



2010  
Public Policy  
Agenda

*aascu*

American Association of State  
Colleges and Universities

## **Accountability**

Public colleges and universities have an obligation to be responsible and trusted guardians of the public's resources and to communicate clearly and effectively about their stewardship of the public's investment in them. AASCU is committed to greater public accountability and has been a leader in promoting improved data systems, greater transparency and increased focus on student learning outcomes. AASCU calls on its members to participate in the AASCU/APLU Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), designed to improve transparency of institutional and student data, core educational outcomes and student engagement. To date, over one-half of AASCU members have signed on to this initiative.

The Higher Education Act requires colleges and universities to be more accountable, particularly in relation to transparency in college costs. AASCU worked with Congress to ensure these new provisions take into account the unique nature of costs in public higher education and tuition-setting authority of public colleges. AASCU helped to secure several provisions, including recognition of the measure of tuition in dollars and not just percentages; the role of state appropriations in tuition levels; and the role of tuition-setting authority in the price of tuition. AASCU believes that the federal effort to engage states in the higher education debate through maintenance of effort and supplement—not supplant—requirements is an important piece in the college cost equation and will continue to advocate for strengthening these provisions.

President Obama has called for the United States to be first in the world in the number of people with a postsecondary degree by the year 2020. AASCU applauds this focus on producing more graduates, as well as shifting the accountability focus on improving the number of graduates produced by institutions, rather than just on graduation rates. AASCU will support efforts to strengthen government oversight and institutional accountability to eliminate fraud and abuse in federal student aid programs.

## **Federal Role in Accountability— AASCU Policy Statements**

### **Consumer Information and College Costs**

- ◆ Encourage the use and adoption, where applicable, of voluntary reporting structures such as the Voluntary System of Accountability.

- ◆ Oppose any attempts to impose federal cost containment measures on institutions.

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Public institutions of higher education in only 15 states have authority to set their own tuition rates.

Increases in tuition at public colleges are directly correlated to declines in state appropriations; that is, when state appropriations decrease, tuition and fees must be increased—sometimes significantly—to make up the shortfall. While the recession has sharply exacerbated disinvestment in state operating support for higher education on a per-student basis, enrollment is surging at many state colleges. In some instances, such as throughout California’s public postsecondary sector, thousands of students have been denied classes due to fiscal limitations such as not having enough money to hire instructors. In Utah, for example, student enrollment in the public four-year university system has increased 17 percent in 2008 and 2009 combined, while funding has been cut 17 percent, reflecting \$1,300 fewer state dollars invested in each full-time student. Federal stimulus monies helped mitigate about half the cuts, but state re-investment is unlikely once those dollars are exhausted. To offset the cuts, Utah’s state colleges increased tuition by about nine percent. The increase would have had to be 42 percent to restore revenues lost from state funding reductions.

### **Postsecondary Student Data Systems**

- ◆ Support state efforts to develop an integrated network of state data systems, based on common data elements, to serve as a privacy-protected state-based system of student level longitudinal data.

- ◆ Discourage federal efforts that require states to collect overly burdensome or intrusive student data, while supporting data collection that directly informs key educational outcomes.

- ◆ Oppose federal efforts to require states to disclose student data that could violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

## **Degree Attainment Reporting**

- ◆ Focus national educational attainment goals and federal evaluation efforts on the number of Americans with a degree or certificate, rather than solely on institutional graduation rates.
- ◆ Require that graduation rates using federal financial aid as a proxy for income be reported in IPEDS. These new graduation rates were identified in the HEOA for the following groups: Pell Grant recipients, Subsidized Stafford Loan recipients who are not Pell Grant recipients, and students who do not receive any federal aid or who receive only unsubsidized loans.

## **Accreditation**

- ◆ Support mandatory public disclosure and dissemination of findings from final accreditation reports.
- ◆ Encourage the six regional accrediting associations to clearly define and broadly communicate their expectations for assessing and reporting student learning in a manner that is aligned with the AACSU/APLU Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA).

## **Transfer of Credit**

- ◆ Oppose the direct involvement of the federal government in regulating inter-institutional academic practices such as the transfer of credit. Academic matters are most appropriately handled through the collaborative efforts of accreditors and statewide, system and institutional boards.

## **Fraud and Abuse in Federal Student Financial Aid Programs**

### **90/10 Rule**

- ◆ Support integrity in federal student financial aid programs by encouraging changes to the recent amendment to the Higher Education Act that weakened federal regulation of these programs regarding the “90/10 Rule.” The amendment weakens the original intent of the provision by allowing for-profit institutions to include private institutional loans and the extra unsubsidized Stafford Loan eligibility authorized by the Ensuring Continued Access to Student Loans Act (ECASLA) in calculating the minimum required 10 percent of revenue that is to be derived from sources other than federal student financial aid.
- ◆ Oppose any efforts to weaken regulation of an institution of higher education’s financial viability for participation in the Title IV student financial aid programs.

### **Loan Program Integrity**

- ◆ Encourage the replacement of Cohort Default Rates with improved indicators to track fraud and abuse in the federal student financial aid system.

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Cohort Default Rates (CDRs) on student loans have declined in recent years. However, the decline has been fueled by the misuse of the current CDR formula, which is used to determine eligibility for participation in Title IV programs.

## **Campus Safety, Security and Emergency Preparedness**

- ◆ Oppose onerous, costly and unfunded campus security mandates from the federal government.
- ◆ Encourage and fund federal, state and institutional partnerships that enhance campus safety and security.

## **State Role in Accountability— AASCU Policy Statements**

### **Improved Student and Institutional Data**

- ◆ Support state efforts to work with the higher education community and the federal government to improve and expand student data systems to inform educators and policymakers on strategies for improving student attendance, retention and college completion. The implementation of statewide or multistate consortia student data systems will provide for the enhanced ability to identify both challenges associated with and solutions for improving student success.

As states and school systems work to align expectations in high school with the demands of postsecondary education, they need better data on student success when they leave the P-12 system and enter college. As of 2008, 28 states have the ability to match student-level P-12 and higher education data, up from just 12 states in 2005, according to the Data Quality Campaign.

- ◆ Encourage states to align data system efforts with institutional and system contributions being made via the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), a joint initiative between AASCU and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) that provides greater transparency of student demographic information, core student educational outcomes and student engagement.

### **Upholding Ethical Standards**

- ◆ Encourage collaborative efforts with states to ensure that appropriate policies are in place that promote ethical behavior, that ensure appropriate transparency and accountability for institutional transactions, and that seek to prevent conflicts of interest that may arise between institutions and third-party vendors.

## **Public Safety, Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Response**

- ◆ Support state-coordinated efforts to help higher education institutions plan for, respond to and recover from natural disasters and other public safety emergencies.
- ◆ Support existing state law and proposed legislation that: 1) bans concealed weapons from public college campuses or 2) provides for institutional and system autonomy with regard to concealed weapons policy. Discourage new legislation that would overturn or weaken concealed weapons bans on campus.

## **Governing Board Selection, Preparation and Institutional Relations**

- ◆ Continue to endorse the selection/appointment criteria put forward by the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis: commitment to public education; record of public or community service; knowledge of complex organizations and academic institutions; demonstrated collaborative leadership; willingness and availability for constructive engagement; commitment to open-minded, nonpartisan decision-making; and a record of integrity and civic virtue.
- ◆ Encourage the formation and maintenance of appropriate and constructive relationships between institutions, their governing and coordinating entities and states' elected leaders. The terms of these relationships must be absolutely clear. AASCU opposes changes in these relationships that muddle or politicize the decision-making process or compromise the autonomy or integrity of institutions.
- ◆ Continue to endorse the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities' statement, *Governing in the Public Trust: External Influences on Colleges and Universities*, as a

## STATE ROLE IN ACCOUNTABILITY

constructive articulation of the roles and responsibilities of those charged with governing the nation's higher education institutions.

### **Academic Bill of Rights**

- ◆ Encourage opposition to state legislation mandating intellectual diversity or faculty quotas on campus.