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## ABSTRACT

This action agenda for public 4-year comprehensive colleges and universities calls on these institutions to focus on what they do best, to ensure that they remain accessible and affordable, to communicate their vision and success, and to continue to provide higher education opportunities that ensure an educated citizenry. To ensure their continued responsiveness and success, action is needed in four core areas: (1) quality assurance; (2) public engagement; (3) access and inclusion; and (4) communication and advocacy. To ensure the quality of the educational product, college and university presidents and chancellors will have to establish a climate that demands quality, develop the resources to support it, and work for assessment and accountability. To ensure public engagement, it will be necessary to work for better education at elementary and secondary levels and work closely with communities and businesses. Access and inclusion must be addressed through a variety of approaches so that students receive equal educational opportunities regardless of race and social status. Better communication and advocacy will ensure that the public receives accurate information about the costs of public higher education and the needs of institutions and students. (SLD)

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# A Commitment to Students, Community and Society

An Action Agenda for the Nation's  
Public Four-Year Comprehensive  
Colleges and Universities

American Association of State  
Colleges and Universities

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The nation's four-year comprehensive colleges and universities are both steeped in tradition and on the cutting edge of what's new and progressive. They were created to serve the communities and states where they are located, and to be among the most adaptable and accessible of all types of institutions.

Public, comprehensive institutions have continually developed new programs to respond to societal needs, student demands, and advances in knowledge. But their primary mission has been to help students succeed, to support them in a learning environment that best meets their needs and to prepare them for both the workforce and the world. These institutions have enriched their communities with cultural offerings, and are involved in community service that enhances student learning and faculty-community connections. These are also the institutions that are called upon to respond to the changing needs of the labor market.

These colleges and universities have made remarkable progress in areas such as: campus diversity, electronic delivery of information, designing curricula that meets different learning styles, partnerships with business and industry, and accountability and efficiency. Calls for fiscal efficiency are not new to these institutions. Because some of their funding comes from public tax dollars, they have always had to be accountable. During times when state appropriations to public higher education were reduced, these institutions have had to manage, prioritize and reallocate resources, without sacrificing academic quality and the ability to respond to change.

Despite their phenomenal success and growth—almost 40 percent of all students attending four-year colleges and universities attend one of these schools—there is a need for an action agenda for this sector of higher education. These institutions were created with a basic mission to provide increasing numbers of students with the opportunity to learn, to better themselves as individuals, to better society through their knowledge and to take responsibility in their communities. These colleges and universities were created to be the springboards from which citizens were able to grasp the American dream. Today there are barriers to access to public comprehensive colleges and universities, there are challenges to their mission, questions about efficiency and accountability, and there are some who say they have to reinvent themselves to counter an

## AASCU INSTITUTIONS

More than 400 of the nation's comprehensive public four-year colleges and universities are members of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

What are AASCU institutions?

These are the institutions that:

-  deliver on helping people reach the American dream
-  are many times the center of cultural and intellectual life in their communities
-  provide education for a large segment of society, including first-generation college students and immigrants
-  emphasize meeting the diverse needs of the states in which they are located
-  emphasize teaching and learning
-  are committed to access and inclusion
-  receive a portion of their funding from state taxes, allowing tuition to remain affordable
-  are publicly created and controlled by state governance systems
-  award predominantly baccalaureate and master's degrees

entrepreneurial revolution in education. This tugging on the fabric of these institutions is explainable. They were called upon to be adaptable and changeable from their inception, adding and expanding programs to meet the needs of the changing society.

Yet, the unprecedented expansion projected in enrollment in higher education—supported by projected increases in the number of high school graduates, the number of immigrants entering the system and adults seeking additional postsecondary education for retraining and lifelong learning—indicates that many educational choices are desired and needed. Public, comprehensive colleges and universities are one of those available choices that will meet the educational needs of most people seeking higher education.

This agenda addresses how these institutions will need to deal with the barriers of change and reinforces the sector-specific mission of being learner-centered. This is the niche for these institutions that will define them from other postsecondary choices as students determine where they will access the information they need to prepare them for both work and life.

## THE AGENDA

The action agenda calls on public comprehensive colleges and universities to focus on what they do best: to ensure that they remain accessible and affordable, to communicate their vision and their success, and to continue to provide higher education opportunities that will ensure an enlightened and educated citizenry that supports the needs of the workforce and the communities and states in which they are located.

To ensure their continued responsiveness and success, action is needed in four core areas: Quality Assurance, Public Engagement, Access and Inclusion, and Communication and Advocacy.

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# QUALITY ASSURANCE

Despite the need for efficiency and cost cutting, public colleges and universities have to maintain the quality of their “product.” This definition of quality has been expanded to include criteria much like that in the private sector, such as the adoption of maxims of customer service and convenience. In addition to a clear mission statement that defines the institution’s educational goals, components that ensure academic quality include a curriculum that supports the needs of the marketplace and sustains the whole person, the promotion of intellectual and social inquiry, and the maintenance of excellence in teaching and learning. Assuring quality, however, also includes collecting data and making the information about the institution available.

## **AASCU presidents and chancellors will:**

### **Climate**

- set clear, consistent and intellectually rigorous learner-centered educational goals at the institution
- create a culture of innovation and creativity by rewarding risk-taking and supporting professional development
- build campus communities that integrate work and learning, service and reflection
- support an awareness of and the need to effectively address different learning styles within the classroom and through services to students
- find solutions to keep students studying, learning and moving ahead
- be future-oriented and insist that the institutions recognize the importance of global interdependence and the need for cross-cultural competence
- implement professional development programs for faculty and staff to facilitate the use of technology in the classroom and to ensure that faculty are responsive to the use of appropriate technology
- integrate international education into the whole curriculum, realizing that the preparation of students for the global marketplace spans not only disciplines but nations and cultures as well
- ensure that technology is used not only to enrich and further learning, but also to further communication

### **Resources**

- ensure that the curriculum provides students with the skills, general education, and specific learning they need for their future lives and careers
- attract a highly qualified faculty who are committed to the educational enterprise and who value the opportunity for intellectual interaction with the students they teach
- provide student services that offer all students a reasonable opportunity to succeed and cultivate leadership and responsibility
- allocate resources to expand the availability of technology on campus so that all students have access to information beyond the boundaries of the campus and are comfortable accessing information electronically
- use technology to share instructors, courseware and resources
- develop partnerships to share the cost of purchasing services, equipment and supplies and outsource when possible

### **Accountability**

- look for new ways to measure quality and productivity
- promote the disclosure of the level of access, student success, program quality, and institutional financial and performance information
- promote campus-wide awareness of the importance of public accountability
- support and use uniform accountability reporting to get information to the public and policymakers

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# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

AASCU institutions already contribute much to society and their communities. Going beyond mere job training is inherent in their institutional missions. There is the recognition that education should also foster an enlightened citizenry and contribute to greater social cohesion and stability. There is a need in today's environment to use the classroom and campus experience to promote citizenship and ethical choices. The students educated at public colleges and universities will be the leaders of the coming century and must be prepared to help shape the future. In addition, AASCU campuses have a particular mission to become involved and to improve the communities in which they are located. From kindergarten through college, every child in America should have the kind of teaching needed to help him or her be successful and take advantage of opportunities to contribute to both the nation's economy and society. Since the quality and preparation of classroom teachers will affect the quality of students' educational experience, better preparation of public school teachers is needed. Since teacher preparation is the birthright of many AASCU institutions, they have a particular responsibility to ensure that classroom teachers are well prepared.

## **AASCU presidents and chancellors will:**

- recognize, through the curriculum and on-campus activities, multiple opportunities that show students how to be informed and involved citizens and to live productively within communities
- advocate for better public schools to send students better prepared for postsecondary opportunity
- ensure that the institution serves as a model for a pluralistic and democratic society by fostering a climate of inclusion that is free from bias and discrimination
- develop curricula that are relevant to community-building and that are centered on both the student and society
- develop ways to stay in touch with the students on their campuses
- remain active in their communities and develop formal mechanisms to ensure that the campus is committed and open to community needs
- recognize that AASCU institutions, in particular, have a special commitment to bring cultural and arts opportunities to their communities
- support faculty and staff in efforts to broker resources to business and industry
- support bridge programs between industry and universities and work collaboratively to ensure graduates can contribute to the competitive edge that this country needs to compete in the global economy
- work closely with regional school districts and link the preparation of teachers to the needs of the public schools and their communities
- recognize the responsibility their institution has to ensure the effective preparation of classroom teachers, teaching them to be effective in the classroom and knowledgeable and available to become involved in public school reform
- recognize that teacher education programs must reflect the diversity of our nation's schools in the students they educate, the curricula they teach and the instructional options they offer
- develop effective training programs for current teachers and administrators and make those programs accessible and convenient

AASCU institutions were created to be accessible and affordable and have done a good job of opening doors of opportunity for many first-generation college students, immigrants, and segments of the population who were traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Higher education is the great equalizer, and public, comprehensive colleges and universities must ensure that students receive equal educational opportunities, irrespective of their race and social status. According to the National Commission on National Investment in Higher Education, a growing shortfall in public funding may force the nation's colleges and universities to turn away half the student population by the year 2015. The projected enrollment growth combined with increased costs, inadequate institutional funding and higher tuition could seriously threaten access to educational opportunity.

## **AASCU presidents and chancellors will:**

- advocate for financial aid funding, especially for the neediest students
- let students with disabilities know that they can be accommodated and are welcome
- ensure that different learning styles are recognized and supported
- develop public statements that include the benefits of an education to the community and that recognize that civility, access, inclusion and equity are the goals of a public university
- elevate the debate concerning equity in American society
- enhance the campus climate for all students by working actively to promote equity in faculty and staff hiring and to support programs and activities which indicate to students that they are important as individuals
- ensure that admissions staff target efforts to recruit and admit students from underrepresented groups
- support funding for programs to ensure that at-risk students in all categories are given opportunities to succeed
- insist that the outcome standards of their institutions be equal for all students
- expand the accessibility of their institutions to all individuals who seek higher education by providing opportunities to learn via community-based or technology-delivered courses
- extend services and programs to reach adult and employed students as well as those seeking continuing professional development
- strengthen links with community colleges to ensure a seamless educational opportunity from one sector to another

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Recent national surveys have shown that the public is misinformed about the cost of public higher education. Recent proposed state and federal legislation mandating additional reporting requirements is an indication that policymakers are misinformed about what public institutions are doing in the areas of cost-cutting and accountability. Federal education policies that target tax savings for middle-income Americans are an indication that lawmakers are misinformed about the need to support access to higher education for the neediest students. Reports from private think tanks, and information found in gubernatorial addresses, political speeches, and media headlines indicate that many people are misinformed and can't differentiate among the different sectors of higher education. Legal opinions and recent state initiatives have had the effect of limiting the tools institutions can use to admit underrepresented students. This is another indication that there is a need to better articulate institutional goals. Within communities, citizens often see "walls" around colleges and universities that keep them from participating. Clearly, there needs to be better communication.

## AASCU presidents and chancellors will:

### Communication

- articulate the economic and cultural contributions public higher education makes to the nation, effectively making the case that it is a common good that both serves the interests of society and provides individual benefits
- ensure that accurate and comprehensive information is collected and participate in information campaigns that accurately represent the cost of attending college
- ensure that information is collected and articulated on how their institution is cutting costs and supporting efficiency
- provide information that would help citizens feel ownership for their publicly supported colleges and universities, showing specific contributions that they make to their quality of life
- talk about research and technology in terms the public can understand by relating it to how it affects people
- let people know that education opens doors of opportunity
- let people know that financial aid is available to help them attend their institution
- speak out on behalf of those who have obstacles—financial or otherwise—that would keep them from attending their institution
- find out what barriers keep people from attending their institution and try to remove them
- determine what makes their institution special and different from the other institutions in the state and talk about it
- let people know what their faculty are doing and the teaching and learning that is occurring on their campus
- take responsibility for building better lines of communication
- let businesses know what having a public college or university in their area means for them in terms of resources and employees
- open the doors on their campus to the community to reinforce that two-way relationship
- engage others to speak on behalf of public higher education
- make it a priority to enlist the help of the board of trustees in support of the institution

#### **Advocacy**

- explain that the primary purpose of state appropriations is to offset the cost of public education and to keep student tuition as low as possible
  
- compile information to convince policymakers that federal financial aid should be funded to guarantee access to higher education, especially in the form of grants to needy students

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# **ACTION AGENDA**

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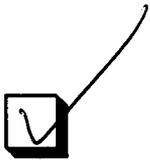


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