**ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT**

Access to college means ensuring that all students who wish to pursue a higher education have the opportunity to do so, regardless of their socioeconomic, demographic, geographic or academic backgrounds. It includes the opportunity to earn admittance, experience a supportive environment during their studies, and graduate from college prepared to succeed in the workplace and participate as a citizen of the world.

While institutions and state and federal governments play a role in ensuring that the path to college is as smooth as possible for all students, state and federal governments are particularly vital to ensuring equal access to college. The states and federal government, in partnership with the nation’s P-12 system, have a responsibility to focus the most effective strategies for access and inclusion on the precollege years and work to reduce barriers in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has begun to implement the new Post 9/11 GI Bill Program. AASCU is actively monitoring this implementation and the effect it is having on veterans and campuses. This past year, AASCU was asked to testify before Congress on this very issue. As Congress continues to revamp and review the implementation, AASCU will remain actively engaged in discussions with policymakers, advocating for positive change that will reduce confusion and lead to a more simplified process.

In his fiscal year 2010 budget, President Obama proposed the creation of an Access and Completion Fund. AASCU developed an alternative that would direct funds to institutions based on the number of Pell-eligible students enrolled. Although the funding for this program did not materialize, AASCU continues to explore funding opportunities and avenues for this initiative.

Looking forward, the Congress will be reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and examining immigration reform. AASCU will work to strengthen teacher development programs in order to ensure that high school graduates are college-ready, not only with an understanding of curricula, but also armed with the skill sets needed to achieve college success.
Federal Role in College Access and Attainment

AASCU Policy Statements

K-12 and Postsecondary Education Alignment

- Support funding directed toward states in their efforts to align P-12 and higher education curricula, standards and assessments to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs)

- Boost appropriation levels for Title III of the Higher Education Act that supports the development and strengthening of Historically Black Colleges and Universities; Predominantly Black Institutions; American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities and Alaska Native and Hawaiian Serving Institutions; Asian-American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions; and Native American Serving Institutions.

- Boost funding of Title V of the Higher Education Act, which supports the development and strengthening of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in order to address the nation’s changing demographics and increasing enrollments at HSIs.

Federal Early Outreach and Student Services Programs: TRIO and GEAR UP

- Support increased funding for TRIO and GEAR UP through the annual appropriations process.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), between 2007-2018, college enrollment is expected to increase 4 percent for white students, 26 percent for black non-Hispanic students, 38 percent for Hispanic students, 29 percent for Asian/Pacific Islander students, 32 percent for Native American/Alaskan Native students, and 14 percent for nonresident alien students.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in FY 2009 there were 2,880 TRIO projects, 836,395 total participants (not including TRIO Training participants), and a total funding allocation of $899,423,543 for TRIO—an increase in funding and projects over 2008. According to other recent data, two-thirds of TRIO participants come from households where neither parent graduated from college and where family income is under $30,975.
Oppose any proposal to scale back or eliminate any significant component of TRIO and GEAR UP programs.

**Veteran Students, Students Called to Active Duty and Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) Students**

- Support legislative changes and/or technical corrections to the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 in order to make procedures simpler and more transparent, as well as standardize benefit processing in accordance with accepted higher education practices. In particular, support efforts to replace separate payment charts for tuition and fees created by the U. S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs (VA)—in which the VA calculates and caps tuition and fee charges separately—with a combined tuition and fee figure conforming to standard higher education practices.

- Assure that veteran students receive their full education benefit entitlement for military service, irrespective of other forms of financial assistance. Collaborate with appropriate stakeholders to oppose any proposals to make the VA the “payer of last resort” for veterans’ educational benefits. Making the VA the payer of last resort will take away benefits veterans have already earned through service to their country and create roadblocks in their path to higher education. Payer of last resort provisions will also result in further confusion and increased administrative burden for colleges and universities serving veteran students.

- Support an equitable increase in the $7/student fee paid by VA to institutions for processing veteran student benefit certifications. This fee has not been increased in over 30 years. Given the complexity and multiplicity of present-day veterans’ education benefit programs, $7/student does not adequately cover the time-consuming procedures required by VA—not alone provide assistance to properly advise and counsel veteran students.

- Support efforts to have school certifying officials given appropriate, secured access to VA data systems (now in development) that will contain timely information on veteran students’ remaining education benefit eligibility.

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The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (also known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill) also has a Yellow Ribbon component, where institutions whose tuition and fees are higher than the base Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit (in-state tuition and fees at the most expensive public college or university in that veteran’s state) can sign agreements with the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs to contribute up to 50 percent of tuition and fees toward the remaining cost. The VA will match up to 50 percent of the school’s Yellow Ribbon contribution. According to September 2010 VA testimony, in the 2009-2010 academic year, VA paid out $41.7 million under the Yellow Ribbon Program.
Federal Role in College Access and Attainment

Institutions need appropriately limited access to this data in order to better serve veteran students.

- Fund Model Programs for Centers of Excellence for Veteran Success, authorized under HEA, to award competitive grants for model programs that support veteran student success in postsecondary education.

- Benchmark MGIB benefits (pre-9/11 GI Bill) to the cost of attendance at public four-year institutions for those service members who served prior to September 11, 2001. Service members eligible under the current MGIB who served on or after September 11, 2001 will have an irrevocable decision point to choose either set of benefits.

- Ensure that no student-reservist is required to repay any unearned federal student aid received for an academic term in which they are called to active duty.

- Support the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in its efforts to create a comprehensive payment system able to make timely and accurate payments to eligible recipients of veterans education benefits. Such a system should ensure that student veterans, states and institutions do not suffer adverse financial consequences as a result of federal action.

- Advocate for more advantageous tuition rates for MGIB Selected Reserve (Chapter 1606) benefits; also advocate for portability equity for MGIB-SR benefits earned during mobilization for a period of 10 years after leaving service (equal to MGIB Active Duty portability rates).

- Boost funding for the Upward Bound TRIO programs that prepare low-income, first-generation military veterans for college.

- Support ROTC programs on campus that allow students to develop both academic and leadership skills in the service of their country.

- Discourage attempts to mandate institutional refund policies for veteran and active-duty military students on the federal level; a recent national survey indicated that nearly 80 percent of responding campuses had already established refund policies for military activations and deployments.
**Funding for Advanced Degree Programs**

- Increase investment in federal scholarship and fellowship programs, such as the Javits Fellowship and GAANN programs, as important means of building a pipeline for historically underrepresented groups into academia and advanced graduate studies.

- Boost funding to the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program through the TRIO programs in order to increase the number of undergraduate students who participate in advanced degree programs. Funding is used to encourage enrollment in advanced degree programs through mentoring, test preparation for the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), tutoring, and assistance in applying for graduate school. Students who benefit from this program are tracked and supported as they progress through their advanced degree programs.

**Undocumented Students**

- Support clarification of existing federal immigration law to allow states to determine the tuition status of qualified dependents of undocumented immigrants. AASCU believes that states’ authority over tuition policy must be preserved and respected.

- Support access to federal loan and work study programs for qualified undocumented students who were brought to the United States under the age of 16, have resided in the United States for five or more years, have graduated from a United States high school, and are individuals of good moral character who are pursuing postsecondary education to qualify for permanent residency status.

**Diversity**

- Promote higher education policies that ensure equal access to educational opportunities for all students.

Since 2001, 10 states have passed legislation allowing undocumented students to receive in-state tuition. The issue of whether undocumented students should have access to enrollment in public postsecondary institutions and lower in-state tuition rates continues to be hotly contested in many states. Considerable attention will be given to the first state Supreme Court case on the issue, in California. A central question in the case is whether high school attendance can legally replace the residency requirement for receiving in-state tuition. While the California court’s decision—expected to be handed down in 2011—will not have any binding effect on other states, it may have national implications given that policymakers and the courts could be influenced by it.