



June 12, 2015

The Honorable Robert Scott  
Ranking Member, Committee on Education and  
the Workforce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2181 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Scott,

On behalf of the more than 170,000 bipartisan members and supporters, over 1,000 branches, and 800 college and university partners, of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide input as the Committee prepares to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA).

Workforce changes over the century have resulted in higher education becoming less of a luxury and more of a necessity. At current rates, the U.S. will add over 16 million jobs by the year 2020 that require at least some postsecondary education.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the number of jobs requiring a graduate degree is estimated to grow by at least 2.5 million by that same year.<sup>2</sup> Since many students cannot afford to pay their tuition out-of-pocket, student loans are an important and necessary option that allows students to make worthwhile investments in their educations. College graduates have fared better in the recent recession and current recovery, and have higher wages and better job prospects overall.<sup>3</sup>

About 30 percent of Americans aged 25 and older hold four-year college degrees. Among undergraduates, 56.5 percent of the student body in 2012 was female, up from 42 percent in 1970.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of female graduate students grew from 35 percent to 59 percent during this same period.<sup>5</sup> During the 2011–12 school year, women earned 57.3 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 59.9 percent of all master's degrees, and 51.4 percent of all doctorate degrees awarded in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to expanding four-year and graduate degree attainment, U.S. community colleges have taken a growing role in our higher education system as they continue to play an integral part in educating and training our workforce. A third of all higher education students attend community college, including 40 percent of undergraduates. As AAUW's recent research explains, women make up the majority of students in all sectors of higher education, including community colleges. More than 4 million women attend community colleges, which is more than the number of undergraduate women attending either public or private not-for-profit, four-year institutions. These 4 million women include more than 1 million mothers, of whom half are married and half are unmarried. The number of unmarried or single parents among undergraduate students has nearly doubled in the last 20 years.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Cost of College**

Many graduates struggle to repay their loans. Loan repayment is an even more significant burden for women, who earn less on average over the course of their lives than their male counterparts. AAUW's research report, *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College*

*Graduation*, found that the median student loan debt burden was slightly higher in 2009 for women than men. In addition, among full-time workers who were repaying their loans in 2009, nearly half (47 percent) of women one year after college graduation were paying more than 8 percent of their earnings toward student loan debt. Only 39 percent of men were in the same position. Furthermore, just over half of women (53 percent) and 39 percent of men were paying a greater percentage of their income toward student loan debt than AAUW estimates a typical person could afford.<sup>8</sup> There are many ways to reduce this burden on students. When reauthorizing HEA, AAUW urges Congress to protect Pell grants, improve loan repayment options, and consider affordability concerns outside of tuition.

### **Loan Repayment**

While AAUW and other advocates work to close the gender pay gap and even the playing field for women workers, we also know that income-contingent and income-based loan repayment plans (IBR) are crucial for women in particular to manage their debt, since these plans allow struggling borrowers to customize loan repayments to reflect their economic circumstances. A streamlined IBR program is key to ensuring more borrowers can easily learn about and access the program without confusion as to which income-based or contingent plan they qualify for.

In addition to making repayment more manageable for borrowers, AAUW encourages Congress to make refinancing possible for both federal and private student loans. Borrowers should be able to refinance student loans the same way that they can with other financial products. AAUW also supports provisions to make private student loans dischargeable in bankruptcy: While we hope that programs such as IBR and refinancing can help borrowers avoid bankruptcy, the ability to discharge private student debt in this worst-case scenario is imperative.

### **Securing Pell Grant Funding**

One component of student access to higher education in the face of rising tuition and decreasing state investment is meaningful grant aid.<sup>9</sup> The federal Pell Grant program provided grants to more than 8.9 million students in 2012–13.<sup>10</sup> During that award year, about 60 percent of Pell Grant funds went to financially independent undergraduate students. Among dependent Pell Grant recipients, 61 percent came from families with annual incomes below \$30,000<sup>11</sup> and about 36 percent of all Pell Grant recipients were classified as independent with dependent children.<sup>12</sup>

The maximum Pell Grant covered 91 percent of the average tuition and fees at a public four-year institution in 1993–94, but only 63 percent in 2013–14. In addition, the maximum Pell Grant in 2013–14 only covered 31 percent of tuition, fees, and room and board.<sup>13</sup> The maximum Pell Grant was \$5,645 for the 2013–14 award year and is projected to increase to \$5,975 by 2017.

Congress must ensure that the maximum Pell Grant is maintained. In addition, AAUW encourages Congress to move Pell Grants entirely to mandatory funding to ensure that even with projected increases the program is not subject to annual appropriations disagreements. Finally, to address the specific needs of nontraditional students, AAUW encourages changes to the Pell Grant program to allow students to access more than one grant in a school year and to increase income protection allowance, which determines how much aid working students qualify for.

### **Other Costs Associated with Higher Education**

Often lost in the conversation about affordable higher education are the other costs incurred by students during their time in school. With more and more individuals enrolling at various stages of their careers and lives, AAUW believes it is imperative to take a bigger picture look at affordability. Many students today are also parenting while enrolled in college. Research has found that in most states, average child care center fees for an infant are higher than a year's tuition and fees at a public college.<sup>14</sup> Costs for child

care put it out of reach for most student parents, making affordable on-campus child care a necessary student support. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than half of the more than 1,000 community colleges in the United States offer on-campus child care for students.<sup>15</sup> Our one federal program to support this type of affordability, the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), must be reauthorized to continue to support parenting students as they pursue higher education.

### **Programs to Support Gender Equity**

HEA reauthorization is also an appropriate time to examine necessary programs that help support areas where women remain underrepresented in education, or face still-pervasive gender discrimination. Title IX remains a key provision that supports women as they pursue postsecondary education free from discrimination and must be protected during an HEA reauthorization.

#### **Women's Educational Equity Act**

The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), authored by Patsy Mink in 1974, should not be eliminated. WEEA is the only federal grant program designed for Title IX assistance to states. It can be extended to P-12 and higher education, via grants for schools and for states and education agencies. Research from the National Coalition of Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE) has demonstrated just how important this type of grant program is – states struggle with how to apply Title IX to all aspects of their educational programs, as required by law. A grant program approach provides flexibility to the states to craft solutions to their individual circumstances. WEEA was originally included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1974, and it has been included in each subsequent reauthorization. If current efforts in Congress to reauthorize ESEA fail to reauthorize WEEA, we urge that it be included in HEA.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Women in STEM**

AAUW's report, *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*, found that environmental and social barriers – including stereotypes, gender bias, and the climate of science and engineering departments in colleges and universities – continue to block women's participation and progress in science, technology, engineering, and math.<sup>17</sup> AAUW's just-released follow up report, *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing*, shows that these factors exacerbate the country's critical economic need to fully engage women in the fields of engineering and computing; the report also explains what we can do to make these fields open to and desirable for all employees.<sup>18</sup>

We need to increase America's competitiveness by reducing barriers that deter women and underrepresented minorities from pursuing academic and career goals in STEM fields. AAUW supports the approach of the STEM Opportunities Act to help move more women and minorities into the full range of STEM programs. The bill promotes data-driven research on the participation and trajectories of women and underrepresented minorities in STEM, encourages smart policies – such as no-cost extensions and flexibility in timing for the initiation of awards – for recipients of federal research awards who have caregiving responsibilities, and would initiate federal guidance to grant reviewers and program officers on best practices to minimize the effects of implicit bias in the review of federal research grants. It also ensures the development and dissemination of guidance to universities to aid them in identifying any cultural and institutional barriers limiting the recruitment, retention, and achievement of women and minorities in academic and government STEM research careers, and to develop and implement current best practices for reducing such barriers. Finally, it authorizes NSF to award grants to universities to implement or expand research-based practices targeted specifically to increasing the recruitment and retention of minority students and faculty.

## **Women Faculty**

Although women make up 42 percent of full-time collegiate faculty, they tend to be concentrated in less-senior instructional and contingent positions.<sup>19</sup> AAUW is pleased that the Higher Education Opportunity Act included the Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program, which authorizes 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. This program must be reauthorized in HEA.

## **Data and Metrics**

A general theme emerges for AAUW when considering the various affordability and outcomes oriented metrics. It is important that data be disaggregated by gender and by race and ethnicity. Currently, the College Navigator tool includes some information desegregated by gender and by race and ethnicity. We should not abandon that model in an effort to streamline the data being collected and shared. It is valuable to students, and as a tool to ensuring schools are providing quality and affordable higher education, when we can use these metrics to assess student success. AAUW's research shows that women, in particular, struggle to repay their student debt.<sup>20</sup> Data collection and dissemination that glosses over the gender differences between the debt students take on and their repayment rates may obscure important information for women who are comparing schools. In addition, if data is used to incentivize schools to provide good value through grants or financial aid, schools that serve women poorly must be held accountable.

Similarly, as earnings and employment information is collected and shared – such as long-term median earnings – it too must be disaggregated by gender as well as race and ethnicity. The gender pay gap is, unfortunately, alive and well. AAUW's research shows it begins immediately following college graduation, even for women with the same major, experience, occupation and other factors as their male peers.<sup>21</sup> There are many reasons for the gender pay gap, some of which colleges and universities can impact. Clear information about salaries and college majors during career counseling and academic planning can help women move into careers with higher and/or more equitable pay. Providing salary negotiation training on campus, like AAUW's \$tart \$mart program, can empower women towards leveling the playing field. The proof is in the outcome, though, and schools that are serious about providing value for their degrees must also be serious about combating gender stereotypes. These schools must also equip their students with the tools necessary to succeed in the workplace. Data must be collected and shared in a way that is disaggregated by gender and by race and ethnicity where possible so that prospective students can find schools that are successful in meeting these challenges.

Our current data collections are imperfect. For example, community colleges are the backbone of higher education access in many communities. A third of all higher education students, including 40 percent of undergraduates, attend community colleges. Women make up a majority of students at community colleges, as is the case in all sectors of higher education, and nearly a quarter of these female students are also parents.<sup>22</sup> But, our current federal data source on higher education outcomes does not adequately serve community colleges. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) has two specific shortcomings that obscure an accurate understanding of the success or challenges facing community colleges. IPED reports graduation rates or completion rates only for full-time, first-time degree or certificate seeking students who begin in the fall. This excludes many students who may be well served by their institution but still had to stop-out, or enroll at part-time or less than part-time, to fit a nontraditional schedule. In addition, students who complete their associates degrees or certificates before transferring to a four-year institution are counted as graduates, but are not included as a transfer student in the IPEDS data. Given the realities of how today's students pursue their educations, this oversight simply makes no sense. The National Student Clearinghouse has improved data collection around transfer rates, but does not disaggregate the information by gender or race and ethnicity. Without corrections to these data problems

we may see a more negative or overly positive picture of a community college than is true, making that data less useful for all stakeholders. AAUW supports efforts to tackle some of these issues through ending the prohibition on a student unit record.

### **School Safety, Civil Rights, and Consumer Information**

AAUW is concerned that a focus only on enrollment, completion, and cost in conversations about data and consumer information can ignore important aspects of the college experience that impact outcomes for students. These include compliance with civil rights laws and student safety. AAUW research shows that when students are not safe they cannot learn – and specifically incidents of harassment or violence impact academic outcomes at all levels of education.<sup>23</sup> It is as important that the federal government help provide information about completion rates and earnings as it is that they report information about whether schools provide safe and equitable learning environments while using federal money. Having data and information about how schools comply with these laws and respond to such incidents are imperative for potential students to make informed decisions.

Currently, much of this information is collected via the Clery Act requirements, as recently updated through the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act in 2013. Those provisions and their newly updated regulations all go into effect in July 2015.<sup>24</sup> We have not seen the full value of the new transparency requirements, but better understanding the scope of sexual violence on campus will inform prospective students regarding the best place for them to successfully complete their higher education. We also know this data plays an important role when it comes to shaping violence prevention work.

In addition, the Equity in Athletics Disclosure Act (EADA)<sup>25</sup> requires colleges and universities that have intercollegiate athletics programs to annually provide data on participation, staffing, revenues and expenses by men's and women's teams. EADA is used by a myriad of different stakeholders annually – ranging from those who assess the financial integrity of schools, to schools in their recruitment efforts, to reporting on various issues that impact higher education.<sup>26</sup> While the NCAA collects some similar information, they have made their collection compatible with the EADA and note the value of EADA's comparability between schools on a number of characteristics.<sup>27</sup>

The Clery Act and the EADA provide a glimpse into the steps schools are taking to ensure an equitable environment for men and women, and are important consumer information tools for students. AAUW believes that this type of data collection could go even further. Schools should also be assessed on fundamental aspects of gender equity on campus – such as enrollment in various programs by gender and availability of support for pregnant and parenting students through on-campus child care. The current College Navigator program does include information about Clery Act reports, which AAUW supports. A school that is a good value is not simply one that provides the highest completion for the fewest dollars, or provides access to students who qualify for Pell grants without an overwhelming amount of debt. A school that is a good value is also a place where students can learn in a safe environment. AAUW knows from the legal cases we have supported and the research we have done that safety on campus impacts completion. Students who are harassed or assaulted may see their compromised safety change their routines and even their ability to attend and complete courses which may lead to changing schools or dropping out.<sup>28</sup>

We hope you will consider AAUW's recommendations as you reauthorize the Higher Education Act.

If you have any questions or need additional information, feel free to contact me at 202/785-7720, or Anne Hedgepeth, government relations manager, at 202/785-7724.

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Maatz  
Vice President of Government Relations

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (February 2013). *Employment Projections: 2010-2020 Summary, Table 9*. [bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm](http://bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (April 2013). Usual Weekly Earning of Wage and Salary Workers First Quarter 2013. [www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/wkyeng.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/wkyeng.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (September 2014). *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 303.7. [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_303.70.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_303.70.asp).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (September 2014). *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 303.8. [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_303.80.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_303.80.asp).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (September 2014). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2013*, Table 318.10. [nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_318.10.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_318.10.asp).

<sup>7</sup> AAUW. (2013). *Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success*. [www.aauw.org/research/women-in-community-colleges](http://www.aauw.org/research/women-in-community-colleges).

<sup>8</sup> AAUW. (2012). *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation*. [www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm).

<sup>9</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (May 1, 2014). States Are Still Funding Higher Education Below Pre-Recession Levels. [www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4135](http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4135).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *2012-2013 Federal Pell Grant End-of-Year Report*. [www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-2012-13/pell-eoy-2012-13.html](http://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-2012-13/pell-eoy-2012-13.html).

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *2012-2013 Federal Pell Grant End-of-Year Report. Table 13, Table 6*. [www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-2012-13/pell-eoy-2012-13.html](http://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-2012-13/pell-eoy-2012-13.html).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> The College Board. (2014). *Trends in Student Aid 2013*. [trends.collegeboard.org/student-aid](http://trends.collegeboard.org/student-aid).

<sup>14</sup> Child Care Aware. (2014). Parents and the High Cost of Child Care. [www.usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy/reports-research/costofcare/](http://www.usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy/reports-research/costofcare/)

<sup>15</sup> AAUW. (2014). Child Care on Campus: A Must for Mothers in College. [www.aauw.org/2014/05/06/child-care-on-cc-campus/](http://www.aauw.org/2014/05/06/child-care-on-cc-campus/)

<sup>16</sup> Women's Educational Equity Act [www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg86.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg86.html)

<sup>17</sup> AAUW. (2010). *Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*. [www.aauw.org/research/why-so-few/](http://www.aauw.org/research/why-so-few/)

<sup>18</sup> AAUW. (2015). *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing*. [www.aauw.org/research/solving-the-equation/](http://www.aauw.org/research/solving-the-equation/)

<sup>19</sup> American Association of University Professors. (2011). *AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators*. [www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/08E023AB-E6D8-4DBD-99A0-24E5EB73A760/0/persistent\\_inequity.pdf](http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/08E023AB-E6D8-4DBD-99A0-24E5EB73A760/0/persistent_inequity.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> AAUW. (2012). *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation*. [www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm).

<sup>21</sup> AAUW. (2012). *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation*. [www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm](http://www.aauw.org/GraduatettoaPayGap/index.cfm).

<sup>22</sup> AAUW. (2013). *Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success*. [www.aauw.org/research/women-in-community-colleges/](http://www.aauw.org/research/women-in-community-colleges/)

<sup>23</sup> AAUW. (2006). *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*. [history.aauw.org/aauw-research/2006-drawing-the-line](http://history.aauw.org/aauw-research/2006-drawing-the-line). AAUW (2011). *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School*. [www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line/](http://www.aauw.org/research/crossing-the-line/)

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2014). Negotiated Rulemaking 2013-2014

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). [www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2012/vawa.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2012/vawa.html)

<sup>25</sup> 20 USC §1092(e)

<sup>26</sup> See: Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics, CBS [www.cbssports.com/collegefootball/writer/jon-solomon/24803567/moneyball-how-college-footballs-middle-class-is-winning-big](http://www.cbssports.com/collegefootball/writer/jon-solomon/24803567/moneyball-how-college-footballs-middle-class-is-winning-big).

<sup>27</sup> NCAA [www.ncaa.org/about/resources/finances/ncaa-membership-financial-reporting-system](http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/finances/ncaa-membership-financial-reporting-system)

<sup>28</sup> AAUW. (2006). *Drawing the Line: Sexual Harassment on Campus*. [history.aauw.org/aauw-research/2006-drawing-the-line](http://history.aauw.org/aauw-research/2006-drawing-the-line)