

Legislative Priorities Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE) is comprised of approximately 50 organizations dedicated to improving educational opportunities for women and girls. NCWGE's Task Force on Higher Education has advocated for more than 30 years for policies and programs to advance women and girls in at all levels of education so that they can achieve long-term economic independence.

Since the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) in 1998, NCWGE has witnessed many improvements in the collegiate environment for women and girls. This coalition fought to ensure many important provisions were included in the 1998 bill, including women's access to higher education, supplemental services for parenting and nontraditional students, and increased safety measures on campus. However, NCWGE finds there is still much to be done in order to make the college dream a reality for women of all ages and in all circumstances.

NCWGE believes that female college students often face unique challenges that may make college access and retention more difficult for them. Non-traditional female students,¹ including those who are parenting and pregnant, are often forced to balance attending post-secondary school with work and family care. These women are more likely to attend school part-time, and single mothers will face extra expenses such as childcare. In the 1999-2000 school year, 73 percent of undergraduates were considered in some way "nontraditional," meaning they were not among those who received a high school diploma, immediately enrolled in college full time, relied on their parents for financial support and did not work during the school year.² There are very few federal programs that recognize the unique needs of nontraditional students and provide appropriate assistance to them.

In light of the increasing number of nontraditional students and parenting students, the majority of whom are women, NCWGE supports policies that help these students enter and complete post-secondary education. Given the need for a highly skilled workforce, the rising cost of tuition, and the changing characteristics of the "traditional student," NCWGE priorities for authorization are as follows:

Student aid and financial assistant services must be updated to match the needs of today's typical college student. Approximately 63 percent of all federal, state, and institutional aid given to students for 2002-2003 came from programs funded under the HEA.³

- **Pell Grants:** Since Pell grants were intended to serve as the foundation for all student aid, NCWGE supports making Pell grants a more viable source of tuition assistance for

¹ There are numerous definitions for "nontraditional students;" the term includes students who are over 25, work full time, are pregnant or parenting, are displaced homemakers, or attend school part-time or less than part-time. In the context of this paper, we distinguish between "nontraditional students" and students seeking nontraditional education and career paths – though clearly many students fall into both categories.

² National Center for Education Statistics, 1999-2000

³ The College Board, *Trends in Student Aid*, 2003.

nontraditional students. About 28% of all undergraduates received Pell grants,⁴ though the funding streams for these grants have never matched actual need. In FY05, the maximum grant amount was funded was \$4,050 (even though the program was authorized for a maximum grant amount of \$5,800 for FY05). While some students who qualify for Pell grants receive help from their families, many have independent tax status. Of these independent students, approximately 64.3% earn less than \$25,000 per year.⁵ Congress should craft Title IV of HEA so that it recognizes the needs of working and working-poor students, and considers the additional expenses these independent students face. NCWGE recommends the following:

- Retain eligibility of Pell Grants for part-time students. Part-time students, including those attending less than half time, constitute a growing proportion of college students and should continue to be eligible for all types of financial aid, including Pell Grants.
- Retain student aid income calculations. Students receiving other federal benefits, such as welfare or food stamps should not have those benefits reduced because they receive federal financial aid.
- Reduce the “work penalty,” allowing the need analysis – on the basis of which federal aid is determined – to more accurately reflect a family’s true expenses. Factors such as dependent care should be included in the need analysis. Students who qualify for the Earned Income Credit should be able to exempt that credit from their final aid calculus.
- Increase the Income Protection Allowance (IPA) for independent students. The IPA for independent students is larger than the IPA for dependent students, but it is much smaller than the IPA for parents of dependent students. The current IPA forces working students to receive smaller financial aid packages, and discourages some women from pursuing full-time school.
- Make Pell grants available to students who are pursuing short-term training programs. Currently only students enrolled in degree or certificate programs qualify for aid, when many students return to school to take a few classes to refresh their skills.
- Make Pell grants available for year-round students and those who attend class less than part-time. Many older female students attend classes during the summers, and federal student loans should be available to all students willing to make a commitment to higher education, even if they have to chip away at that dream one class at a time.⁶ These women may only be able to take one or two classes per semester, and should be encouraged to stay in school, rather than punished, even though they have additional constraints on their time.

⁴ 2003-2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), U.S. Department of Education

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Most students attend less than half time temporarily, and aid to those students may increase their ability to complete a degree program. “Initiative to Aid Illinois Adult Learners.” Springfield, IL: Illinois Student Aid Commission, 2001.

Campus-based childcare must be improved and expanded to help parenting students get the services they need. NCWGE strongly supports expanding access to higher education for all women, particularly low-income women. A significant barrier that can prevent low-income women from participating in higher education is the inability to obtain convenient and affordable childcare. Providing quality day care on campuses for students will allow thousands of women to pursue postsecondary education. At present, campus based childcare only services a small percentage of the need. There must be an investment that will support the increased participation of low-income women in post-secondary education through the provision of campus-based childcare centers. Campus-based childcare programs offer an opportunity to dismantle the barriers that some women face in trying to obtain a college education.

- Retain the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which provides funds to schools for campus-based childcare and after-school programming primarily to serve the needs of low-income students. The program was authorized at \$45 million, though funding has never matched that level. President Bush’s budget for FY05 requested level-funding this program at \$16.1 million, and CCAMPIS actually received only \$15.97 million – far below need. Increase funding for CCAMPIS.
 - Provide incentives for schools to operate CCAMPIS programs at night, when most nontraditional and parenting students take classes.

Campus diversity must be a priority. Women have historically been underrepresented in many critical fields such as mathematics, physical sciences, and engineering as well as in graduate education generally. These disparities are even more exaggerated in academic teaching positions.⁷ Women receive only 15 percent of engineering degrees and 30 percent of those in physical sciences, but 80 percent of master's degrees in education and library science. Similarly, only 11 percent of engineering doctorates, 12 percent of physics doctorates and 22 percent of mathematics doctorates go to women, while 61 percent of education doctorates are awarded to women. And many fields of advanced study remain occupationally segregated, dominated by either men or women. Further, many institutions of higher education have disproportionately low-levels of women in tenure-track positions.

- NCWGE supports policies and programs designed to encourage women to enter all fields of study, particularly ones where women have been underrepresented in the past. This includes:
 - Vocational and career training programs, including certificate programs, in fields typically dominated by male students (including mechanics, electronics, drafting, etc.).
 - Four-year bachelor’s degree programs such as engineering, computer technology, physics, business, etc.
- Streamline the categorical graduate education grant funding in Title IX into one program with fewer and broader objectives. NCWGE also strongly advocates retaining guidelines and provisions that encourage women and minorities to pursue careers in nontraditional fields. It is critical that any restructuring of the programs incorporates and maintains

⁷ Nelson, Donna J. and Rogers, Diana C. “A National Analysis of Diversity of Science and Engineering Faculties at Research Universities.” 2003

elements that encourage women and minorities to pursue graduate education, particularly in fields where they are underrepresented.

- Maintain requirement for institutions of higher education which are applying for the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN) program to set forth policies and procedures to assure that, in making GAANN fellowship awards, the institutions will seek talented students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds, as determined by the Secretary. NCWGE recommends that women be included in the groups eligible for fellowships based on underrepresentation, and urges the adoption of language that clarifies the responsibility of the Secretary and the grantee institutions to distribute fellowships equitably.
- Include the Patsy Takemoto Mink Graduate Fellowship Program in the final bill. The Mink Graduate Fellowship Program would create a new federal fellowship providing financial support for women and minorities who agree to pursue a doctoral or terminal master's degree and then teach at the collegiate level. The proposal also envisions special attention being given to producing fellows from minority-serving institutions, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions.

Campus safety must remain a priority. In recent years there has been an increase in violent crimes against women on our nation's campuses.

- **Crime reporting:** Maintain language from the 1998 HEA defining campus crimes, expanding the scope of what could be considered a campus crime to include not only crimes that occur on campus, but also crimes that occur: in or on noncampus buildings or property; on public property; and in dormitories or other residential facilities for students on campus. This expansion of locations allows for more reliable reporting of crimes occurring at colleges and universities and provides students with more accurate information regarding their safety.
- **Hate Crimes:** In the 1998 HEA, Congress required colleges to collect and report to the Department of Education statistics on crimes involving bodily injury to any person in which the victim was targeted because of his/her race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability. However, NCWGE is concerned that the data is not being reported accurately and often conflicts with hate crime data that is provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) annual report, "Hate Crime Statistics." NCWGE strongly urges Congress to include proposals that address the discrepancies between hate crime reporting to ED and the FBI. Additionally, Congress should create policies that provide incentives, training opportunities for campus law enforcement officials and administrators, and reporting enforcement measures designed to ensure accurate reporting of hate crimes on campus.
- **Violence against women:** Maintain grant programs to reduce the incidence and improve the response to violent crimes against women. Only institutions in compliance with the campus crime disclosure requirements are eligible for these grants. These grant programs should promote collaboration between local victim services, campus police, local law enforcement, and campus administrators to improve the coordinated response to violence on campuses.

- **Study on sexual assault:** Continue to require the Attorney General and Secretary of Education to conduct a national baseline study on campus sexual assault procedures. This report provides crucial information on how colleges and universities handle sexual assault on campus. Students, parents, and community advocates can use this information to improve the procedures on their local campuses.

Expand programs that help graduates manage debt. Due to the wage gap between men and women, loan repayment is an even more significant burden for women.⁸ Since women are more likely to borrow than men and they will earn lower wages on average after graduation, female graduates are more likely to struggle with their loan debt.⁹ No student wants to borrow more than is necessary to finance higher education, but when students need to borrow they should have access to loans that carry the most favorable terms and conditions.

Member Organizations

Academy for Educational Development
American Association for the Advancement of Science
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union
American Council on Education
American Educational Research Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Psychological Association
Association for Gender Equity Leadership in Education
Association for Women in Science
Association of American Colleges and Universities
Association of Junior Leagues International, Inc.
Association of Teacher Educators
Business & Professional Women USA
Center for Advancement of Public Policy
Center for Women's Policy Studies
Council of Chief State School Officers Resource Center on Educational Equity
Dads and Daughters
Equal Rights Advocates
Federation of Organizations for Professional Women
Feminist Majority Foundation
Gallaudet University
Girl Scouts of the USA
Girls Count
Girls Incorporated

⁸ According to a recent AAUW report, "Gains in Learning, Gaps in Earnings", median annual earnings in 2003 for full-time workers with a bachelor's degree were \$61,800 for men and \$44,200 for women – a \$17,600 difference.

⁹ Price, Derek V. 2004. *Borrowing Inequality: Race, Class, and Student Loans*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers.

Girlstart
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
Ms. Foundation for Women
Myra Sadker Advocates for Gender Equity
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
National Association for Girls & Women in Sport
National Association of Collegiate Women Athletic Administrators
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Administrative Women in Education
National Council of Negro Women
National Education Association
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Women's History Project
National Women's Law Center
National Women's Political Caucus
NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund
Parent and Teacher Association
Partners of the Americas
U. S. Student Association
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women Work!
Women's Edge
Women's Research and Education Institute
Women's Sports Foundation

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