



Presidential Mentors Program

By the Numbers – Why You Need To Be a Federal Advocate for Your Institution

New college or university presidents often overlook the importance of the federal government in the success of their institution. From appropriations to tax policy to regulations, the federal government plays an outsized role in the operations of most colleges while also supporting scientific research, institutional support, and other campus activities.

Consequently, it is essential for presidents to advocate for their institution and to engage with federal officials, including members of Congress as well as staff at the Education Department and other federal agencies. It is, however, something that is not among the skill set of most new presidents. A 2018 Council of Independent Colleges report found that for presidents in their first four years, it is one of the top three areas in which they feel most unprepared.

Working in partnership with NAICU and its nearly 1,000 member presidents and associations, college and university presidents need to focus on three general areas:

APPROPRIATIONS

For most colleges and universities, the federal government is the largest single source of revenue annually, primarily through the federal student aid programs: Pell Grants, student loans, and campus-based aid (Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and Work-Study).

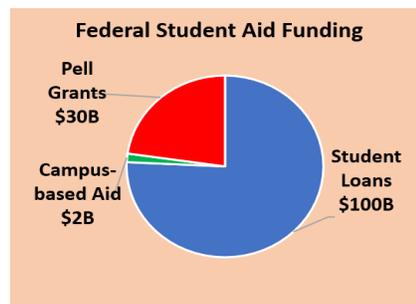
Advocacy for increased funding for Pell Grants and campus-based aid in the annual appropriations process, and support for increases in federal student loans through the Higher Education Act reauthorization process are annual priorities for presidents of private colleges and universities.

While state support for higher education has generally dropped over the past decade, federal funding has expanded.

Tax Policy

Beyond appropriations, the federal government provides over \$100 billion in tax relief for students and their families, helping them save for college, pay tuition, and repay student loans. This allows colleges to target institutional aid toward the neediest students, and to distribute its own funds more generously than they otherwise would be able to do.

Charitable giving incentives under tax law also are particularly important to private nonprofit colleges and universities that rely on philanthropic support as an integral part of their budgets.



Finally, federal tax treatment of endowment funds is critical for many private colleges. In recent years, Congress has attempted to impose rules on the use of endowment funds that do not consider the situation of individual institutions. Many lawmakers do not understand that endowments are composed of discrete charitable gifts, with many being restricted to specific purposes. They also fail to realize that the colleges' annual payouts are already allocated for specific campus functions such as student aid, research, facility improvements, technology, and healthcare needs.

REGULATIONS

It is a given that higher education is pervasively regulated. While regulation is necessary to assure that our institutions operate with accountability and transparency, intrusive regulation has continued to grow under both of the past two administrations. Congress, the Department of Education, and other federal agencies have expanded the regulatory demands placed on higher education institutions. Appropriate regulation of private colleges and universities that is sensitive to institutional diversity and independence, while also addressing society's needs are top annual priorities for presidents of private colleges and universities.

The NAICU website lists detailed information on nearly [two dozen regulatory issues](#) that the association is both monitoring and addressing. Among them are accreditation, campus sexual assault, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), freedom of speech, student aid risk sharing, reporting of foreign gifts, student privacy, and the award and transfer of credit.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ROLE

Perhaps more than any other time in history, it is important that the leaders of private colleges and universities develop a direct relationship with their elected federal officials. Senators and representatives are attuned to hearing and serving their constituents – those people who elected them to Congress. Among constituents, college presidents are especially respected on two fronts: first, they are by definition community leaders, and second, they lead what in many cases is one of the most important enterprises in the member's district or state.

The most important activity presidents can undertake is to connect with their congressional delegation in their home districts. Congress schedules regular work periods to enable members to visit their districts and reach out to their constituents. Presidents can schedule one-on-one conversations with their representatives where they can relate anecdotes about the college's people and programs. These are perfect times to invite representatives to campus so that they gain firsthand insights into the institutions they represent.

Through these personal connections, the cumulative power of members' voices can be leveraged in shaping higher education policy at the federal level.

NAICU ROLE

NAICU provides member presidents with the tools and information to speak confidently and with conviction when engaging with members of Congress and the Administration.

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Our advocacy model is dependent on the unique partnership that leverages our government relations work in Washington with our member presidents in communities across the United States.

Congress has 535 voting members – 435 representatives and 100 senators. NAICU has member presidents in 395 of the 435 congressional districts, giving the association incredible grassroots influence. That clout, however, is totally dependent on the engagement and outreach of member presidents. After all, since all politics are local, the impact of member presidents in their community is critical and highly valued.

There is a place in this effort for every institution – whether a smaller faith-based college, a major research university, a selective liberal arts college, or one of the many other kinds of mission-specific institutions that make up the firmament of private nonprofit higher education.