we know, as we said, it's a long day and we know it's been a long day for many of you. Let me wrap up by first of all thanking our panel members. Would you please give them a hand?

[Applause]

John, and Dolores, and Raul, and Jim, for putting this all together, and for our guests and colleagues who have supported us this afternoon from the Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, as well: Jim, David, and Jeff and Kim and all those folks. Thank you very much. Do you have a -?

Male Speaker: Please give me the sign in sheets if you have them. I'll be by the door.

Male Speaker:

I just want to again thank everyone. It's really important for us to get this right. We spend a lot of time with Joel's group and with others at the Department to make sure that we're understanding what the challenges are, broadly speaking, but also very specifically speaking to minority-serving institutions. And that's why myself and our colleagues are here, because we wanted to make sure that we directly heard some of the issues and challenges that you're faced with.

One of the things we want to do is make sure that we get feedback. But we also make data-driven decisions. So we're looking at a lot of the data. We're having discussions, and we're looking at the best possible way to serve all institutions. But we're also looking very specifically at MSI's as well. I want to thank you for turning out and thank you for your good questions and comments. We'll huddle and we'll make some decisions about some of the things that we've heard.

I'll be around throughout the week so please grab me if there are any comments or questions that you need to ask. I'll be around. Thank you.

[Applause]

Joel Harrell:

Thank you sir. I appreciate it. Thank you.