

U of I joins call for increased federal funding

University leaders say education, research are keys to nation's future

URBANA, Ill. — The University of Illinois has joined campuses across the country in a call for increased federal education and research funding to close an “innovation deficit” that university leaders say poses a serious, long-term threat to the nation’s economy.

In a letter to President Obama and Congress, university officials say closing the gap must be a national imperative to produce the highly skilled graduates and research discovery that are critical to drive progress, job creation and economic growth.

The letter, drafted by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and the Association of American Universities, is signed by the presidents and chancellors of 165 U.S. universities, including U of I President Robert Easter; Phyllis Wise, chancellor of the University’s Urbana-Champaign campus; and Paula Allen-Meares, chancellor of the U of I’s Chicago campus.

The call for increased funding comes as Congress debates steep budget cuts to reduce a growing federal deficit. But in their letter, university officials say investments in research and education “are not inconsistent with long-term deficit reduction; they are vital to it.”

More than half of U.S. economic growth since World War II is the result of technological innovation, most stemming from federally funded scientific research, according to the letter. Those breakthroughs, the letter says, have improved lives and created businesses and products that have generated entire new sectors for the nation’s economy.

But the letter says America’s place as the world’s innovation leader is in serious jeopardy. Over the last decade, it says, countries such as China, Singapore and Korea have increased their investment in research at two to four times the rate of the U.S., which also has fallen to 12th among developed countries in the share of young adults who hold college degrees.

“Throughout our history, this nation has kept the promise of a better tomorrow to each generation,” the letter says. “Failing to deal with the innovation deficit will pass to future generations the burdens of lost leadership in innovation, economic decline, and limited job opportunities.”

The open letter is available online on a joint APLU-AAU website <http://www.innovationdeficit.org/>

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The University of Illinois is a world leader in research and discovery, the largest educational institution in the state with more than 77,000 students, 24,000 faculty and staff, and campuses in Urbana-Champaign, Chicago and Springfield. The U of I awards more than 20,000 undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees annually.

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