**Rural University Sample Op Ed**

For many in **[insert community name here,]** **NAME OF INSTITUION** provides opportunities for education, employment, and overall community improvement. The presence of a college in communities across the country often leads to economic development, beautification, revitalization, and philanthropy. In the wake of the pandemic, colleges will help lead their communities out of the economic depression, but only if prospective and returning students can afford to attend.

The Biden Administration and Congress have an opportunity to make college more affordable and accessible and best address the student debt crisis, while ensuring the success of communities and college towns across the country. Washington must double the maximum Pell Grant to $13,000 now.

Currently, nearly 7 million students receive a Pell Grant, benefiting from the federal program created in 1972. The targeted grants assist students who are most in need, and on average, each year, over one-third of college students in the U.S. receive a Pell Grant. This proven program has demonstrated its success for students and institutions in the real world.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, students need financial aid more now than ever before. The grant's purchasing power has decreased over time, and students need an updated grant amount to help cope with the financial hardship they have experienced in the last year. A [report](https://www.thirdway.org/memo/why-we-should-double-the-pell-grant) from Third Way may have put it best by noting that "We don't need to reinvent the wheel: Pell Grants already have a track record of helping students both access and complete education beyond high school.” The Pell Grant has enjoyed bipartisan support throughout its existence. Students need assistance that is both fair and efficient, and expanding an already existing program is the fastest and most effective way to achieve that goal.

College towns in the United States greatly benefit from the educational institution's role in the economic and social life of the area. In **[my community],** we employ **X amount of people**, and our student population spends -- on average -- **x amount of money per year**. On a larger scale, private, nonprofit higher education supports and sustains a combined total of 3,404,213 full-time and part-time jobs throughout the nation due to its operations, student spending and visitor spending. Private, nonprofit higher education also directly employs over 1 million people as a part of its day-to-day operations. (NAICU Economic Impact Study) Our community’s economy, like so many others, depends on our students. By doubling the Pell Grant, Congress will be providing an economic boost that benefits students, faculty, as well as the local economies of rural, suburban, exurban, and urban campuses across the country.

Data released by a [nonpartisan research and policy institute](https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/pell-grants-a-key-tool-for-expanding-college-access-and-economic#_ftn1) showed "that a $1,000 increase to the award increased retention rates among recipients by 1.5 percentage points and increased enrollment by up to five percentage points." Awarding students more federal money allows them to work less to pay for college and focus more on classes. By doubling the Pell Grant, more students can attend universities and graduate from institutions that they would be unable to attend otherwise.

For a student attending a 4-year public college in the 1979-1980 school year, the maximum Pell Grant covered more than [75 percent of the cost](https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy-files/pub_files/pell_recs_one_pager.pdf). Today, the maximum award covers only 28 percent of the cost. Given the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, low-income students [may be more likely to struggle](https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/22665/The_Pandemic_Is_Exacerbating_Inequities_Present_in_Financial_Aid_With_Particular_Impact_on_Low-Income_Students_Report_Finds) to repay loans because of lost jobs and income. Doubling the grant could reverse this trend, allowing Pell to make up a greater share of the cost of college to ensure recipients don’t just enroll in school but graduate as well. If Congress does not act, we may deprive a generation of our brightest minds from higher education.

Beyond enrollment, greater grant aid has also increased completion rates, and earnings for first-time students, according to a [recent report](https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20180100) from the American Economic Journal of Applied Economics. Without considering the higher completion rates (which are correlated with higher income), the [report](https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20180100) found that the increased earnings alone are enough for the government to recapture its expenditures within 10 years, demonstrating that investing in additional grant aid will pay for itself over time. This is in part because college graduates pay more in taxes, which will allow the government to recoup what it spent on the program.

The Pell Grant is a proven, fast, efficient and equitable program that can distribute funding to the students who are most in need, which is why Washington must act to *Double Pell Now!*