

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a grand, ornate interior space, likely a legislative chamber or a university hall. It features a series of tall, classical columns supporting a balcony with a decorative balustrade. Large, arched windows are visible, allowing natural light to illuminate the space. The ceiling is highly detailed with intricate carvings and a central octagonal medallion. The overall color palette is warm, with beige and cream tones, accented by the blue light from the windows.

AASCU American Association
of State Colleges and
Universities
Delivering America's Promise

2017 Public Policy Agenda

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From the President



I am pleased to present the American Association of State Colleges and Universities' (AASCU) 2017 *Public Policy Agenda*. This annual statement of principles and policy positions guides the association's advocacy efforts on current and developing issues at the federal and state levels.

Our policy agenda recommitments the association and its members to the national goal of promoting affordability by restoring the proper funding balance among the federal government, the states and families. For three decades, the financing trendline for public higher education has been the narrative of diminishing state support. This shortfall in public higher education support has been only partially recouped with tuition hikes financed through student borrowing. Not only has this trend put multiple cohorts of students in deeper debt, it has also significantly underfunded public institutions and undermined their efforts to serve their communities.

America's public institutions are gateways to opportunity for millions of students, but need adequate resources to perform that function well. Unlike institutions with sizable endowments and tuition-setting autonomy, state colleges and universities have an average endowment of only about \$5,700 per student, and a public obligation to contain tuition hikes. State support is therefore critical for keeping public institutions affordable. I am delighted to note that policymakers at all levels of government are increasingly recognizing public disinvestment as short-sighted and counter-productive to the national interest. It is heartening to report that multiple variants of AASCU's original proposal for a federal-state partnership have been introduced in Congress. We are pleased to see the development of a broad consensus that the key to affordability is a genuine federal-state partnership and investment—not disinvestment—in the public sector.

Our agenda is equally concerned about educational quality and forces that chip away at rigor, integrity and, ultimately, the meaning and value of academic credentials. Academic freedom and other essential traditions of higher education are critical

attributes of our institutions. We view academic integrity and the labor-market value of credentials as inextricably linked; we strongly support better quality assurance and greater accountability for all institutions. In addition, we support innovation and experimentation as legitimate methods of broadening access and containing costs, but in order to protect students and taxpayers, we urge great caution in the design of various experiments.

As always, access and diversity remain cornerstones of our collective mission. This commitment remains only partially fulfilled more than a half-century after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Higher Education Act. But our institutions have made enormous strides during the past 50 years, and they have helped create a more prosperous and just society. We will continue to advocate for greater inclusion of those historically under-represented in American higher education and oppose efforts to restrict the ability of institutions to serve all members of our society.

The *Public Policy Agenda* is the result of robust discussion within the AASCU Council of State Representatives—our policymaking body— and within the AASCU membership. I hope it will promote more detailed conversations at both the state and the federal levels, and lead to policies that further expand educational opportunities for all Americans.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Muriel A. Howard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Muriel A. Howard
President

State Colleges and Universities Educate and Prepare Millions of Students for America's Future

America's public institutions of higher education serve a unique role as the portal through which much of our future workforce emerges to face the economic landscape of the 21st century. Our purpose is to ensure that all students in America have access to high-quality, affordable college programs. Our programs collectively offer more than four million students the opportunity to achieve America's promise of an affordable, high-quality higher education. And, across the country, our institutions serve as indispensable venues for student access and civic engagement. In addition, as institutions are created by and are accountable to the states, they serve as catalysts for economic growth in their communities and as engines of global competitiveness for the nation. Accordingly, in light of the challenges that state colleges and universities face—shrinking budgets, campus violence and onerous regulations to name a few—we must persevere to create opportunities for all students who would otherwise have few options for realizing the American Dream.

To this end, AASCU presents its 2017 *Public Policy Agenda*, which underscores the most compelling policy issues affecting public higher education and promotes policies that help our institutions fulfill their unique role in educating America's workforce. Each issue has implications at the state, federal or both levels of policy and law. Accordingly, we provide our state and federal policymakers with specific actions items to consider moving forward.

Among the many issues impacting our campuses, conversations around the cost of higher education, campus sexual assault and how we measure the success of our institutions will be front and center heading into next year. AASCU has prioritized these three issues in its advocacy plans at the national level, as well as in our work with state-level partners. Our collective voice will be instrumental to our work going forward to ensure that our state colleges and universities are heard and heeded in the policy discussions to come, especially in light of deliberations for a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), the cornerstone legislation of America's higher education.

Affordability—The State/Federal Partnership

The top priority for the preservation of America's public higher education sector is for federal and state policymakers to ensure sufficient, consistent and sustained state funding in order to keep public colleges affordable for all students, especially those from modest economic circumstances. Virtually all other vexing higher education policy challenges in recent years stem from erosion of state support for public institutions, among them: educational attainment, institutional productivity, cost containment, financial aid, innovation in program delivery, and student persistence and completion. While all stakeholders play a role in financing a public college education—the federal government, states, institutions and students—the primary driver of higher tuition prices over the last several decades has been the state-to-student cost shift brought about by state disinvestment in public higher education. For several decades, per-student state support for public higher education has been diminishing, causing families to shoulder twice the share of costs they confronted 25 years ago. This trend was only accelerated by the economic downturn of the last several years.

One strategy for incentivizing states to increase their fiscal commitment toward public higher education is to better leverage the federal aid provided to students and campuses through “maintenance of effort” (MOE) provisions in federal spending legislation. MOE provisions establish a threshold of state financial support required in order to receive federal funding such provisions can provide powerful incentives for state policymakers to maintain their financial support for public colleges and universities, and mitigate tuition increases. At the same time, MOE provisions tend to punish states that have strived to fund higher education as generously as they could (by setting their past generosity as a high eligibility threshold), while they provide an easy path for significant improvement for states that massively reduced their funding levels.

AASCU has proposed an alternative approach to MOE provisions in its *Proposed Federal Matching Program to Stop the Privatization of Public Higher Education*, an approach that has received significant support in the policy community. This new federal-state funding compact would leverage considerable federal monies, include a non-arbitrary state funding threshold, and contain a sound distribution formula. This would incentivize state reinvestment in public higher education and mitigate the privatization of higher education.

While we support tuition-reduction proposals, we worry about unintended consequences of tuition-free proposals for public higher education. Tuition-free public higher education is an appealing concept in that it continues and expands the nation's earlier commitment to free universal K-12 education, but there are specific pitfalls—some of which have been cited in the discussion of state policies to promote tuition-free community college—that policymakers should heed as they proceed with any efforts in this direction.

First, it is important to explicitly recognize the need for joint and coordinated action on the part of both the federal and the state governments for any tuition-free proposals to be operationally and financially feasible since neither the federal nor the state governments can unilaterally assume the significant costs of eliminating tuition. As identified above, AASCU has proposed, and will advocate for, a specific mechanism—the federal-state matching grant program—through which public sector tuition costs can be reduced or eliminated.

Second, to maintain and improve the academic quality of public higher education, it is critical for public funding to make up any lost institutional tuition revenues. Three decades of state privatization has deprived public institutions of much-needed resources to keep up with their private counterparts, and what little additional expenditures have been possible in pursuit of quality have been financed with rising tuition revenues. There is a great risk of stagnation or even deterioration of quality efforts if the total amount of available federal and state support does not keep pace with the actual needs of public colleges and universities.

Third, the reduction or elimination of tuition should be independent of federal student aid eligibility, so as to enable low- and middle-income students to use existing aid programs to offset other components of their cost of attendance. Existing state tuition-free initiatives have, in contrast, been configured as “last-dollar” programs that allocate aid recipients' existing federal aid eligibility to tuition, and therefore, provide little or no benefit to students and families who need financial assistance the most.

Despite these misgivings, we stand ready to work with advocates of free college to develop policies that anticipate and address potential unintended consequences. Most notably, we believe that any free tuition model would only work through a federal-state matching mechanism like the one developed by AASCU.

Policy Actions

- Advocate for increased state investment in public higher education, and promote policies that align federal and state funding practices in support of greater affordability and improved access.
- Encourage and promote AASCU's state-federal matching program and other strategies for leveraging federal resources to incentivize state higher education funding.
- Support proposals that promote state-federal affordability partnerships by providing federal incentives for increased state funding of operating costs at public colleges and universities.

Combat Campus Sexual Assault

Campus safety remains a top priority for AASCU institutions. AASCU schools seek to create an environment that is open, safe and respectful for all students. Any piece of legislation that addresses campus sexual assault should be grounded in the following principles: prevention and education, respect for the wishes of the victim, proactive support to students and fairness for all who are involved in a given incident.

At the state level, over the last year, the number of state-level proposals seeking to address sexual violence on college campuses increased. Attention to this issue is critical and overdue, and AASCU welcomes conversations on how to improve campus and state approaches. Specifically, greater emphasis needs to be directed at solutions to help prevent sexual violence through education and outreach, including more attention to this issue in high schools. Campuses must also have support services in place for victims, and ensure that students are aware of these services. Lastly, AASCU remains committed to ensuring that campus disciplinary hearings on these matters are conducted in a fair, equitable and timely manner.

Policy Actions

- Support policies and programs emphasizing a renewed and sustained commitment to sexual violence prevention.
- Encourage state and system officials to review and update state laws and campus procedures related to sexual violence and ensure fair and equitable proceedings.
- Call on the Department of Education (ED) and Congress to consult with institutions of higher education in devising policies against sexual violence on campus.
- Ensure that federal legislation pertaining to campus disciplinary processes maintains a standard that is fair and

equitable to all parties.

- Oppose federal and state intrusions on academic practices, including transcript notations.
- Harmonize Clery Act data reporting requirements with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting standards.

Accountability and Accurately Measuring Success

AASCU supports the uniquely American tradition of quality assurance in higher education through non-governmental peer review, also known as accreditation. The logic behind deference in the HEA to accrediting bodies to evaluate institutional academic integrity is valid and should be preserved. However, a number of shortcomings in accreditation should be addressed by policymakers. First, this process is increasingly unable to assure the public that it is an effective mechanism of ensuring institutional integrity. Second, as federal demands on accreditation have become increasingly prescriptive, it has lost the original clarity and focus it enjoyed as a purely voluntary undertaking. Finally, accreditation has become too procedural and costly, and is perceived by many as stifling innovation.

AASCU supports the appropriate use of valid and reliable data to measure and promote accountability and institutional transparency. Clearly, graduation rates as defined under current law only count first-time full-time students, and therefore, under-report institutional and student success rates. The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) and the Student Achievement Measure (SAM) are examples of initiatives through which AASCU seeks to better inform all stakeholders of outcomes data, including graduation data for part-time and transfer students. The public higher education sector has, for many years, recognized the need for transparency and accountability for student outcomes. The VSA and SAM are two examples of how we have embraced our responsibility to be held accountable. AASCU strongly supports both measurements that provide the public a better picture of student progress and completion. We urge the federal government to consider both the VSA and SAM when crafting legislation and future databases around student outcomes.

AASCU recognizes institutional costs associated with federal data collection. The

association supports efforts to streamline data collection, apply cost-benefit and privacy principles to new data collection efforts, and reduce, where possible, the effect of data collection on individual privacy and institutional workloads.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on graduation rates as a measure of success, economic evidence strongly suggests that high-quality postsecondary education produces disproportionate direct and indirect socioeconomic benefits that accrue even for those who do not complete degrees. What's more, over the long term, the entire working life of each tracked cohort of students—some of the most abstract, least vocational academic disciplines counter-intuitively outperform the most labor-market-oriented vocational offerings of colleges and universities. These two factors—that completion may not be the best measure of individual or societal return-on-investment and that narrow short-term metrics can actually mask the true economic value of higher education—should both be carefully factored into any efforts to define institutional accountability or incentivize student behavior.

Policy Actions

- Work with all stakeholders in reviewing and revisiting accreditation's role within the regulatory triad: the federal government, states and accrediting bodies.
- Preserve the American tradition of political non-interference in academic judgments about programmatic quality.
- Reduce unnecessary costs by more tightly defining the accreditation process and its expected outcomes.
- Support the collection of the student data needed by the federal government for purposes specifically authorized by law.
- Balance benefits to be derived from the collection of new data with institutional compliance costs and individual privacy concerns.
- Support evidence-based regulations, oversight and enforcement initiatives to target problem institutions.
- Work with Congress and the Administration on devising reasonable financial aid policies to reward institutional accountability and effectiveness, including a properly configured risk-retention policy on student loans.
- Promote completion and graduation initiatives that support reasonable access and academic quality.

Strengthen Teacher Preparation

AASCU institutions are deeply committed to teacher education, preparing more than 50 percent of all teachers certified annually in the United States. The growing national

alarm about the rigor and performance of the P–12 system certainly concerns AASCU institutions as well. Too many students come to college unprepared and in need of remediation, and the problem is worsening. The shortcomings of our P–12 system contribute to the already daunting challenges that colleges and universities face with regard to cost, outcomes and accountability. It is unclear how federal policy on teacher preparation may improve these outcomes; however, in its October 2016 final rule, AASCU was alarmed by the administration’s approach to the topic. The regulation in question, while motivated by the right intentions, is so methodologically arbitrary and operationally unworkable that it would, if ever implemented, produce random and unfair governmental ratings of teacher preparation programs.

Policy Actions

- Continue to work with Congress and the Administration to chart a workable federal policy on teacher preparation.
- Urge policymakers to align teacher preparation requirements with the 2015 reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Advocate for withdrawal of the October 2016 regulations, pending new legislation through the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.
- Support the Teacher/Educator Quality Partnership Program.
- Encourage state efforts to develop appropriate licensure standards on the basis of valid, reliable and objective data, and align assessment of teacher preparation programs with those standards.
- Ensure that states evaluate all teacher preparation venues using the same standards.

State Colleges and Universities Will Continue to Address Other Issues at the State and Federal Levels

Reform Federal Need Analysis

AASCU supports reforming the federal need analysis formula to better target federal funds to the neediest students. Federal financial aid eligibility is calculated through the difference between the Cost of Attendance (COA) and the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). Each institution of higher education has a different COA, but the EFC is calculated through a federal formula. As a legislatively defined formula, the federal need analysis algorithm has been the target of intense lobbying by various

constituencies. Not surprisingly, it has been manipulated to favor particular financial resources over others. All home equity, for example, is excluded from consideration, as is the value of family farm and small business (defined as businesses with 99 or fewer employees) assets. Over the years, this near-total exclusion of assets has made the formula increasingly harsh in its assessment of wages, and it now quickly escalates the family's share of responsibility beyond the realistic means of most middle-income applicants. As such, the EFC has changed over several decades to become a less credible measure of low- and middle-income students' ability to pay for college. Consequently, the federal Pell Grant has lost some of its original focus on the neediest students at the same time as the majority of low- and middle-income students are left with no option but to borrow.

Policy Actions

- Revamp need analysis to more accurately ascertain families' ability to pay for college.
- Eliminate special treatment of different classes of assets and income to ensure equitable treatment of all applicants based on their financial circumstances.
- Improve the entire aid application process for access to student aid.

Increase Federal Grant Aid

The composition of federal student aid has shifted from grants to loans. Outstanding debt figures are alarming not only in aggregate, but also in individual terms. Only 2 percent of bachelor's degree recipients had cumulative loan balances of \$40,000 or more (2012 constant dollars) in 2003–04. By 2013–14, 20 percent of such borrowers were carrying that much in debt. Cost containment has rightly captured most of the attention as policymakers grapple with the educational debt phenomenon and its underlying causes, particularly tuition inflation driven by state disinvestment in public higher education. But while addressing escalating tuition through mechanisms like the AACSCU proposal for a state-federal partnership ought to be the primary imperative, a rebalancing of grants and loans for the neediest students is a parallel requirement for an effective national strategy for broad access. Properly income-targeted grant funding can and should, at least partially, level the playing field for the neediest students, most of whom would still need to work and borrow to fully cover the cost of their education. But public perception that student aid constitutes an unsustainable burden on the federal budget has led to calls for cost-saving reforms that too often limit access for at-risk students. Proposals leading up to the reauthorization of the HEA generally point in the direction of reforming student aid to direct spending to promote

institutional productivity, often equated with college completion. Various plans would tie institutional eligibility for federal aid to completion rates; would limit student eligibility to a predicted likelihood of completing a postsecondary program; and would federally define academic progress. These policies, if adopted, would severely undermine access and equal opportunity for the neediest students.

Policy Actions

- Strengthen and expand the Pell Grant program as the cornerstone of the federal government's commitment to eliminating need as a barrier to access to college.
- Increase grant aid and distribute it solely based on need.
- Oppose imposition of non-need-based criteria as pre-conditions or limitations on grant funding for students.
- Reinstate year-round Pell.
- Support and improve the current Ability-to-Benefit provisions in the federal student aid programs.
- Support campus-based programs and ensure their equitable distribution across institutions and student populations.

Keep Student Debt Manageable

While addressing college costs and restoring the historical federal affordability partnership with the states should be the top policy priority for Congress, federal policy must also address the costs and features of student loans. The quality of federal loan servicing, consumer protections built into the federal financing system, and the basic terms and conditions associated with student debt should all be reviewed and improved. On the repayment front, better borrower counseling and greater utilization of various income-based repayment (IBR) options is the way forward. Some have proposed that all borrowers be automatically enrolled in IBR, with opt-out possible for those who prefer standard amortization options. AASCU supports broader use of IBR, and is open to considering it as the universal or automatic repayment option, provided that borrowers retain the right to opt out. Forcing universal repayment through IBR appears reasonable today, when the IBR payment amounts are, in fact, affordable.

Policy Actions

- Set student (and parental) loan interest rates at a reasonable level.
- Simplify loan repayment options by consolidating duplicative and confusing choices.
- Improve loan servicing through better contracting practices.
- Allow borrowers with high-interest federal loans to refinance at lower rates.
- Require institutional certification for private-label educational loans.

- Reinstating dischargeability of private-label educational loans in bankruptcy.

Prepare Students for Gainful Employment

A large number of programs that currently participate in Title IV programs are eligible for federal dollars only if they “prepare students for gainful employment in a recognized occupation.” These include all programs offered by for-profit providers, and an even larger number of non-degree certificate programs offered by public and not-for-profit providers. AASCU recognizes the need for better accountability—based on actual labor-market outcomes—for these programs, regardless of the type and control of institutions offering them. Unfortunately, some programs of questionable quality that have been marketed as preparing students for successful careers have failed to deliver on their promises. Such programs rely on heavy advertising and high-pressure sales tactics, and often leave their former students—dropouts and graduates alike—with high levels of debt and little in terms of improved employment rates or wages. AASCU endorses a broad and multifaceted analysis of outcomes associated with such programs to ensure that they meet the policy goals of the underlying statute. As with all regulations, the Department of Education should be mindful of compliance burdens associated with its gainful employment rule, and attempt to minimize unnecessary costs for the vast majority of legitimate institutions that provide such programs.

Policy Actions

- Support legislation that more clearly articulates effective and targeted criteria for the regulation of the gainful employment provision of Title IV.
- Continue to work with the department to improve the regulations governing gainful employment.

The College Scorecard

The College Scorecard is an ED initiative to provide more consumer information to students and families. The inaugural version of the new scorecard, released in September 2015, can be seen as a step forward, but suffers a number of shortcomings. These include the provision of institutional—as opposed to programmatic—earnings of former students and continued use of the current definitions of graduation, which only counts first-time full-time students.

Policy Actions

- Work with the ED and the higher education community to ensure that the data system does not inadvertently stigmatize public institutions for their historical role as venues for broad access.

- Ensure that the data system properly contextualizes institutional performance against the backdrop of each institution's unique institutional and student characteristics.
- Work with the department to improve data definitions for key performance indicators, such as graduation and transfers, by expanding current IPEDS data to include Student Achievement Measure (SAM) data.

Provide Appropriate and Responsible Regulatory Relief

While a regulatory framework is the inevitable requirement for proper oversight and quality assurance, burdensome, duplicative, nongermane and ineffective regulations have proliferated over the years at an alarming rate. Compliance costs are increasing at a faster rate than nearly all other institutional expenditures, and now contribute substantially to cost escalation at the same time as they divert resources from more productive activities. The federal government would do well to comprehensively examine the regulatory burdens it has imposed on institutions with an eye toward greater efficiency.

Policy Actions

- Support ongoing regulatory review to streamline compliance burdens whenever possible.
- Encourage more targeted risk-based regulations.
- Support meaningful analysis of the benefits and costs associated with new regulations.

Promote Innovation in Higher Education

Innovation and continual improvement have been and remain important elements of the historical success for public colleges and universities. As the need for higher education grows much faster than traditional means of delivery, the higher education community must point the way forward through the development of innovative models of content delivery and credentialing. AASCU supports promising efforts to innovate and reinvent various aspects of higher education through new policies, programs and practices. It is, at times, difficult to distinguish breakthrough innovation from passing fads that may undermine the integrity of academic credentials. Therefore, it is essential for new and previously untested initiatives to be thoughtfully examined, and to balance the embrace of the new with a demand for evidence-based assurances of likely success. An important policy tool for proper testing and evaluation of new ideas is the experimental site provision of Title IV, which can be expanded to allow more regulatory flexibility for carefully accommodating innovative practices on a limited basis to determine their broader utility.

Policy Actions

- Support new and emerging forms of instructional and program delivery.
- Support Net Neutrality to ensure that institutions and students continue to have access to an open Internet.
- Support campus adoption of new and emerging technologies, particularly for students with special needs.
- Support experimentation with competency-based education.
- Support broader institutional recognition of faculty-approved academic credits for prior-learning assessment.
- Support properly configured high-quality dual enrollment and early college high school programs.
- Ensure that untested innovations are properly studied before gaining eligibility for federal funding, and support safeguards for students and taxpayers.

Support Immigration Reform and International Education

An estimated 11.5 million people in the United States—individuals and families who work and contribute to the nation’s economy and are quite unlikely to collectively disappear—are undocumented. Many of the undocumented were brought into the U.S. as children, and know no other homeland than this country. This population certainly deserves immediate access to higher education. AASCU supports the passage of state and federal DREAM Acts to enable such students to participate in higher education and map out a strategy for full citizenship. In addition, states should have the full authority to set tuition policy for undocumented students. Lastly, the number of H1-B visas and green cards should be expanded.

Policy Actions

- Support comprehensive immigration reform.
- Support continuation of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), while Congress deliberates legislative solutions.
- Support the federal DREAM Act legislation and passage of state-level DREAM Acts.
- Support expansion of H1-B Visas.
- Advocate for international exchange programs and reasonable international student and scholar visa policies.

Support Higher Education in Tax Policy

The tax code has been a strategic tool for middle-income families to address costs associated with a college education. While tax policy does not reduce college costs at the outset, it does provide assistance to students and families on a retroactive basis. As such, AASCU strongly supports reform of multiple current tax credits and tuition deductions that involve tax benefits for both students and institutions.

Policy Actions

- Make permanent, simplify and improve the American Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Eliminate tax liability on loan forgiveness programs.
- Preserve and expand student loan tax deductions.
- Expand employer-provided educational assistance benefits.

Improve Educational Opportunities for Veterans and Servicemembers

AASCU and its institutions have had a decades-long tradition of serving the educational needs of veterans and active-duty members of the Armed Forces. This partnership is all the more needed now, as the Armed Forces downsize and begin the orderly transition of servicemembers to productive and fulfilling civilian lives. AASCU is committed to working with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), Education (ED), and Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure optimal access and successful educational outcomes for servicemembers and veterans.

Policy Actions

- Support the continuation and proper funding of the DoD Tuition Assistance Program.
- Ensure that active-duty servicemembers and veterans continue to have access to educational programs and credentials that are broadly recognized, and have value within the civilian sector.
- Support the maintenance and improvement of the GI Bill educational benefits.
- Improve institutional accountability and oversight for institutional participation in GI Bill educational benefits.
- Improve coordination among the agencies with regard to the unique needs of servicemembers and veterans.
- Support Executive Order 13607—Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.

Intercollegiate Athletics

Student athletes play a valuable and important role in the day to day life of a higher education institution. In today's changing sports domain, it is important that student athletes are provided with adequate support and mentoring to prepare them for life inside and outside of the sports world. This includes proper health insurance, tutoring and other athlete support services. It is also imperative that our student athletes play an active role in efforts to combat campus sexual assault.

Policy Actions

- AASCU staff will monitor legislative actions that could lead to federal or state legislation regarding Intercollegiate Athletics.
- AASCU believes that any federal role in NCAA reform should be limited and that NCAA reform should come from within the NCAA member institutions. Rules that promote the student-athlete model of amateurism, that call for a wide array of athletic participation opportunities, and that seek to reflect and reinforce the role of athletics within the educational mission, should be encouraged and reinforced.

Competitiveness

Public colleges and universities play a central role in expanding the nation's human capital and boosting our competitive advantage in today's global marketplace. This is accomplished, in part, by providing quality preparation for the majority of the nation's P-12 teachers. It is also accomplished by producing graduates in a variety of fields who have the knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of business, nonprofit and public sector employers. This includes health care workers, scientists and engineers, business leaders, and others essential to the nation's economy.

AASCU believes that the federal government must play an essential role in supporting institutional efforts to meet national, state and local workforce needs. The federal government can provide incentives for individuals to enter high-demand fields and to work in hard-to-staff areas, support scientific research and education, and streamline efforts to attract international talent. State and local governments can also support institutional efforts to educate teachers, health care workers, scientists and engineers, and others. The nation's economic competitiveness, security and prosperity depend in large measure on how well the nation's colleges prepare citizens for a knowledge-based economy.

Policy Actions

Rural Institutions

- Provide appropriations for the Rural Development Grants for Rural Colleges and Universities program. These grants encourage partnerships between rural colleges and universities and local entities that promote greater access to college for rural high school students, increase the number of adults in rural communities with a bachelor's degree or higher, enhance training opportunities, and stimulate technological innovation.
- Support continued funding for rural broadband enhancements that provide greater access to postsecondary education.

Urban Institutions

- Support efforts to reauthorize, authorize and fund programs that encourage research and partnerships between urban and metropolitan anchor institutions and their communities. These efforts are designed to promote economic and workforce development, community revitalization, teacher recruitment, and greater access to college for urban high school students.

STEM Research and Workforce Preparation

- Increase funding for the programs in the America COMPETES Act and support specific funding designations to public four-year institutions for research and workforce development in energy and sustainability fields, including the Professional Science Masters program.
- Recognize the contributions of each sector of higher education in the strengthening of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields. The resources of the entire community must be tapped when creating, funding and implementing STEM programs that educate future scientists, engineers and mathematicians, as well as create research opportunities for students studying in the STEM fields.
- Support and improve basic and applied scientific research and education activities for undergraduate programs in order to complement established graduate and research programming.
- Advocate for programs that recruit and support traditionally underrepresented populations into STEM fields, such as students of color, low-income students and women.
- Support the creation of institutional incentives (e.g., in performance-based funding) to graduate students in fields associated with high-need jobs identified by state workforce service agencies.

Federal Research and Development

- Continue support for undergraduate research and mentoring in STEM fields, and for STEM pipeline programs promoting P-20 partnerships and articulation agreements.
- Support programs that meaningfully engage students in applied research that addresses the nation's innovation plans for healthcare, energy and national security.
- Support technology transfer and workforce training programs that link institutions of higher education with the manufacturing sector and incentivize corporate and private sector investment in these partnerships.
- Fund the development and renovation of laboratory facilities and support equipment acquisition that will promote innovative, collaborative scientific and technical research at all institutions of higher education.

Sustainability and Energy Efficiency

- Expand federal efforts to support institutions of higher education in improving efficiency in the physical plant, campus transportation, and other institutional operations.
- Advocate for grant funding at the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other federal agencies that support university research in sustainability, renewable energy and green technology.

Predictable State Funding Policies are Critical to Ensuring College Access, Equity and Quality

There are both quantitative and qualitative dimensions to the provision by states of operating monies for public colleges and universities. While equitable, sufficient and predictable state funding is requisite to mitigating the escalation of tuition prices, state policymakers should also be cognizant of other fiscal and governance policies that shape college access, affordability and academic quality. State fiscal policies should align within the context of institutional and system governance and autonomy, as they involve issues of admissions, tuition and financial aid policy. State policymakers should also be aware of funding policies that are regressive in nature, such as those often inherent to state lottery-funded scholarship programs.

Policy Action

- Encourage state policymakers to recognize issues of institutional/system governance, equity and academic quality in all policies associated with the state role in higher education financing.

Equitable and Mission-Focused State Performance-Based Funding Systems Can Enhance Understanding of Student and Institutional Outcomes

Legislation that links state higher education appropriations to select institutional outcomes, commonly known as performance-based funding (PBF), is an increasingly popular financing policy mechanism. PBF programs should be a collaborative effort among key stakeholders to build an incentive structure that respects and reinforces campus missions; encourages campuses to recruit, retain and graduate low-income and nontraditional students; and remains compatible with state higher education goals. However, there is limited research on the effectiveness new performance-based funding systems, and evaluations of older systems have not shown considerable improvements in student outcomes.

Policy Actions

- Support further research on existing state funding systems.
- Involve public comprehensive university leaders in system design.

State and Institutional Investment in Need-Based Student Aid Programs for Low-Income Students Improves Access

The states' main responsibility in higher education is to provide operating support

for public colleges and universities in order to lower the cost of attendance, a responsibility that many states have not carried out well. One unfortunate consequence of the privatization process of the past 30 years is that too many lower-income families confront unmet financial need at public institutions, even after factoring in federal grants and student loans. Tightly income-targeted state and institutional grant programs can be an important tool in addressing the gap between the resources available to such families and public college costs.

State student aid programs were originally designed to assist low-income students, but have shifted to emphasize academic merit over financial need. The critical policy difference between the two types of aid is that need-based aid, if properly devised, actually increases the number of students who can participate in higher education because they would otherwise be unable to afford college costs.

At the institutional level, need-based financial aid, derived from sources of private, philanthropic support and tuition revenues, further enhances college affordability for millions of students attending public institutions. Public institutions should be allowed discretion to devise need-based aid programs that broaden access for low-income families.

Policy Actions

- Promote increased state investment in tightly income-targeted need-based student aid programs.
- Support need-based state grant programs that promote access for lower-income students.
- Oppose state policies that restrict public institutions' ability to provide need-based financial aid.

Preserve Institutional Autonomy of Public Institutions

As public institutions, AASCU members respect and understand the public's right to exercise oversight and demand accountability from them in exchange for their support. In the interest of preserving the integrity of the credentials granted by public institutions, however, it is critical that policymakers allow public colleges to exercise their best academic judgment on educational matters. Political interference with academic freedom and institutional autonomy would inevitably undermine public institutions and diminish the value and credibility of their credentials.

Policy Actions

- Preserve and protect academic freedom and institutional autonomy at public institutions.
- Oppose state efforts to politically micromanage academic decisions regarding admissions criteria, the faculty, curriculum, and instruction at public institutions.
- Oppose political interference with research and the academic peer-review process.

Strong Alignment of P-12 and College Curriculum is Critical to Student Success

AASCU supports high academic standards that prepare students for college and career such as the Common Core State Standards. Students' academic preparedness for the rigors of college-level work is fundamental to their success in higher education. A strong high school curriculum aligned with college standards is integral to student success and should be available to all students. AASCU strongly endorses high standards in science, mathematics and English language arts for grades P-12. We call on states to facilitate the timely implementation of the Common Core, develop sound assessment mechanisms, and ensure collaboration among stakeholders in the P-16 continuum.

Policy Action

- Encourage strong state engagement with P-12 and higher education in the implementation and assessment of the Common Core State Standards or equally rigorous state standards.

State Role in Fostering Diversity

A strong middle-class has long been viewed as the bedrock of American democracy. Particularly in the aftermath of the recent recession, however, many families find themselves falling behind and are gravely concerned that they may be unable to provide their children with the higher education opportunities they will need to succeed in the nation's increasingly knowledge-based economy. The forces of economic inequality disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities and at-risk students. Colleges and universities are our society's last best chance at a significant intervention with such students, and it is critical that institutions, particularly public colleges, be allowed to do what they can to recruit and educate them. Not only does such outreach benefit the individual students in question, campus diversity benefits the entire student body by exposing students to experiences and perspectives they would otherwise not encounter. Students learn from each other by exploring their differences, not their similarities, and it is only by embracing campus diversity that

institutions can fully realize their potential for educational excellence.

Policy Actions

- Oppose political interference with constitutionally valid campus admissions practices intended to promote diversity.
- Educate policymakers and the public about the educational value of campus diversity in preparing students to live and work in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

Keep Authority to Establish Campus Security and Weapons Policy with College Officials and Governing Boards

AASCU remains disappointed over continued attempts by state lawmakers to strip college presidents and public university governing boards of their authority to regulate weapons on campus. Nearly every higher education and law enforcement stakeholder group has steadfastly opposed legislation that allows individuals to carry weapons on campus.

Policy Action

- Oppose state legislation that seeks to strip institutional and/or system authority over campus weapons policy.

Recommit to the States' Consumer Protection Function within Higher Education's Regulatory Triad—States, Accreditors, and the Federal Government.

State governments serve as pivotal consumer protection in higher education. Over the past several years, troubling allegations of false or misleading enrollment, completion, and job placement rates at for-profit colleges have led to a crackdown of this industry by state attorneys general. Nevertheless, the state regulatory agencies charged with monitoring this industry are often understaffed and states usually have few incentives to invest in regulatory oversight because most loans and grants are derived from federal student aid.

Policy Actions

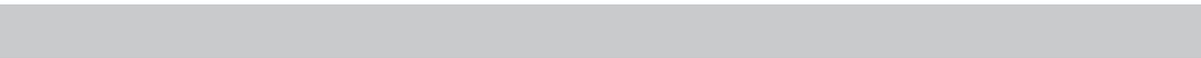
- Clarify the responsibilities of state governments in relation to other members of the regulatory triad.
- Support strong state oversight of for-profit colleges, including adequate staffing, expertise and resources of state regulatory agencies
- Advocate for state regulations that provide an adequate and reliable mechanism for oversight of current and emerging practices by for-profit providers.

Promoting Civic Engagement is a Critical Educational Responsibility of Colleges and Universities

The undergraduate experience involves much more than gaining knowledge and training in a given discipline. It also entails inculcating in students a sense of civic responsibility and active community engagement. Across the U.S., state colleges and universities seek to embed learning opportunities that prepare students to be the informed, engaged citizens our communities need. AASCU works with a variety of institutions to promote civic learning and engagement through initiatives such as the American Democracy Project. One of the foundations of a vibrant democracy is participation in the electoral process. States and institutions should facilitate college students' ability to vote in order to foster a lifelong commitment to engaging in the policy process at the local, state and federal level.

Policy Actions

- Encourage AASCU institutions to facilitate their students' participation in the elections process to the maximum extent possible.
- Oppose state legislative interventions that unnecessarily and inappropriately limit college students' ability to vote.





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