

**American Association
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George R. Boggs
President

September 24, 2008

Senator John McCain
John McCain 2008
P.O. Box 16118
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**American Association
of State Colleges
and Universities**

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**American Council
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Molly Corbett Broad
President

Dear Senator McCain and Senator Obama:

America is a nation of unparalleled opportunity. The richness and diversity of our national fabric - by faith, by national origin, and by cultural traditions - are woven into a single national character. We are a people unified by a belief in collective ideals of economic opportunity, freedom of thought, protection of individual liberties, and commitment to advancing America's security and prosperity.

**Association of
American Universities**

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Robert Berdahl
President

America's higher education system is a reflection of that same national character. We have the most diverse system in the world - from open-access community colleges that are the envy of other countries to the world's most highly regarded research universities. From trade schools that specialize in job training to colleges whose entire curriculum focuses on the Great Books. Unlike other nations, our system of higher education is open to all with the desire to grow and succeed - from students straight out of high school to older working adults looking to learn new skills.

**National Association
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President

As representatives of our higher education institutions, we wish to suggest several areas of consideration for strengthening higher education, preserving America's economic and national security, and ensuring that our citizens have full opportunity to succeed in a world undergoing vast and rapid change.

1. Solving the Access Problem, Together

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Peter McPherson
President

Americans have always believed in equal opportunity. Nowhere is that belief better realized than through national efforts to ensure that capable, hard-working students are not denied access to a college education due to a lack of financial resources, or because of inadequate academic preparation. Since the advent of the original GI Bill, our nation has made substantive progress toward opening the doors of American higher education to all. Through a partnership of federal, state, philanthropic, and college-based student aid programs, millions of students have become the first in their families to complete college. The original GI Bill allowed a record 7.8 million World War II veterans to participate in

educational and training programs from 1944 to 1956; when the Higher Education Act (HEA) was signed into law in 1965, the Department of Education recorded 5,920,864 students enrolled in higher education programs. In Fall 2006, Department of Education statistics showed 18,205,474 enrolled students- a direct consequence of the HEA.

These investments have benefitted all Americans, through the birth of a robust knowledge-based economy that, despite growing competition from abroad, remains unparalleled in human history.

But we still have challenges ahead. A report by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance estimates that, in the current decade, between 1.7 million and 3.2 million academically qualified students will not earn bachelor's degrees due to financial barriers. Elementary and secondary education reform will ring hollow if we produce more high performing high school graduates, but do not provide the means for them to finance a college education.

No one entity - government, private philanthropy, families, or the colleges themselves - can fill this gap. However, by working together and designing complementary systems of aid and outreach, we can fulfill our nation's promise of educational opportunity for all. The federal government can help by recommitting itself to our proven student aid programs, while colleges, families, business, and state governments need to also pledge to fulfill our historic roles in helping students of all economic means afford a quality education.

2. Maintaining the Public Trust through Greater Transparency

College leaders and policymakers need to renew their attention to the public purposes and opportunities upon which America's higher education system was built. Better consumer information should be made available to parents and students to aid them in their decision-making. Numerous voluntary initiatives across all sectors of higher education are now underway to arm students, families, policymakers and other stakeholders with information about what higher education has to offer, and how to prepare academically and financially to benefit from it. These collaborative efforts by colleges and universities also seek to provide information about the many facets of the student learning experience and the record of each institution in contributing to this experience. The federal government also is contributing to more informed decision making by enhancing the visibility of data on postsecondary education - data that is already collected, but that has not been fully utilized.

While much progress has been made toward enhancing consumer decision making and increasing transparency by both the federal government and by colleges in just the past year, our job is not complete. Colleges must continue to re-examine the way we demonstrate our commitment to college affordability and opportunity, and our accountability to the public's trust. And while sharing more of the information it currently collects, the federal government must also ensure that colleges are not overburdened by additional costly reporting requirements that do not serve consumer needs.

3. Maintaining Our Competitive Edge - From Research to Job Training

Today, 58 percent of the nation's basic research is conducted by universities, compared to 36 percent in 1960. The federal government supports 60 percent of that research.

It is estimated that society benefits from a return of 28 cents every year on every dollar invested in academic research. But no dollar figure can capture the benefits of conquering diseases, raising crop yields, or fostering intellectual freedom worldwide through innovation in information technology and communication.

Equally important are the opportunities provided America's workers to learn new skills and train for new jobs. Taking growth and replacement needs into consideration, a greater proportion of total job openings are projected to be filled by workers with at least some college rather than by those with a high school degree or less. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), over the period from 2006 to 2016, an estimated 57.3 percent of job openings are expected to be filled by those with some college or a bachelor's or higher degree. That is 29,076,000 of 50,732,000 jobs. Increasing the country's average level of education by even one year can boost economic growth by up to 15 percent. Educational gains account for more than a quarter of the increase in U.S. productivity.

Americans change jobs often. Fluid career paths in the new global economy will require ongoing workforce redevelopment. The partnership between college and universities and the federal government in the areas of both research and job training needs to be strengthened if our nation is to keep its competitive edge.

4. Advancing International Education – Our Best Diplomatic Tool

Higher education is one of our nation's greatest exports and best diplomatic tool. Countless international leaders have had their image of America shaped by their time as students at our nation's colleges and universities. This exposure to American ideals and interaction with our citizens is of immeasurable benefit to our nation.

But America is losing its role as the preferred destination for international students and scholars. When the United States put up new roadblocks to international students after September 11, other nations seized upon the opportunity to fill the gap. To preserve the future of U.S. scientific and intellectual leadership, we must welcome the world's brightest students, teachers, and researchers to our nation. While immediate national security concerns must be addressed, we need to ensure that our long-term security is not being undermined.

Equally important is increasing the number of American students who study abroad. These students serve as important ambassadors. They demonstrate to the world our values and ideals, while gaining insight into other cultures that serves them throughout their lives. These students can help government, businesses, and the education sector fill the growing demand for citizens

with the skills, knowledge, and diverse cultural orientation needed to operate globally. In 2006-07, only about 225,000 U.S. students studied abroad. Our nation should commit itself to increasing that number to 1 million students studying abroad per year in the next decade.

5. Success Through a Proactive Partnership

Improving college access and affordability, enhancing institutional responsiveness, maintaining a national competitive advantage through research and workforce training, and advancing international education are vital to America's continued prosperity. But these critical efforts cannot be accomplished in a vacuum; they can only be realized through a strong partnership among all stakeholders: the federal government, state governments, secondary and postsecondary institutions, businesses, and the nonprofit community. Through the service of faculty, students, and staff - and in countless other ways -- America's colleges and universities have a long history of commitment to and involvement in their communities.

Congress has demonstrated its commitment to these efforts by funding the Pell Grant program, early intervention programs, and research, and by maintaining the campus-based and state aid and job training programs. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the federal government's role as a partner in access, affordability, and competitiveness remain strong. We also look forward to working hand in hand with the federal government to ensure that our nation's veterans will benefit fully from the new GI Bill enacted earlier this year.

We hope you find our comments regarding higher education issues and opportunities to be useful. The undersigned associations representing our nation's colleges and universities, and our member institutions themselves, stand ready to do our part to enhance the important partnership among our colleges and universities, the private sector, families, and the federal government. It is in our nation's interest to pursue this goal together.

With kindest regards,

George R. Boggs
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American Association
of Community Colleges

Constantine W. Curris
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