

Summary of APLU's Higher Education Policy Platform for Presidential Transition Teams

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Encourage States to Reinvest in Public Higher Education

Public institutions across the nation have worked diligently to keep in-state tuition affordable despite state disinvestment. On average, full-time, in-state students paid \$3,980 for tuition and fees in 2015-16. Steep cuts to state funding for public universities are the driving force behind tuition increases at public institutions. In FY2016, 47 states are spending less per student than before the recession. Average state spending remains 18 percent lower than before the recession.

Affordable and accessible higher education should begin with states reinvesting in public higher education and there is a federal role to induce such investment vis-a-vis a new federal-state partnership. The federal "carrot" to trigger state reinvestment should be strong with only essential restrictions in order to encourage maximum participation from states and maintain an appropriate balance between the federal government's role and the role of state government.

Enhance Transparency in Higher Education

Comprehensive, accurate data on student outcomes at each college and university in the U.S. are considerably lacking. As a result, students and families are left in the dark as they make the critical decision about which college or university to attend; policymakers struggle to appropriately hold accountable institutions receiving taxpayer dollars; and institutions lack the information they need to assess their performance and improve.

Congress should repeal a provision in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 that prevents the federal government from collecting and publishing aggregate student-level data.

Invest in Access and Degree Completion: Expand Pell Grants

Pell Grants are the single greatest federal tool for facilitating higher education access for the neediest students. But they could also be used to greater effect to encourage completion. Restoring year-round Pell Grants would increase the likelihood of on-time graduation by enabling coursework over the summer, enhancing flexibility for nontraditional students and encouraging uninterrupted academic progress.

Expect More from Higher Education and Protect Students

The federal government's investment in higher education through Title IV of the Higher Education Act, Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Treasury, and the tax code are critical for a vibrant, successful, and diverse higher education system. More should be done though to protect this investment and students. Institutions that persistently perform poorly should be subject to greater scrutiny.

Strengthening Title IV Institutional Eligibility

Department of Education cohort default rate thresholds for institutional eligibility to access the federal financial aid system are remarkably lenient, subject to manipulation, ineffectively

enforced, and moving toward irrelevance. APLU recommends a more comprehensive process to protect students and taxpayers from subsidizing the worst performing institutions of higher education.

Differential Accreditation: Focus Accreditor Resources Where Most Needed

A differential or “risk-based” approach to accreditation would help appropriately focus accreditor resources on institutions needing the most attention. As part of a differential review, accreditors should use more outcomes data, e.g. graduation rates, employment outcomes, loan default and repayment rates.

Protect Student Veterans and Servicemembers: Close the 90/10 Loophole

The loophole allowing for-profit colleges and universities to exceed 90 percent of their revenue from federal financial aid when including Department of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) funding has led to significant adverse consequences including making servicemen and women and veterans targets of aggressive recruitment campaigns by some unscrupulous institutions. The 90/10 loophole should be closed.

Risk-Sharing: The Wrong Approach

Risk sharing is not the right approach to strengthening institutional accountability. Risk sharing would ultimately encourage many institutions to minimize “risk.” That is, the policy would essentially drive many institutions to favor admission of students who are the least likely to default or repay their loans. We should be working to make higher education more, not less, accessible to low and middle income families.

Campus Safety and Security: Combatting Sexual Assault

Public universities welcome a partnership with the federal government in ways that will enhance the tools universities have to combat campus sexual assault. APLU cautions against one-size-fits-all approaches which do not account for existing and effective institutional policies and/or state and local law.

Higher Education Regulations: Modernize, Streamline, and Focus

Effective federal regulation of institutions of higher education is needed to protect the public interest. Yet numerous regulations significantly and needlessly add to the operating costs of institutions, which ultimately drive up the price of providing education to students. A bipartisan group of senators appointed a task force that made more than 50 recommendations for appropriately easing regulatory burden. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education should act on the recommendations.

Supporting Graduate Education Should Be a National Priority

Despite the increasing importance of an advanced degree, policymakers repeatedly have made decisions to the detriment of graduate students such as higher interest rates on graduate student loans and repeal of subsidized in-school interest. These adverse changes should be reversed so both undergraduate and graduate education are supported.

Global Learning Should Not Be A Luxury

In an increasingly global environment, an international experience is an essential element to a well-rounded education and building a workforce equipped to compete. Yet only 1.5 percent of all U.S. students study abroad and 53 percent of those students choose to study in Europe. The next administration should make the expansion of study abroad opportunities a major priority.