

## **2016 Policy Follow-Up Report**

### **Jeanette Youngblood, AASAP President**

The Council for Opportunity in Education's 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Policy Seminar was held in Washington, D.C. on March 15-17, 2015. Arkansas has a sixteen person delegation attend, which included fifteen professional TRIO staff members and one TRIO alumnus (see complete list at the end).

Through a combined effort, visits were made to the offices of all six members of Arkansas Congressional Delegation. AASAP members were able to meet personally with Representative Rick Crawford, Representative French Hill, Senator Tom Cotton, and Senator John Boozman. In addition, AASAP members were able to meet with designated staff personnel for Representative Steve Womack and Representative Bruce Westerman. It was exciting to discover that Representative Westerman's staff included a Talent Search Alumna from Rich Mountain Community College and an Upward Bound Summer Staff Member from Southern Arkansas University.

In preparation for the visit, team members discussed a strategy for each meeting. Because some meeting times overlapped, not everyone was able to attend every meeting, so determining a plan of action was important. For each meeting, it was decided what state and national information and data should be shared, as well as who was willing to share it. Also, the group determined how best to utilize the stories of our TRIO students to personalize our message including having AASAP's TRIO Achiever, Joe Berry, share his story in each meeting he was able to attend.

The consistent message of every visit was "Restoration before Innovation," highlighting that based on their strong record of success, all TRIO programs deserve to have all financial appropriations restored before new initiatives receiving funding. In addition, each Congressman was asked to sign on to the appropriations letter for either the House or Senate and to join the bi-partisan, bi-cameral Congressional TRIO Caucus. AASAP members were also able to provide each office with infographics which utilized the most recent APR data for SSS, TS, and EOC.

When asked to reflect on what was the most successful from the Capital Hill visits, some of those attending listed the following:

- Having our alum to speak his story.
- Finding out that AR TRIO programs have connections (alums, former staffer, etc.) within certain offices.
- Knowing some of the legislative interests of the individual Representatives and Senators so it was easier to tailor our message.
- Feeling like the group had a "genuine audience" for the message being shared. Based on what had been shared from previous visits, more hostility was expected.
- Seeing the overall professionalism that the group displayed before, during and after the visits.

- Sharing the infographic.
- Getting Senator Boozman to agree to join the TRIO Caucus.

As a follow-up to the Congressional Visits, a thank you letter was sent from AASAP to each Senator and Representative, along with a copy of the Arkansas Fact Book. This letter thanked them for taking the time to meet with the Arkansas team and asked them to make TRIO students a priority. In addition, each member of the Arkansas team has been encouraged to extend a personal invitation for their own congressional leader to visit their program as a follow-up.

Important groundwork was completed during the Congressional Visits, as Representative French Hill's office requested a visit with Pulaski Technical College's Student Support Services Program for March 30, 2015. Upon visiting the program and with its students, he has identified as a TRIO supporter.

### **Arkansas Team**

Joe Berry, TRIO Alum (ASU-Beebe)  
Nathan Brown (UA)  
Crista Gray (UALR)  
Michelle Hardin (UCA)  
Billy Ray Huggins, Jr. (UALR)  
Elena Maina (UALR)  
Stephanie Manning (SAU)  
Cody McMichael (ASU—Heber Springs)  
Ashia Muhammad (UALR)  
Jeff Neufeld (RMCC)  
Steven Ogden (UACCH)  
Sharon Scudder (ASU—Heber Springs)  
Mary Kate Snow (PTC)  
Eunice Walker (SAU)  
Carla Williamson (SAU)  
Jeanette Youngblood (Lyon)