As president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), I am pleased to present the association’s 2018 Public Policy Agenda. This annual statement of principles and policy positions guides AASCU’s advocacy efforts on current and developing issues at the federal and state levels.

Our policy agenda recommits the association and its members to the national goal of promoting affordability by restoring the proper 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. America’s public institutions of higher education are gateways to opportunity for millions of students and serve as the nation’s main engines of social and economic mobility. But they need adequate resources to perform these functions well.

We are pleased to see that policymakers increasingly recognize public disinvestment as shortsighted and counterproductive to the national interest, and that the broad consensus emerging is that the key to affordability is a carefully configured federal-state partnership to support high-quality, affordable public colleges and universities.

We remain concerned about educational quality and the forces that may chip away at academic freedom, rigor, integrity and, ultimately, the meaning and value of academic credentials.

We view academic integrity and the labor market value of credentials as inextricably linked and we strongly support better quality assurance and greater accountability for all institutions.

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 have helped create a more prosperous and just society. We will continue to advocate for greater inclusion of those historically underrepresented 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 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.

Mildred García, Ed.D.
President
STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE ENGINES OF MOBILITY FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

America’s public institutions of higher education serve a unique role as the portal through which so many of our citizens and much of our future workforce gain the skills they need to face the economic challenges of the 21st century. Our programs 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 access and civic engagement. In addition, as institutions created by and accountable to the states, they serve as catalysts for economic growth in their communities and as engines of global competitiveness for the nation. In light of the challenges that state colleges and universities face—shrinking budgets, increased demand for accessible and affordable postsecondary education, and onerous regulations, to name a few—we must persevere to create opportunities for all students who would otherwise have few real options for realizing the American Dream.

State Colleges and Universities Will Lead on Issues of Affordability, Campus Climate and Quality Assurance. Among the many issues impacting our campuses, conversations around the cost and quality of a higher education, fostering a safe and supportive campus environment for all students, and how we measure the success of our schools 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 American higher education.
ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY AND VALUE

- Support federal policies that promote adequate state support for public institutions;
- Increase federal grant aid;
- Keep student debt manageable;
- Protect income-based repayment and loan forgiveness options;
- Maintain tax provisions that support higher education;
- Eliminate tax liability on loan forgiveness programs;
- Preserve and expand student loan tax deductions;
- Expand employer-provided educational assistance benefits;
- Advocate for increased state investment in public higher education, and promote policies that align federal and state practices in support of greater affordability and improved access;
- Encourage and promote AASCU’s proposed 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;
- 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; and
- Support evidence-based regulations, oversight and enforcement initiatives to target problem institutions.
CAMPUS CLIMATE: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- 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 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 transcription;
- Harmonize Clery Act data reporting requirements with the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reporting standards;
- Oppose legislation that prevents campuses from exercising judicious discretion regarding events and scheduling choices that may lead to violence;
- Oppose state legislation that seeks to strip institutional and/or system authority over campus weapons policy;
- Promote free exchange of ideas to the maximum extent possible;
- Sponsor and support activities that educate the campus community about the value and central importance of academic freedom and open discourse;
- Ensure and promote broad intellectual engagement;
- Oppose micromanagement of constitutional campus operations through new “free speech” laws;
- 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;
- Defend the constitutionality of campus diversity efforts;
- Support outreach and targeted support programs for underserved populations;
CAMPUS CLIMATE: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Defend the legality of university admissions, financial aid, and faculty appointment policies intended to promote diversity;
- Support minority-serving institutions;
- Promote policies that maximize an inclusive campus environment for all students, faculty and staff;
- 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 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;
- Support the legislation to create a pathway for legalization for individuals brought to the U.S. as children;
- Advocate for international exchange programs and reasonable international student and scholar visa policies; and
- Oppose inappropriate restrictions on travel to the U.S. by international students and scholars.
QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;
- Work with all stakeholders in reviewing and revisiting accreditation’s role within the 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;
- 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;
- 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;
QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

- 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;

- 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;

- 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;
QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

- 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;
- 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;
- 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;

- 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;
- 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; and
- Ensure that states evaluate all teacher preparation venues using the same standards.
Bachelor’s Degrees Conferred at AASCU Institutions as a Percentage of U.S. Totals

Agriculture: 28%  
Business: 30%  
Computer and Information Sciences: 26%  
Education: 45%

English: 36%  
Foreign Languages: 23%  
Health Professions: 31%  
Mathematics: 27%

Institutions and Students

40% of all U.S. HBCUs are AASCU Institutions  
27% Students enrolled in the DoD Tuition Assistance Program

26% Students receiving Post 9/11 GI benefits
IMPORTANT NOTE: The members listed on this map are current as of February 14, 2018. Check out aascu.org/members/by-state-and-territory/ for the most recent list.
AASCU’s membership of more than 400 public colleges and universities is found throughout the United States, Guam and the Virgin Islands. We range in size from 1,000 students to 44,000. We are found in the inner city, in suburbs, towns and cities, and in remote rural America. We include campuses with extensive offerings in law, medicine and doctoral education—as well as campuses offering associate degrees to complement baccalaureate studies. We are both residential and commuter, and offer online degrees as well. Yet common to virtually every member institution are three qualities that define its work and characterize our common commitments.

♦ We are institutions of access and opportunity. We believe that the American promise should be real for all Americans, and that belief shapes our commitment to access, affordability and educational opportunity, and in the process strengthens American democracy for all citizens.

♦ We are student-centered institutions. We place the student at the heart of our enterprise, enhancing the learning environment and student achievement not only through teaching and advising, but also through our research and public service activities.

♦ We are “stewards of place.” We engage faculty, staff and students with the communities and regions we serve—helping to advance public education, economic development and the quality of life for all with whom we live and who support our work. We affirm that America’s promise extends not only to those who come to the campus but to all our neighbors.

We believe that through this stewardship and through our commitments to access and opportunity and to our students, public colleges and universities effectively and accountably deliver America’s promise. In so doing we honor and fulfill the public trust.