

Improve Access to Higher Education

The American Association of University Women is committed to making the dream of higher education a reality for all women. As the skill requirements of jobs continue to increase, so too should access to postsecondary education. In 2007, Congress passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRA) and reauthorized the Higher Education Act in 2008.¹ If properly implemented and funded, both of these laws have the potential to greatly improve access to higher education and help meet the needs of current and future college students. AAUW supports the following measures to build on those successes and make higher education more attainable for all.

- **Improving and Expanding the Pell Grant Award Program:** The maximum Pell grant for the 2008-2009 school year is \$4,731, which covers only 33 percent of the total cost at a public 4-year institution.² AAUW supports increasing the maximum award level to \$7,000 and advocates mandatory appropriations to provide the necessary resources for the program, in addition to moving to a system of direct student loans to fund these priorities. Fortunately, Congress and the administration have identified education as a key place for investment in economic recovery, supporting AAUW priorities such as increasing the maximum Pell grant award, proposing mandatory funding, and adjusting this vital financial aid yearly to keep pace with inflation. This additional funding is timely because AAUW successfully pushed 2008 legislative changes that allow students to qualify for Pell grants based on a year-round enrollment schedule, and also provide part-time students with access to Pell grants. Given the economic downturn, more students are seeking aid and additional people are returning to school to retrain, making additional funds critically important to both economic recovery and building a competitive workforce in the global marketplace.³
- **Making College More Affordable and Managing Student Debt:** Over the past decade, debt levels have more than doubled for graduating seniors with student loans, from \$9,250 to \$19,200—a 108 percent increase (58 percent after accounting for inflation).⁴ Because women are more likely to borrow money for college than men and will earn less on average after graduation, female graduates are more likely to struggle with their loan debt.⁵ When CCRA became law, it reduced subsidized student loan interest rates by up to 50 percent, capped loan repayment at 15 percent of an individual's discretionary income, and created loan forgiveness plans for graduates who enter public service.⁶ AAUW strongly supported this legislation. Unfortunately, in 2008 the Department of Education issued regulations weakening some of these provisions. According to the final regulations, married borrowers could be expected to pay up to or more than double the monthly loan payment if they file taxes jointly. In addition, those who enter public service professions could be forced to wait 10 years or more before learning whether they qualify for the loan forgiveness plan. In spite of these regulatory setbacks, AAUW will work to ensure that the law's intent of truly decreasing the cost of higher education and rewarding public service is maintained.
- **Creating Economic Stimulus for Students:** Last year, in response to the current economic slowdown, Congress passed AAUW-supported legislation to ensure that student loans remain available and accessible even as financial markets tighten. AAUW continues its work with Congress and the Department of Education to ensure that students have access to all the federal loans for which they are eligible—even during tight economic times. Congress and the administration should continue to make access to student loans a priority in recovery and stimulus action. In this economic climate, students who have exhausted all available aid may increasingly be forced to turn to risky private loans or leave school altogether because of lack of funds. These students should have access to additional, affordable federal loans. Irrespective of the economic climate, AAUW will continue its work with Congress and the Department of Education to ensure that students have access to all the federal loans for which they are eligible.
- **Raising the Income Protection Allowance:** AAUW urges Congress to allow single, financially independent students to keep more of their income when determining eligibility for financial aid. As of May 2008, the income protection allowance is \$3,750 for a dependent student, and for an independent student the amount is \$7,000 if single or married to another student, and \$11,220 if married to a non-student.⁷ AAUW supports raising the income protection allowance to \$9,000 for dependent students and \$12,000 for independent students. This increase is a more realistic reflection of the cost of living, and will allow more students to access the aid they desperately need.

- **Implementing Programs to Help Nontraditional College Students:** The 2008 HEA reauthorization authorized innovative programs that would help nontraditional students (e.g. older, parenting, working, or attending school part-time⁸) achieve success in college. These programs—Student Success Grants and the Pilot Project to Increase Persistence and Success in Community Colleges—should be fully funded.
- **Increasing Funding for Campus Child Care Programs:** AAUW strongly supports providing support services to help students balance the demands of work, family, and education. The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program provides funds to schools for campus-based child care and after-school programming, primarily to serve the needs of low-income students. In the 111th Congress, AAUW encourages Congress and the administration to substantially increase CCAMPIS funding. These additional resources will not only increase child care services, but also trigger an increase in the minimum available grant level and expand CCAMPIS eligibility to more institutions. AAUW believes campus child care programs should be a priority for higher education funding, and the need for such support services will only grow during the current economic downturn.
- **Improving Title IX Enforcement:** The Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education must become an agency of action rather than reaction. This can be done by providing timely and useful technical assistance and guidance, proactively conducting compliance reviews, and vigorously investigating and enforcing Title IX complaints. In addition, AAUW believes the 2005 “Additional Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy: Three-Part Test — Part Three” should be rescinded. AAUW is concerned that the clarification is a dramatic departure from the previous standards under which schools could demonstrate compliance with Title IX. The new rule lowers the bar for schools, making it easier to prove compliance by using a less rigorous and less thorough e-mail-based survey method. As a result, it jeopardizes the number of athletic opportunities that will be available to women on campus. AAUW is actively working with coalition partners, allies in Congress and the administration to rescind this clarification and make clear that the governing Title IX enforcement standards are those detailed in the 1996 Policy Clarification, which require schools to consider multiple factors under prong three of the Title IX three-part test.
- **Diversifying the Professoriate:** Minorities make up less than 20 percent of all collegiate faculty.⁹ Further, although women make up 39 percent of full-time collegiate faculty, they tend to be concentrated in less-senior instructional positions and at two-year institutions, as opposed to research universities.¹⁰ AAUW is pleased that the Higher Education Opportunity Act included the Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program, which authorized fellowships for students interested in obtaining a doctorate, or other terminal degree, with a specified service requirement to teach at degree-granting institutions of higher education after graduation. In the 111th Congress, AAUW will work to secure funding of the fellowship program and assist the Department of Education with the implementation of the program.
- **Increasing Awareness of Hate Crimes on Campus:** Every year, more than half a million students endure bias-motivated slurs, vandalism, threats, and physical assaults on college campuses.¹¹ In the 110th Congress, AAUW successfully led the effort to pass a provision that aligns the HEA hate crimes reporting categories with the categories used by the FBI. This improved data will give parents and students a more accurate sense of campus safety and provide colleges with a better picture of their campus climate. AAUW will work with the new Congress and administration to fund and inspire the necessary education, training and outreach necessary to fully implement this new hate crime reporting standard.

For more information, call Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, 202/785-7720, Tracy Sherman, Government Relations Manager, 202/785-7730, or Adam Zimmerman, Regulatory Affairs Manager, 202/728-7617.

¹ The Higher Education Opportunity Act was signed into law in 2008.

² The College Board. (2008). *Trends in Student Aid*, 2008. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://www.collegeboard.com/html/costs/aid/>.

³ Sanchez, Leonel. (Nov. 3, 2008). "More Students Spring from Tough Times." San Diego *Union-Tribune*. Retrieved April 7, 2008, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/education/20081103-9999-1m3train.html>.

⁴ Project on Student Debt and the National Center for Education Statistics. *Quick Facts About Student Debt*. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/File/Debt_Facts_and_Sources.pdf.

⁵ AAUW Educational Foundation. (April 2007). *Behind the Pay Gap*, 3.

⁶ The College Cost Reduction Act was signed into law in 2007.

⁷ Federal Pell Grant, Academic Competitiveness Grant, National Science and Mathematics Access To Retain Talent Grant, Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Work-Study, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Federal Family Education Loan, and William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Programs, 73 Fed. Reg. 104. (2008). Retrieved April 7, 2009, from <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/E8-11953.pdf>

⁸ U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). Special Analysis 2002: Nontraditional Undergraduates. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2002/analyses/nontraditional/>.

⁹ American Council on Education. (2006). *Minorities in Higher Education: 22nd Annual Status Report*.

¹⁰ West, Martha S. and John W. Curtis. "AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006." American Association of University Professors. Retrieved April 7, 2009, from, <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/63396944-44BE-4ABA-9815-5792D93856F1/0/AAUPGenderEquityIndicators2006.pdf>

¹¹ Southern Poverty Law Center. (2004) "10 Ways to Fight Hate on College Campuses." Retrieved April 7, 2009, from, <http://www.tolerance.org/campus>