

COVID Pandemic Relief

Congress provided institutions and students critical funding to help make college possible during an unprecedented global crisis. The CARES Act, CRRSAA and the American Rescue Plan have been essential to keeping colleges open during the past year. We also appreciate other provisions in these bills, such as the Paycheck Protection Program, refundable tax credits for nonprofit employers to cover the costs of any mandated paid sick or family leave provisions, and efforts to assist non-profits that self-insure with their unemployment expenses. Finally, we applaud the expansion of Tax Code Sec. 127, employer-provided education assistance, to allow employers to help pay student loan amounts for employees and support any efforts to increase the annual benefit amount.

Double the Pell Grant and Increase Student Aid Funding

The Pell Grant program serves as the cornerstone of federal student aid and works with other student aid programs to help low-income students get into, stay in, and complete college. While NAICU supports the \$150 increase in the Pell Grant, raising the maximum award to \$6,495 provided in the FY2021 spending bill, more funding is needed to provide the critical support to the students who need it the most. NAICU also supports the increases for SEOG, Federal Work-Study, TRIO and GEAR UP as these programs are critical to ensuring students are ready for college and supported through completion. We encourage Congress to double the Pell Grant to \$13,000, and increase student aid funding in the final FY2022 bill.

Federal Student Loans and Student Loan Debt

Federal student loans are a critical access tool for millions of Americans. While most students have manageable debt and repay their loans, it is still a concern. Attempts to address the debt issue need to be focused on those borrowers who are struggling the most. Budget proposals to charge low-income students interest while they are in school would cost working class and Pell students thousands of dollars. While we support reasonable federal loan limits for borrowers, we do not support a dramatic lowering of loan limits for parents and graduate students, which would force many to turn to the private market for loans for which they may not qualify.

Free Public College

Federal funding to waive public college tuition will not result in college for all. We strongly support keeping the federal higher education investment targeted to low- and middle-income students and not on one sector of institutions, which would allow those students to choose their best-fit college. A federal-state partnership to address college tuition should equitably include private, nonprofit colleges and their students. Private, nonprofit colleges enroll similar percentages of Pell Grant students as public colleges and are a key part of ensuring opportunity and choice in American higher education.

Tax Policy

We remain steadfastly opposed to the private college endowment/net investment tax, and the private college salary tax that were signed into law in 2017. These taxes should be repealed. They are punitive, unfair, and do nothing to help our institutions or the students we serve. Congress should strengthen and expand the current student and family benefits and charitable giving incentives. It should also allow employers to offer more tax free education and student loan repayment assistance.

Campus Sexual Assault

Students attending college should expect to find a safe and supportive environment. But current fluctuations in rules, with little time for meaningful implementation, undermine recent positive action towards changing campus culture. Federal initiatives to enhance campus safety must assure the safety and fair treatment of all students. The initiatives must also reflect the significant lessons learned during the past decade's efforts to address this problem.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

President Biden has already started the process of fortifying the current DACA program. If Congress were to also take action to address the DACA program in a bipartisan manner that provides certainty to these students about the program going forward, it would make it much more difficult to renew or rescind the program based on who occupies the White House.

International Students

The openness of our colleges and universities is vital to our nation's economy and to promoting our leadership in the world. We support efforts to ensure international students are welcome on U.S. campuses, while also ensuring American interests are protected.

Veterans and Service Member Education

The federal investment in educational benefits for veteran and military students has opened educational opportunities for many veterans. Particularly important are the Post-9/11 GI Bill and its “Yellow Ribbon” program. We continue to work with Congress to ensure the VA can get student veterans their benefits under the “Forever GI Bill” expansions in a timely manner. Colleges are committed to continuing to offer a supportive campus environment for veterans.

Financial Responsibility Standards

Current financial responsibility standards were put in place in 1992, and have not been adequately updated to reflect today's accounting standards or public policy questions. Also, the pandemic saw large revenue losses for institutions, which will have an impact on their financial responsibility scores. We believe that flexibility should be granted to private, nonprofit institutions regarding their financial responsibility scores and that the fundamental purpose of the standards should be reviewed and updated.

Institutional Aid

The private, nonprofit sector consists of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Minority-Serving Institutions. These institutions benefit from institutional aid programs in Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act. We believe that greater flexibility should be granted to these institutions in how these funds are used, current programs should be updated to better serve these institutions, and funding should be increased to allow them to better support their students.

Freedom of Speech

Promoting the free and open exchange of ideas is a central tenet of higher education. In an era of increased protests on college campuses, Congress has considered various proposals to regulate how institutions handle freedom of speech. Any such proposals must consider an institution's duty to balance free speech protections with other essential values, such as student safety, inclusion, respect, and institutional mission.

Student Privacy

We support increased transparency, but also believe in the importance of protecting the confidentiality of students' personal information. Congress should give careful consideration to the new technology approach in the Student Right to Know Before You Go Act, which has the potential to get policymakers the information they want without sacrificing student privacy.

Deregulation

Regulation and oversight in higher education is important to assuring accountability for federal dollars. However, we encourage the elimination of higher education regulations that are stifling innovation or not serving their intended purpose and the revision of those regulations that are outdated and no longer effective. Congress should decide what is critical to federal oversight, taxpayers, and higher education consumers, and then focus reporting and related regulatory requirements to those areas.

Accreditation

The core function of accreditation is ensuring the quality of American higher education, while acknowledging its diversity. We are concerned that accreditation is losing its independence and becoming an agent of federal compliance. Quality and diversity are accomplished through the peer-review process, and by an institution's autonomy to establish its own mission and academic standards.

Award and Transfer of Credit

The awarding and defining of academic credit is central to an institution's academic mission, and to the value and meaning of its diploma. It is also an important and effective quality control mechanism. In a rapidly changing environment of increased student mobility and new modes of course delivery, institutions are taking a careful look at their policies to ensure students are treated fairly and expeditiously and that policies do not hinder degree completion.