



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF 50 RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS

INTRODUCTION

In late 2017, the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) was awarded a grant to convene a group of forward-thinking campus leaders tasked with developing policy solutions to help students surmount the obstacles that prevent them from enrolling in, paying for, and graduating from college. NASFAA used the grant funding to facilitate the Higher Education Committee of 50, a group composed of college presidents, enrollment managers, admissions staff, financial aid and bursar leaders, members of governing boards, students, and other leaders from all postsecondary institution sectors. Combined, they hold memberships in more than 140 higher education-related professional associations, with many serving in multiple leadership roles.

The Higher Education Committee of 50 divided their work into four subgroups reflecting the four policy areas. Each

subgroup reviewed relevant literature, heard from experts, and engaged in hours of discussion and debate before developing their respective recommendations. NASFAA released draft recommendations for public comment, and the subgroup members analyzed and reviewed all feedback. They incorporated much of this feedback into the final recommendations.

The Higher Education Committee of 50 executive summary offers 36 recommendations for consideration by Congress in the hope that they will foster discussion and guide future policy decisions for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. This brief presents the findings of the Access Subgroup.

The full report, including additional details, a reference list, and a full list of Higher Education Committee of 50 members, is available at <https://www.highereducationcommitteeof50.org>.

ACCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Access Subgroup developed recommendations aimed at improving the ability of low-income, first-generation, and other underrepresented students to attend an institution of higher education. As a starting point, the subgroup defined **access** as the ways educational institutions and policies strive to ensure all prospective students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of postsecondary education.

Because the scope of access to higher education is expansive, this subgroup limited their efforts to the period beginning with the admissions process and culminating at the end of the first year of study.

Access Subgroup members also agreed on the high importance of success and completion at the postsecondary level. The goal of improving access to higher education is not simply to

enroll underrepresented students, but also to provide adequate support to enable them to achieve their educational goals. Because success and completion efforts can be distinct from access efforts, the subgroup chose to focus exclusively on access issues.

Within the broad category of access, the subgroup concentrated on three main areas: (1) reducing and removing structural barriers to higher education, (2) improving access to information and awareness of college options, and (3) improving the first-year experience.

Access Recommendation 1: Simplify and improve the current financial aid application process utilizing one or more of the following strategies:

- A. Implement the NASFAA proposal for a three-level application process (NASFAA, 2015).
- B. Expand the functionality of the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT) to include (1) all line items of the IRS 1040 tax return used in the calculation of the applicant's EFC, (2) W-2 information, and (3) verification of non-filing status.
- C. Consider allowing students to file a Free Application for Federal Student Assistance (FAFSA) that would permit financial aid consideration for multiple years (e.g., a one-time FAFSA).
- D. Consider allowing students to apply for financial aid via the federal tax return process.

Access Recommendation 2: Require Title IV institutions to adopt standardized elements in the financial aid award notification, including all costs, net price, grouping by types of awards, and common descriptors/language.

Access Recommendation 3: Require the U.S. Department of Education to provide more transparency on the verification selection process through the FAFSA with the goal of reducing the number of FAFSA applications selected for verification. Specifically, the Department should treat students equitably with regard to the verification selection criteria and ensure potential Federal Pell Grant recipients are not disproportionately selected for verification compared to recipients of other federal need-based aid programs.

Access Recommendation 4:¹ Support the expanded use of online instruction to enhance access and increase affordability.

Access Recommendation 5: Require the U.S. Department of Education to create and make available a federally recognized database of "virtual advisors" to provide general information to students that will ensure student success as it relates to the admissions and financial aid application processes.

Access Recommendation 6: Improve and prioritize broadband internet services for online education/digitally delivered education and training.

Access Recommendation 7: Provide financial incentives to graduate school counseling educator programs to place interns in high schools with some of the lowest college-going rates and/or in high schools that serve predominantly low-income students.

Access Recommendation 8:² Allocate additional funding in a separate allocation for which schools could apply. Allowable uses of these funds would include, but would not be limited to, student mentors in summer bridge and other transition-to-college programs.

Access Recommendation 9:³ Include in federal student aid funding courses taken in summer bridge programs, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, and other developmental coursework without affecting students' Federal Pell Grant lifetime eligibility. Under this recommendation, Congress should remove the current 30-credit-hour limit. Current satisfactory academic progress requirements, including rules on repeat coursework, would apply.

CONCLUSION

In a single year, the Higher Education Committee of 50 has accomplished work of extensive breadth and depth, addressing a wide range of topics while drilling down on practice and policy to develop thoughtful, innovative recommendations. Nonetheless, the Committee recognizes and deeply believes this work is just a starting point for future HEA

reauthorization discussions and understands that many of the recommendations will require future work and refinement. The 116th Congress provides a fresh new policy window to explore HEA reauthorization, and Committee members will ensure their recommendations reach key stakeholders, inform related discussions, and lay the groundwork for further exploration.

¹ Because the Access Subgroup finalized Recommendation 4 after the public comment period had ended, it was not subject to public comment. However, the entire Higher Education Committee of 50 reviewed this recommendation, and it passed with a super majority during the December 2018 final vote.

² Because the Access Subgroup finalized Recommendation 8 after the public comment period had ended, this recommendation was not subject to public comment. However, the entire Higher Education Committee of 50 reviewed this recommendation, and it passed with a super majority during the December 2018 final vote.

³ Because the Access Subgroup finalized Recommendation 9 after the public comment period had ended, this recommendation was not subject to public comment. However, the entire Higher Education Committee of 50 reviewed this recommendation, and it passed with a super majority during the December 2018 final vote.