From the President

I am pleased to present the American Association of State Colleges and Universities’ 2015 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.

America’s public colleges and universities continue to play a central role in providing access to quality higher education for the vast majority of students. Yet, even as the public and policymakers are becoming increasingly concerned about affordability and the student debt crisis, the 30-year trend of privatization of public higher education—and the shifting of costs from the states to students—continues unabated.

Last year, AASCU initiated a major effort to mitigate and reverse this disturbing trend through a proposal for a federal matching grant program to incentivize greater state investment in affordable public higher education, the Federal-State College Affordability Partnership. I am delighted to report that in the short year since I first described it in last year’s Public Policy Agenda, our proposal has been adopted in the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee’s bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965. In addition, the Obama Administration and the Washington policy community have also coalesced around the central vision of our proposal, namely, that the only national solution to the higher education affordability crisis is through incentivizing states to once again contribute their fair share.

Another important AASCU accomplishment worth noting is the Senate bill’s authorization of a “student unit-record” system, a longstanding association priority, with very strong privacy protections that we specifically recommended. We believe the proposed framework will generate far more accurate data about institutional performance while at the same time providing the strongest privacy protections for students.

These important provisions capture the essence of the challenges facing public institutions: sufficient resources to do the job, and evidence that those resources are used in a wise and accountable manner. In this Public Policy Agenda, as always,
AASCU fully embraces both of these challenges as pillars of proper policy. We will continue to advocate for proper funding of higher education and for proper accountability for those funds.

The shifting political landscape in Washington and the states will surely complicate the policy process, but we believe that higher education access and opportunity are values that transcend partisan differences. We are committed to working constructively with the administration and Congress in Washington, and with policymakers in state capitals, to sustain America’s promise of a better future for all through improved educational opportunities.

The 2015 Public Policy Agenda will serve as a point of reference for this effort. We hope that this written framework will assist our members, other interested organizations, as well as federal and state policymakers in navigating the challenges ahead. The association and its members are committed to ensuring that the public purpose of public higher education is served.

Muriel A. Howard
President
Public Colleges and Universities are Essential Partners in Meeting State Needs and Objectives

America’s state colleges and universities serve a critical role as the linchpin of the nation’s human capital development strategy. Not only are they the main venue for broad and affordable access to high quality higher education for some four million students, they also serve as engines of civic engagement and economic growth for their communities and the nation. Public colleges and universities are unique institutions of higher education in that they balance their primary mission, the advancement of learning, with specific service obligations to the citizens of their respective states. The pursuit of academic excellence while remaining academically and financially accessible are defining characteristics of state colleges and universities. Public institutions are gateways to educational opportunity and economic success for all Americans, and serve as proud and indispensable venues for minority access and success. The following policy recommendations represent the framework within which public institutions can successfully serve the important functions that they are assigned in a financially sustainable and publicly accountable manner. Policymakers should consider public colleges and universities integral partners on state initiatives across the public policy spectrum, including P-12 education, economic development, health care, environmental concerns and social challenges.

The State Role

Sufficient and Sustained State Funding Remains the Central Policy Priority for Public Higher Education

The top priority for American public higher education leaders today must be a relentless call for states to provide sufficient, consistent and sustained state funding in order to keep college affordable for all students, especially those from modest economic circumstances. The majority of all other higher education policy issues in recent years stems from changes in college affordability, 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 borne out of state disinvestment in public higher education. For several decades, per-student state support for public higher education has eroded, a trend accelerated by the economic downturn of the last several years.

Policy Action:
■ 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.

Federal Leveraging of State Higher Education Funding Can Improve College Affordability
One strategy for incentivizing states to increase their fiscal commitment toward public higher education (collectively $76 billion) is to better leverage the $170 billion in 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. A new federal-state funding compact must leverage considerable federal monies, include a non-arbitrary state funding threshold, and contain a sound distribution formula.

Policy Actions:
■ Encourage and promote 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.

Sound 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 are 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 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.

**Policy Action:**
- Support state funding systems that involve public comprehensive university leaders in system design and which recognize and reward outcomes consistent with the missions of these institutions.

**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. Merit-based aid, in contrast, lessens out-of-pocket costs for students who likely would have participated in college anyway. In terms of net output, therefore, merit-based state student grant aid programs are a less efficient use of scarce state resources than need-based aid. They are also invariably regressive in that they benefit students from wealthier backgrounds at the expense of those from lower-income households.

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.

Funding Gimmicks Like “Pay It Forward,” “$10,000 College Degrees,” and Various Unrealistic “Free College Proposals” Are Backdoor Ways of Accelerating the Privatization of Public Higher Education

In recent months, a simplistic proposal to fund “tuition-free” public higher education through a flat tax on students’ future earnings (“Pay It Forward”) has gained visibility as a potential solution to college affordability. In reality, Pay It Forward is an actuarially unsound gimmick to shift the full cost of public higher education from one generation of students to the next, and, if adopted, would create a path of least resistance for the withdrawal of state funding at public institutions. Likewise, some outside interest groups have suggested facile alternatives to teaching that they contend will drive the cost of baccalaureate degrees to $10,000. AASCU is committed to experimenting with all credible proposals to cut college costs and expedite time-to-degree for students, but is equally as committed to academic quality and views unrealistic proposals for cost containment as another backdoor effort to dismantle public institutions.
Policy Actions:
- Discourage “Pay It Forward” legislative proposals as legitimate public higher education funding models.
- Oppose unrealistic “reform” proposals that represent an indirect attempt at disinvesting state funding of public colleges and universities or that diminish academic quality at these institutions.

States Should Maintain Oversight in the Authorization of Online Postsecondary Programs
AASCU endorses strong accountability measures for all postsecondary educational providers. We fully support the states’ obligation and right to exercise oversight of online and other distance-based courses and programs delivered to citizens within their state jurisdictions. We support the engagement of states in orchestrating the authorization of postsecondary programs, working in either consortia or compact arrangements.

Policy Action:
- Support collaborative efforts to address federal regulations involving “state authorization” of online programs.

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-16 and College Curriculum is Critical to Student Success
AASCU supports 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 the Common Core State Standards in 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.

**Policy Action:**

- Oppose political interference with constitutionally valid campus admissions practices intended to promote diversity.

### 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 concealed weapons on campus. Nearly every higher education and law enforcement
stakeholder group has steadfastly opposed legislation that allows individuals to carry concealed weapons on campus.

Policy Action:

- Oppose state legislation that seeks to strip institutional and/or system authority to regulate concealed weapons on campus.

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

The undergraduate experience involves much more than gaining expertise 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.
The Federal Role

The federal government has historically played a significant, but secondary, role in higher education finance through bridging the gap between college prices and family means. Since the 1980s, as many workers’ real incomes have stagnated and inflation-adjusted college costs have escalated, the gap between American families’ ability to pay and college costs has widened to unprecedented levels. The shortfall between resources available to students and college costs is identified through a federally-defined need analysis that is intended to equitably divide responsibility for the total cost of attending college among students, families, states, the federal government and other stakeholders. Federal student aid, in the form of grants, loans and work-study, is then made available—based on federal budgetary choices—to fill the gap. Over the past three decades, despite significant funding increases on the part of the federal government, the federal aid package has shifted decisively in the direction of loans and debt-financing of higher education. This trend, in turn, has created a national educational debt crisis, with an outstanding volume that now exceeds $1 trillion. As public concern about educational debt has grown, policymakers are attempting to devise financing alternatives. The following broad areas of federal policy would be key components of any overhaul of federal student aid programs.

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. EFC has changed over several decades to become a less credible measure of students’ ability to pay for college. Consequently, the federal Pell Grant has lost some of its original focus on the neediest students, leaving too many low-income students having to borrow for their education and dissuading many from completing college.

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.
**Increase Federal Grant Aid**

The composition of federal student aid has shifted from grants to loans. While cost-containment has captured most of the attention as a policy remedy to stop this trend, only a re-balancing of grants and loans can truly reverse it. 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 created an echo chamber calling for cost-saving reforms that too often limit access for at-risk students. Proposals leading up to the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) generally point in the direction of “reforming” student aid to direct its finite—and allegedly unsustainable—spending to produce better outcomes, often mechanically 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:**
- 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
- Reinstate Ability-to-Benefit Eligibility for Pell

**Keep Student Debt Manageable**

To properly address growing concerns about college affordability and the educational debt crisis, federal policy must reform student and family borrowing policies and reconsider terms and conditions associated with student debt. Universal Income-Based Repayment (IBR) is the way forward, with opt-out possible for those who prefer standard amortization options. The federal government has transformed student debt from a form of subsidized assistance into a profitable federal financing activity, the net revenues from which exceeded all federal student aid spending last year.

The Department of Education lends more than $100 billion a year in federal loan capital to students and parents for college attendance, and outstanding federal student
loan debt exceeds $700 billion. These loans are exceptionally lucrative because they carry interest rates far above what it costs the federal government to fund and administer them. In addition, student loans represent a unique and highly collectible lending activity because they are not dischargeable in bankruptcy and the federal government can force repayment through wage garnishment, tax refund and social security intercepts, and debt collection agents. The profitability of student loans and the ease of collecting on them have ended willful defaults, or federal losses due to interest- or credit-risk.

**Policy Actions:**
- Reduce student (and parental) loan interest rates to better reflect program costs and eliminate excess profits for the federal government.
- Eliminate upfront fees for educational loans.
- Simplify loan repayment options by consolidating duplicative and confusing choices.
- Improve loan servicing through better contracting practices.
- Create a well-configured income-based repayment system as the main repayment path for borrowers, but allow borrowers to opt out in favor of standard amortization alternatives.
- Eliminate the statutory definition of default that is a holdover from the guaranteed student loan program, and clarify that federal student loans remain collectible until paid off, discharged or forgiven.
- Modify PLUS eligibility criteria to ensure that minor blemishes do not render financially responsible parents ineligible to borrow.
- Allow borrowers with high-interest federal loans to refinance at lower current rates.
- Require institutional certification for private-label educational loans.
- Reinstate 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 virtually 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. For too long, programs of questionable quality have been marketed by shoddy providers as “preparing students for successful careers.” These programs typically rely on heavy advertising and high-pressure sales tactics, and often leave their former students—drop-outs and
graduates alike—with high levels of debt and little to show for it in terms of improved employment rates or wages. AASCU endorses a broad and multi-faceted 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.

**Improve and Protect Accreditation**

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 continues to be valid and should be preserved. However, a number of shortcomings in accreditation should be addressed by policymakers. 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 more prescriptive, it has lost the original clarity and focus it enjoyed as a purely voluntary undertaking. Finally, accreditation has become too procedural and too costly, and is perceived by many as stifling innovation.

**Policy Actions:**

- Work collaboratively with all stakeholders in reviewing and revisiting accreditation’s role within the triad: the federal government, states and accrediting bodies.
- Strengthen accreditation by clarifying its role in establishing institutional eligibility for Title IV.
- 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.

**Postsecondary Institution Ratings System (PIRS)**

President Obama has charged the Department of Education with a major new initiative to “rate” postsecondary institutions. Devising a ratings system that can equitably and effectively capture the relevant attributes of a large and varied universe of legitimate postsecondary institutions serving a diverse population of students will be a daunting task. By its very nature, a ratings system must simplify inherently complex qualities and measures it factors into account, and is thus susceptible to distortions that may
prove prejudicial or problematic. Many public institutions are concerned that a disproportionate focus on one set of generally desirable attributes (high graduate salaries, for example) may work at cross purposes to their mission of preparing their students for such critically important professions as teaching, social work or public service. To its credit, the department has repeatedly acknowledged the tension between the many diverse—and, at times, competing—goals associated with higher education, and it has assured the community that it intends to strike a reasonable balance.

**Policy Actions:**
- Work with the Department of Education and the higher education community to ensure that any ratings system does not penalize public institutions for their historical role as venues for broad access.
- Ensure that any ratings system properly recognizes the diversity of institutional and student characteristics.
- Oppose any ratings system based on arbitrary or highly subjective value judgments about outcomes.

**Support Accountability and College Completion**
AASCU endorses and welcomes the national conversation on accountability in higher education. As public institutions, accountability for state support is an ingrained feature of AASCU institutions; the same expectation to federal dollars is not intuitively unreasonable. AASCU has already launched several important initiatives in support of greater institutional transparency and accountability, most notably the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), co-sponsored by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. AASCU is committed to engaging and collaborating with other accountability efforts, particularly the Obama administration’s proposed college ratings and revised college scorecard initiatives. The administration has outlined a conceptual approach to defining outcomes and accountability that merits serious investigation and consideration, although any final verdict on its utility will depend on how administration officials resolve key details.

While policy complexities of defining the purely financial metric of “gainful employment” have proven challenging, proper accountability definitions for academic programs, whose value has generally been viewed as transcending purely economic considerations, are even more complicated. Graduation rates, as defined under current law, are inadequate measures of institutional success because they fail to capture transfers and many part-time students. Furthermore, economic evidence strongly
suggests that high-quality postsecondary education produces tremendous direct and indirect socio-economic benefits that accrue even to 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:
- Support and assist with federal accountability initiatives.
- Modify the current 90-10 rule to limit funds derived from all federal educational programs, including federal student aid, GI Bill benefits and Tuition Assistance for servicemembers, to no more than 85 percent of institutional revenues.
- Prohibit the use of federal funds for institutional marketing and recruitment purposes.
- Support risk-based regulations, oversight and enforcement initiatives to target problem institutions.
- Collaborate with Congress and the administration on devising reasonable financial aid policies to reward institutional accountability and effectiveness.
- Promote completion and graduation, but not at the expense of reasonable access or academic quality.
- Protect students from punitive policies that unfairly limit their access to higher education.
- Promote diversity in higher education and oppose policies that have a disparate impact on minority and underserved populations.
- Support the First in the World Program to promote greater affordability and better postsecondary outcomes.

Provide Appropriate and Responsible Regulatory Relief
While a regulatory framework is the inevitable requirement for proper oversight and quality assurance, burdensome, duplicative, non-germane 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 mightily 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.

Support Appropriate Data Reporting
AASCU believes in the appropriate use of valid and reliable data to support accountability, institutional transparency, and public disclosures for federal and state financial aid programs. In addition, the association endorses the collection, analysis and disclosure of outcomes data as a means of providing institutional transparency and ensuring public accountability for federal and state financial aid programs. 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. 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.

Policy Actions:
- Support the collection of 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.
- To the extent practicable, support the adoption of Fair Information Practices principles in all data systems containing personally identifiable information.

Promote Innovation in Higher Education
Innovation and continual improvement have been and remain important elements of their 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 dual enrollment and early college high school programs.

Enhance Campus Safety

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 tackles campus sexual assault should be grounded in the following principles: respect for the wishes of the victim, proactive support to students, and fairness for all who are involved in a given incident. In addition, draft legislation should maintain the longstanding educational nature of the of the university disciplinary system.

Support Immigration Reform

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 latter group 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. Further, the number of H1-B visas and green cards should be expanded.

**Policy Actions:**
- Support comprehensive immigration reform.
- Support the federal DREAM Act legislation and passage of state-level DREAM Acts.
- Support expansion of H1-B Visas.

**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.
- Expand student loan tax deductions.
- Expand employer-provided educational assistance benefits.

**Strengthen Teacher Preparation**

AASCU institutions, many of which were originally founded as normal schools, are deeply committed to teacher education, preparing more than 50 percent of all teachers certified annually in the United States. 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 colleges and universities face with regard to cost, outcomes and accountability. AASCU is committed to a candid, fact-based examination of the role that its members could and should play in promoting better outcomes at the P-12 level. Teacher education programs at AASCU institutions will collaborate with other
stakeholders to continually improve and strengthen their curricula, instruction and clinical practica “so that candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to demonstrate positive impact on all P-12 students' learning and development” that include high-quality clinical experiences that “are early, ongoing, and take place in a variety of school- and community-based settings.” (CAEP, 2013)

**Policy Actions:**
- Encourage teacher preparation programs at AASCU institutions to renew and strengthen their relationship with local P-12 schools by ensuring “that high-quality clinical practice is central to preparation so that candidates develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to demonstrate positive impact on all P-12 students' learning and development.” (CAEP, 2013)
- Support the Teacher/Educator Quality Partnership Program.
- Encourage AASCU institutions to partner with local PK-12 schools and communities to develop strategic approaches to college readiness that are research-based, intentional, sustained and evaluated.
- Promote exemplary strategic college readiness models developed by AASCU members and their PK-12 partners and communities.

Evaluation of teacher education programs should be based on valid, reliable and objective data. Accountability measures should not politicize teacher education by assessing programs on a single attribute (such as curriculum), but rather examine the totality of the educational cycle and experience. AASCU supports calls for greater accountability and outcomes transparency for teacher preparation programs.

**Policy Actions:**
- 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.

**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 Departments of Defense (DoD), Education and Veterans Affairs 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.
- 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.

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, as well, can 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:
Economic and Workforce Development

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.

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 engage students meaningfully in applied research addressing the nation’s innovation plan 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.
Delivering America’s Promise

AASCU’s membership of more than 400 public colleges and universities is found throughout the United States, Guam, Puerto Rico 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 on-line 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.