Talking Points

1. We recognize that all of higher education must do its part in balancing the state budget. Therefore, we are grateful that Governor Corbett treats private colleges and universities equitably with public universities in his budget proposal.

2. Equitable treatment with public universities is especially important in Pennsylvania since 41% of the students attend private colleges and universities and private colleges award 50% of the degrees. Keeping the private sector competitive is good for the state’s economy and for the state taxpayer whose costs are lower in Pennsylvania due to the presence of a large, vital private university sector. Therefore, should the Legislature restore funds for the public universities, I hope the Institutional Assistance Grants (IAGs) will receive a similar percentage restoration. Wilkes now receives $555,378 in IAG funding.

3. I am glad Governor Corbett recognized the importance of protecting our lower-income and middle-class students from rising tuition by prioritizing the PHEAA Grant Program in his higher education budget. PHEAA Grants received a slight 1.9% cut. In these tight budget times, direct need-based aid to students is the most efficient way to help the most middle income families realize the goal of sending their children to college. Unfortunately, however, the Governor’s proposed 1.9% cut will result in smaller grants to these students since additional eligible recipients and increasing tuition will stretch the Grant Program even further. More than one-third of the Wilkes student body – 37 percent of our students – receive PHEAA grants.

4. I recognize that few state programs will receive funding increases this year. However, with the large budget cuts to higher education institutions, providing some additional grant aid to maintain the purchasing power of the grants and assist some additional middle income families pay for college makes sense. Taking only a portion of those institutional budget cuts and re-directing them to student aid is good public policy and will help students stay in college.

5. State funding is likely to remain tight at least in the near future. Our young people and our adults seeking education to improve their job prospects need higher educational opportunity. The state should provide the most cost effective support to help the greatest number of low and middle income students be able to afford college. An increase in the PHEAA Grant Program best meets this need.