

The background of the image is a photograph of a grand, ornate interior space, likely a legislative chamber or a university hall. It features multiple levels of balconies with decorative balustrades, large arched windows, and a prominent relief sculpture on the lower level depicting various figures in historical or allegorical attire. The lighting is bright and even, highlighting the architectural details.

**AASCU** American Association  
of State Colleges and  
Universities  
Delivering America's Promise

# 2020 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

# FROM THE PRESIDENT



Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to share the 2020 AASCU *Public Policy Agenda* (PPA) with you and express my gratitude to the members of the association's Council of State Representatives for the work they do throughout the year to oversee and refine this important roadmap for our policy advocacy efforts.

Each year, a revised PPA is adopted by the membership at AASCU's Annual Meeting. This document highlights the association's policy priorities for the coming year and aligns with our newly approved [strategic plan](#), particularly with our continued effort to advance the mission of AASCU institutions through national and state policy. I hope this written framework assists our members, other interested organizations, and federal and state policymakers in navigating the regular order of congressional business once normalcy is restored.

The times are far from normal for our country and indeed the world. The coronavirus pandemic and the consequent economic crisis it has triggered have upended institutional operations and our students' lives. The sudden switch to distance delivery and need to close residence halls, assist stranded students from other states and countries, and address the plight of our faculty and staff while keeping everyone safe have been challenges that our members have confronted since the outset of this outbreak. It has taken a toll on them personally and on their institutions financially.

This crisis has also deepened the inequities in our country for underserved students at our institutions. The necessity to expeditiously move to online learning has been difficult for our most vulnerable students who do not have technology capabilities and Wi-Fi at home. AASCU has answered the call for assistance from the earliest phase of this crisis, when we

worked collaboratively with other higher education groups to advocate for a significant federal intervention to support institutions and students, provide much-needed flexibility to otherwise rigid federal rules on financial and institutional aid and research, and support continued operations of regional comprehensive state colleges and universities.

I can assure our members and the broader higher education community that AASCU will continue to advocate for federal support, innovative solutions to the challenges ahead, and the preservation and enhancement of a robust and thriving public higher education infrastructure for our nation through these difficult times. The policies articulated in this document remain a vital roadmap to that end. They will certainly need to be complemented with additional emergency measures to help our institutions navigate the difficult road ahead.

I am committed to remaining active and being at the table on your behalf on these and the numerous other topics of importance and relevance to your work. We will keep you informed; act as your eyes and ears in Washington; and, when the conditions warrant it, ask for your direct involvement on issues as they arise.

I thank you for your support and active engagement with AASCU and assure you that AASCU is fully available to you as your Washington office to help in any way we can.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mildred García". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mildred García, Ed.D.  
President



# STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE ENGINES OF MOBILITY FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

America's public institutions of higher education serve a unique role as the portal through which so many of the students and much of the nation's future workforce gain the skills needed to face the economic challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Regional comprehensive university programs offer more than 4 million students the opportunity to achieve America's promise of an affordable, high-quality college education. And, across the country, public four-year institutions serve as indispensable venues for access and civic engagement. In addition, as institutions are created by and accountable to the states, they serve as catalysts for economic growth in their communities and as engines of global competitiveness for the nation. Considering the challenges state colleges and universities face, including shrinking budgets, increased demand for affordable

postsecondary education, enrollment volatility and onerous regulations, we must persevere to create opportunities for all students who would otherwise have few real options for realizing the American Dream—a satisfying career and a fulfilling life.

To this end, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) presents its *2020 Public Policy Agenda*, which underscores the most compelling policy issues affecting regional comprehensive universities and promotes policies that help our institutions fulfill their unique role in educating America's workforce and strengthening communities. Each issue has implications at the state, federal or both levels of policy and law. Accordingly, we provide our state and federal policymakers with specific actions to take going forward.

## **State Colleges and Universities Will Lead on Issues of Affordability, Campus Climate and Quality Assurance**

Among the many issues affecting our campuses, conversations about the cost and quality of higher education, fostering a safe and supportive campus environment for all students, and measuring our institutions' effectiveness and our students' success will be front and center in 2020. AASCU has prioritized these issues in its advocacy plans at the national level and in its work with state-level partners. Our collective voice will be instrumental to our work going forward to ensure that state colleges and universities are heard and heeded in the policy discussions to come, especially considering deliberations for a comprehensive reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA), the cornerstone legislation for American higher education.

# ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY AND VALUE

## Policy Actions

- › Support state/federal partnerships, matching grants and other federal policies that promote adequate state support for all public institutions.
- › Support collaborations with community colleges to contain costs and promote greater affordability.
- › Expand and support dual enrollment programs that are both tuition free and high quality.
- › Simplify access to aid and revise need analysis to provide greater help to the lowest-income students.
- › Preserve and increase federal grant aid.
- › Focus grant aid on baccalaureate programs.
- › Keep student debt manageable.
- › Provide appropriate debt relief to victims of fraud and to overburdened borrowers.
- › Protect income-based repayment and loan forgiveness options.
- › Maintain tax provisions that support higher education.
- › Eliminate tax liability on loan forgiveness programs.
- › Expand funding for low-resource institutions that serve large numbers of low-income and underserved students to decrease and eliminate the opportunity gap.
- › Preserve and expand student loan tax deductions.
- › Expand employer-provided educational assistance benefits.
- › Advocate for increased state investment in public higher education and promote policies that align federal and state practices with greater affordability and improved access.
- › Encourage and promote AASCU's proposed federal matching program and other strategies for leveraging federal resources to incentivize state higher education funding.
- › Support proposals that promote state-federal affordability partnerships by providing federal incentives for increased state funding of operating costs at public colleges and universities.
- › Support ongoing regulatory review to streamline compliance burdens whenever possible.
- › Encourage more targeted, risk-based regulations.
- › Support meaningful analysis of the benefits and costs associated with new regulations.
- › Support evidence-based regulations, oversight and enforcement initiatives to target problem institutions.
- › Work with Congress and the administration on devising reasonable financial aid policies to reward institutional accountability and effectiveness.
- › Ensure any risk-sharing policies enacted by Congress are properly configured to account for student demographics and institutional missions.
- › Promote and support completion and graduation initiatives that further reasonable access and academic quality.

# CAMPUS CLIMATE: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## Policy Actions

- › Support policies and programs emphasizing a renewed and sustained commitment to the prevention of all forms of sexual violence and misconduct.
- › Encourage state and system officials to review and update state laws and campus procedures related to sexual violence in a manner consistent with federal law to ensure fair and equitable proceedings.
- › Continue AASCU's engagement with the U.S. Department of Education and Congress to consult with higher education institutions in devising policies against sexual violence on campus.
- › Ensure that state and federal action pertaining to campus disciplinary processes maintains a standard that is fair and equitable to all parties.
- › Oppose federal and state intrusions on academic practices, including transcription.
- › Harmonize the Clery Act's data reporting requirements with the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting standards.
- › Oppose legislation that prevents campuses from exercising discretion regarding events and scheduling choices that may lead to violence.
- › Oppose state legislation that seeks to strip institutional and/or system authority over campus weapons policy.
- › Promote a free exchange of ideas to the maximum extent possible in a manner that is consistent with constitutional principles.
- › Sponsor and support activities that educate the campus community about the value and central importance of academic freedom and open discourse.
- › Ensure and promote broad intellectual engagement.
- › Oppose micromanagement of constitutional campus operations through new "free speech" laws.
- › Support and promote difficult dialogues and civil debate.
- › Highlight the role of education in restoring and promoting the practice of civil discourse as essential to the health of our democracy.
- › Sponsor and support civic learning and engagement initiatives.

# CAMPUS CLIMATE: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- › Support programs that provide public service opportunities and learning for students and graduates.
- › Support programs that build student civic and information literacy in online spaces through broad, cross-institutional projects that enable students to fact-check, annotate, and provide context for emergent news stories promulgated by social media.
- › Educate students to critically analyze information and act as informed citizens.
- › Encourage regional comprehensive universities to facilitate their students' participation in the election process to the maximum extent possible.
- › Oppose state legislative interventions that unnecessarily and inappropriately limit college students' ability to vote.
- › Defend the legality of university admissions, financial aid and faculty appointment policies intended to promote diversity.
- › Support all minority-serving institutions.
- › Promote policies that maximize an inclusive campus environment for all students, faculty and staff.
- › Support and promote policies that assist underserved students in fully participating in and continuing their postsecondary education.
- › Promote access not only to high-quality certificates but also to full-fledged academic credentials for all students seeking higher education.
- › Restore Pell eligibility for incarcerated individuals to assist with rehabilitation and reentry into society.
- › “Ban the box” on admissions applications and engage in any preventative due diligence and threat assessment based on past criminal convictions only after an academic judgment about applicants has been made.
- › Support the continuation and proper funding of the U.S. Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Program.
- › Ensure active-duty service members and veterans continue to have access to educational programs and credentials that are broadly recognized and have value within the civilian sector.
- › Support the maintenance and improvement of GI Bill educational benefits.

# CAMPUS CLIMATE: SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- › Support less restrictive policies governing active-duty and veteran benefits—policies hamstringing students and put up barriers to degree completion.
- › Improve institutional accountability and oversight for institutional participation in GI Bill educational benefits.
- › Support and improve the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure efficient delivery of GI Bill educational benefits to veterans.
- › Provide active-duty and veteran students with specific support services to meet their unique needs.
- › Improve coordination among the agencies regarding the unique needs of service members and veterans.
- › Support Executive Order 13607—Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members.
- › Support legislation to create a pathway for legalization for eligible individuals brought to the United States as children.
- › Advocate for international exchange programs and reasonable international student and scholar visa policies.
- › Oppose inappropriate restrictions on travel to the United States by international students and scholars.



# QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

## Policy Actions

- › Preserve and protect academic freedom and institutional autonomy at public institutions.
- › Oppose federal and state efforts to politically micromanage academic decisions regarding admissions criteria, faculty, curriculum, instruction and transfer of academic credit at public institutions.
- › Oppose political interference with research and the academic peer-review process.
- › Oppose arbitrary restrictions on international exchange and collaborative research activities of public institutions.
- › Support the collection of targeted, actionable data for accountability and program management purposes in compliance with fair information practices and in a manner that does not impose unreasonable burdens on participating institutions.
- › Encourage state policymakers to recognize issues of institutional/system governance, equity and academic quality in all policies associated with the state role in higher education financing.
- › Work with all stakeholders in reviewing and revisiting accreditation's role within the triad: the federal government, states and accrediting bodies.
- › Preserve the American tradition of political noninterference in academic judgments about programmatic quality.
- › Reduce unnecessary costs by more tightly defining the accreditation process and its expected outcomes.
- › Continue to work with Congress and the administration to chart a practicable federal policy on educator preparation.
- › Urge policymakers to align educator preparation requirements with the 2015 reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- › Support the Teacher/Educator Quality Partnership Program.
- › Encourage state efforts to develop appropriate licensure standards based on valid, reliable and objective data, and align assessment of educator preparation programs with those standards.

# QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

- › Ensure states evaluate all educator preparation venues using the same standards.
- › Support improved teacher salaries to enable states to recruit and retain qualified teachers.
- › Provide appropriations for the Rural Development Grants for Rural Colleges and Universities program. These grants encourage partnerships between rural colleges and universities and local entities that promote greater access to college for rural high school students, increase the number of adults in rural communities with a bachelor's degree or higher, enhance training opportunities, and stimulate technological innovation.
- › Support continued funding for rural broadband enhancements that provide greater access to postsecondary education.
- › Support efforts to reauthorize, authorize and fund programs that encourage research and partnerships between urban and metropolitan anchor institutions and their communities. These efforts promote economic and workforce development, community revitalization, teacher recruitment, and greater access to college for urban high school students.
- › Recognize the contributions of each higher education sector in strengthening STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields. The entire community's resources must be tapped when creating, funding and implementing STEM programs that educate future scientists, engineers and mathematicians.
- › Create research opportunities for students studying in the STEM fields within all sectors of higher education.
- › Support and improve basic and applied scientific research and education activities for undergraduate programs to complement established graduate and research programming.
- › Advocate for programs that recruit traditionally underrepresented populations, such as students of color, low-income students and women, into STEM fields and provide them with support.
- › Support the creation of institutional incentives for graduate students in fields associated with high-need jobs identified by state workforce service agencies.

# QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUTCOMES

- › Continue support for undergraduate research and mentoring in STEM fields and for STEM pipeline programs promoting P–20 partnerships and articulation agreements.
- › Support programs that meaningfully engage students in applied research that addresses the nation’s innovation plans for health care, energy and national security.
- › Support technology transfer and workforce training programs that link higher education institutions with the manufacturing sector and incentivize corporate and private sector investment in these partnerships.
- › Fund the development and renovation of laboratory facilities and support equipment acquisition that will promote innovative and collaborative scientific and technical research at all higher education institutions.
- › Expand federal efforts to support higher education institutions in improving efficiency in the physical plant, campus transportation and other institutional operations.
- › Advocate for grant funding at the U.S. Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies that support university research in sustainability, renewable energy and green technology.
- › Support new and emerging forms of instructional and program delivery.
- › Support net neutrality to ensure institutions and students continue to have access to an open internet.
- › Support campus adoption of new and emerging technologies, particularly for students with special needs.
- › Support and promote efforts to connect all college graduates to career paths upon completion of their programs.

# DELIVERING AMERICA'S PROMISE

AASCU's nearly 400 college and university members are found throughout the United States and in the Bahamas and China. Campuses range in size from approximately 1,000 students to more than 45,000. AASCU members are found in the inner city; in suburbs, towns and cities; in remote rural America; and internationally.

- ◆ We are institutions of access and opportunity. We believe that the American promise should be real for all Americans, and that belief shapes our commitment to access, affordability and educational opportunity, and in the process strengthens American democracy for all citizens.

- ◆ We are student-centered institutions. We place the student at the heart of our enterprise, enhancing the learning environment and student achievement not only through teaching and advising, but also through our research and public service activities.
- ◆ We are "stewards of place." We engage faculty, staff and students with the communities and regions we serve—helping to advance public education, economic development and the quality of life for all with whom we live and who support our work. We affirm that America's promise extends not only to those who come to the campus but also to all our neighbors.

We believe that through this stewardship and through our commitments to access and opportunity and to our students, public colleges and universities effectively and accountably deliver America's promise. In so doing we honor and fulfill the public trust.



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