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COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATIONS ISSUE
“NEXT STEPS” FOR UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION


Washington, DC (September 21, 2006) – The six major U.S. associations representing college and university presidents and chancellors today released a letter being sent to higher education institutions outlining the “next steps” on issues related to undergraduate education.

The letter titled, Addressing the Challenges Facing American Undergraduate Education, is designed to dovetail with President Bush’s American Competitiveness Initiative and congressional efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, as well as reform work undertaken by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, The National Academies, and the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, among others.

Endorsing the letter are George R. Boggs, president, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC); Constantine W. Curris, president, American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU); David Ward, president, American Council on Education (ACE); Robert M. Berdahl, president, Association of American Universities (AAU); David L. Warren, president, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU); and Peter McPherson, president, National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC).
The letter notes that “serious challenges face American higher education and our nation's continued economic competitiveness and security.” Among them:

- Expanding college access to low-income and minority students
- Keeping college affordable
- Improving learning by using new knowledge and instructional techniques
- Preparing secondary students for higher education
- Increasing accountability for educational outcomes
- Internationalizing the student experience
- Increasing opportunities for lifelong education and workforce training

The association leaders recognize that each of these challenges bears directly on undergraduate education. They see their letter as a crucial first step in a process that will not only marshal their own resources but also the collective resources of some 3,500 U.S. colleges and universities to meet these complex challenges. They look forward to a collective engagement of the higher education community with state and federal policy makers.

“We have now seen a variety of very constructive efforts to build on our foundation of strength and improve American higher education. These include the final report of Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings’ Commission on the Future of Higher Education as well as two fine reports—*Rising Above the Gathering Storm* and *Beyond Bias and Barriers*—issued by The National Academies,” said ACE President David Ward. “The link between higher education and our nation’s global competitiveness has been made in Congress and the federal agencies. This is an opportune time for us to step forward and take advantage of this policy climate change.”

"Community colleges are dynamic institutions, constantly changing in an effort to meet the evolving needs of their communities,” said AACC President George R. Boggs. “This change will continue, hopefully with the committed support of federal, state, and local governments. In particular, the nation must do more to help needy students attend and succeed in college. The price of not doing so will be a dear one to pay."

“Opportunities abound for our universities to make breakthrough contributions in broadening postsecondary access, strengthening elementary and secondary education, and transitioning to the New Economy,” said AASCU President Constantine W. Curris. “This letter is a manifestation of AASCU’s commitment to efficiency, effectiveness and transparency.”

“As we address the challenges facing American higher education, we are fortunate to have as a foundation colleges and universities that offer an extraordinary variety of quality educational and research experiences without a centralized system that stifles educational innovation,” said AAU President Robert M. Berdahl. “We need to strengthen the capacity of higher education to meet its role in sustaining the nation's competitiveness without imposing uniformity. An important contribution of research universities, for example, will be to remain at the forefront of scientific research and scholarship, even as we expand our efforts to adapt undergraduate education to the challenges of the 21st century.”
"In this document, we cite seven key areas for attention that other recent examinations of higher education have also identified," said NAICU President David L. Warren. "Addressing these issues will require the best efforts of the nation's colleges and universities, as well as the higher education associations that represent them. Each association brings its own particular strengths to this enterprise, and we will be working cooperatively—whether in concert across all six associations, in smaller groups, or individually. NAICU in particular will be building on the rich compilation of accountability ideas, resources, and examples already available through our 'Colleges, Universities, and Accountability' Web site, and will be developing additional means of communicating clearly and effectively with our institutions' stakeholders. I look forward to reporting on the progress of those efforts in the months ahead."

“The challenges require change. We’ve done so in the past and are willing to do even more in the future,” said NASULGC President Peter McPherson.

The letter stresses the unique ability of the national higher education associations to act as a clearinghouse of information on best practices and other data that can help institutions broaden the scope of ongoing efforts to increase access, enhance accountability, improve links with K-12 education and internationalize the curriculum. But the document also outlines a number of specific initiatives, among them:

- The associations pledge to strongly support in Congress “the bold recommendation” of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education to increase the average Pell Grant to 70 percent (from 48 percent in 2004-05) of the average in-state tuition at public four-year colleges and universities over a period of five years.

- In early 2007, ACE, in partnership with the Advertising Council and Lumina Foundation for Education, will launch a major three-year national public service campaign to encourage low-income, first-generation students to prepare for college. The “Know How To Go” campaign will use national print and broadcast public service announcements (PSAs) and support an extensive network of community partners to provide assistance to students and families where they live.

- To better align high school curricula and graduation requirements with college-readiness standards, ACE, along with several other organizations, is working on the National Diploma Project. This state-based initiative is designed to increase the number of high school graduates who exit secondary school ready to do college-level work without remediation or move smoothly into the workforce or military service.

- To help America remain competitive in math and science, NASULGC, AASCU, AAU and NAICU (in conjunction with the Council of Independent Colleges and Project Kaleidoscope) will launch a multifaceted initiative to increase the number of science and mathematics teachers prepared by colleges and universities and recommended to states for certification.
On issues related to accountability and student learning, NASULGC and AASCU are developing a voluntary, transparent system of accountability for public four-year institutions. AACC has launched a task force on accountability to examine these issues in the distinctive context of community colleges. AAU is working with its member institutions to develop better information for students and parents about the actual costs incurred to attend an AAU university, the average times to degree and graduation rates, and the post-graduation outcomes of students. NAICU has compiled an extensive database of the variety of ways in which institutions demonstrate accountability to their various stakeholders so that innovative practices can be disseminated.

The complete content of the letter can be viewed at http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=18299&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm.

Founded in 1918, ACE is the major coordinating body for all the nation's higher education institutions, representing more than 1,600 college and university presidents, and more than 200 related associations, nationwide. It seeks to provide leadership and a unifying voice on key higher education issues and influence public policy through advocacy, research, and program initiatives.

The American Association of Community Colleges represents the nation’s almost 1,200 regionally accredited community, junior and technical colleges and their 11 million students. Community colleges are the largest and fastest growing sector of higher education, enrolling close to half (45 percent) of all U.S. undergraduates.

The more than 400 members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) extend higher education to all citizens, including those who have been traditionally underrepresented on college campuses, and fulfill the expectations of a public university by working for the public good through education and engagement.

The Association of American Universities is an association of 60 U.S. and two Canadian research universities organized to develop and implement effective national and institutional policies supporting research and scholarship, graduate and professional education, undergraduate education, and public service in research universities.

NAICU serves as the unified national voice of independent higher education. With nearly 1,000 member institutions and associations nationwide, NAICU reflects the diversity of private, nonprofit higher education in the United States. NAICU members enroll 85 percent of all students attending private institutions. They include traditional liberal arts colleges, major research universities, church- and faith-related institutions, historically black colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions, single-sex colleges, art institutions, two-year colleges, and schools of law, medicine, engineering, business, and other professions.

Founded in 1887, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC, A Public University Association), is an association of public research universities, land-grant institutions, and many state public university systems. Its 214 members enroll more than 3.6 million students, award approximately a half-million degrees annually, and have an estimated 20 million alumni. As the nation’s
oldest higher education association, NASULGC is dedicated to excellence in learning, discovery and engagement. For more information visit www.nasulgc.org.

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