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Capitol Hill Day – June 14, 2018

Reauthorization of Higher Education Act

The AAUP believes that accessible higher education should be a public good, not a privilege for the wealthy few. Thus **we are opposed to HR 4508**, the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, now known as the “Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform Act,” or Prosper Act, for short. The bill has been passed by the House Education and Workforce Committee but has not yet been voted on by the full House.

We are joined in opposition by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, since so many of the “reforms” contained in HR 4508 increase the cost of education to students and create more obstacles to access.

Protecting Public Service Loan Forgiveness

HR 4508 eliminates this critical opportunity for new borrowers. The program encourages young people to devote their careers to public service – as teachers, nurses, social workers and the like – by allowing those working in public service positions for 10 years to have their loans forgiven. In its current form, HR 4508 tells our young people not to go into public service. So mean-spirited is this elimination that even the Pentagon and veterans’ organizations have come out in opposition since they view the PSLF as essential in recruiting and retaining staff for the armed services and the Department of Veterans Affairs. We encourage the restoration of the PSLF in the legislation.

Preserving Pell Grants

HR 4508 curtails access to Pell grants, which will hurt low income students and block their access to opportunity. Eliminating inflationary increases will effectively decrease the value of the Pell grants, putting low-income students further behind at a time when the maximum Pell grant of \$5,920 covers less than 30 percent of the average cost of college attendance. The bill also eliminates Supplemental Educational Opportunity grants – a program that provides more than \$730 million to low-income students. The combined effect is to make higher education less affordable and less accessible.

Loan options curtailed; protections eliminated

The bill would impose lower loan limits and sharply reduce the current eight payback options to only two, a move that clearly would create financial problems for some students. It is estimated that low-income borrowers of \$30,000 would need 138 years to repay their loans under the new plan. The bill also eliminates regulations that protected students from predatory scams by for-profit colleges.

Protecting graduate students

Several provisions to the new bill create more difficulties for graduate students. For example, there now would be a cap on money borrowed that will force many students to go to private lenders, with higher costs, to complete their education. It eliminates the loan cancellation available in twenty or twenty-five years under the current income-driven repayment plans; does away with honors scholarships for students who work hard in high school and college; and repeals the Thurgood Marshall Legal Education Opportunity Program, which helps low-income, minority, and disadvantaged secondary school students get into graduate or law school.

College for All Act

Separately, the AAUP has endorsed the College for All Act, introduced last year by Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Pramila Jayapal, which would make four-year public college free for families making less than \$125,000 and make community college free for all. Funding would come from a Wall Street speculation tax. It also would reduce student loan debts by cutting all student loan interest rates for new borrowers while also preventing the federal government from profiting off of the student-loan program. The College for All Act restores the promise that higher education is an accessible public good, not a privilege for the wealthy few.

Rudy Fichtenbaum, AAUP president said, "The College for All Act reaffirms our commitment to quality, public higher education as a right for all Americans. It would expand access to higher education and would help former students already saddled with large student debt to refinance at rates that are offered for new student loans. It would cut down on the abuse of adjunct labor and strengthen academic freedom protections by increasing the percentage of tenured and tenure-track faculty. The AAUP is proud to endorse the College for All Act."

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Prior Learning Assessment and Competency-Based Education

The AAUP is greatly concerned about the growth of two strategies of doubtful value that are being promoted primarily as pathways to generate lower quality degrees for more students at institutions of higher education across the country.

These two strategies are somewhat related. Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is designed to grant credit for college courses to students for information or skills they already possess. It can take a wide variety of approaches, such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests or the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTE) exams, but the goal remains the same: to have a standardized exam replace faculty and course work.

Competency-Based Education (CBE) takes this idea and proposes it more broadly, designing whole programs divorced from the classroom and faculty. It promotes itself as a way to allow students to learn on their own and prove what they know through tests rather than through coursework.

We do not object to exams to determine competency in areas where they are historically commonplace, most notably in technical programs and some health care fields. The problem that is developing is the drive to push standardized exams into fields where they are not an adequate measure of learning – the arts, the liberal arts, social sciences, and some areas of science.

At one level, there is a high degree of unfairness. Suppose there is a standardized exam that exists for an upper level course on the Vietnam War (there is such an exam provided by DANTE). Someone could take the exam, pass it, and get the same credit as someone who actually took the course, did the reading, took the exams and quizzes, wrote a term paper, and discussed many issues with the professor and his/her fellow students. The person who took the course would most likely have gained a much more sophisticated understanding of the war, but on paper, it would appear the same as the person who spent a couple of hours taking an exam.

The result is a cheapening of the degree and of the college experience for the individual. Conflating these two very different activities as being equally representative of learning is to reduce education to mere performance on a behavioral assessment tool. Coursework and assessment are certainly related, but it is both pedagogically unsound and sociologically dangerous to treat them as the same thing.

Much of this drive for PLA and CBE is coming from the organization Complete College America, which is funded primarily by the private Gates Foundation and Lumina Foundation. Corporations, like Pearson, who are supporting this drive see it as a way to turn public higher education into a profit center for their own gain. Advocates believe this approach could get more people more credentials, especially those who have started but not completed college. However, this is a fundamental misreading of the situation. Most students who don't complete their degrees fail to do so because of financial problems.

Instead of inventing new gimmicks, members of Congress should advocate for the restoration of the financial support that has been taken away from our colleges and universities. At both federal and state levels, more grants to low-income students and a lower-cost loan program are needed. Finally, Congress should encourage our higher education administrations to devote most of their financial resources to the instructional missions to produce lower tuition and more full-time faculty.

Nationwide, on average, only about 24 percent of our four-year public university budgets pays for instruction, according to the Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data System (IPEDS). If support of PLA and CBE is indeed driven by a concern for under-privileged populations that struggle to get into and stay in college, then the primary objective should be to improve the quality of education and the public's access to it, not to waive its requirements or dilute its content with testing products. Low-income and at-risk student populations are the very people who most need and benefit from real, hands-on, classroom experiences, and it is simple justice that they be able to get it.

Nevertheless, the Department of Education and some members of Congress have embraced these models, especially CBE. In June 2017, Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) introduced HR 2859, the Advancing Competency-Based Education Act of 2017, currently referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce. **We are opposed to HR 2859.** This bill would waive rules and regulations to allow the Department of Education to fund experiments with CBE. Eligible institutions would receive waivers, or other "flexibility" regarding documenting attendance, minimum weeks of instruction time, requirements for substantive interaction with faculty, and the definitions of key terms like "full-time student," "satisfactory academic progress" and "educational activity." It would encourage the expansion of competency-based education into inappropriate areas in the curriculum.

At best, expanded beyond its traditional role, CBE is an incompetent educational model. It seeks to replace faculty and education with testing. In doing so, it would create a two-tiered educational system, one filled with less expensive tests and less opportunity to learn for our low-income students, while wealthy students could take advantage of a traditional high-quality education. The federal government should not be promoting more inequality in higher education.

These radical changes are being driven by organizations that know little about higher education and are not practitioners or experts in the field. We at the AAUP know the problems in higher education that are driving up costs (administrative bloat, grandiose spending on construction, out-of-control spending on athletics, and reductions in state funding) and it is the cost of higher education that is the biggest barrier to degree completion. The AAUP has for a century worked to improve higher education and maintain standards of excellence, including shared governance and academic freedom. And the AAUP is led by faculty who have devoted their careers to higher education. We are the experts.

We ask that you help us monitor this situation, notify DOE that you share our concerns about this strategy, and that you join us in defending a system of higher education that is the envy of the world.

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Research Funding

In general, the AAUP opposes the Trump administration's drastic cuts in funding to the humanities and to scientific and social science research in the president's proposed FY 2019 budget. The humanities enhance our personal lives as well as the nation's cultural life and are vital in promoting an informed citizenry. Scientific and social science research is crucial in crafting evidence-based policies and making informed and effective policy decisions. What follows are the AAUP's positions regarding funding in several key areas.

National Endowment for the Humanities

We urge Congress to provide no less than \$155 million in FY 2019 funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities and to forcefully reject any efforts to eliminate the agency. Despite some recent increases, NEH funding has declined by 22 percent since 2010. Among the valuable work that the NEH does is provide training for thousands of school, college, and university teachers and reaching tens of millions of Americans with television and radio documentaries, museum exhibitions, and reading and discussion programs in museums and libraries across the nation. Since its inception in 1977, grants made through the NEH Challenge Grants program have leveraged federal funds at a ratio of 3:1, raising \$3,152,110,194 in private support for humanities projects. Grants for research have resulted in the publication of nearly 8,400 books, including 17 Pulitzer Prize winners and 22 Bancroft Prize winners.

National Science Foundation

We urge Congress to provide no less than \$8.45 billion to the National Science Foundation (NSF). The NSF supports about a quarter of all federally-funded basic scientific research conducted at colleges and universities nationwide. Notably, the agency serves as the largest single funder of basic social and behavioral science research. Though the Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences Directorate (SBE)—one of seven research directorates at NSF—represents less than 5% of the entire NSF research budget, it supports around two-thirds of total federal funding for academic basic research in the social and behavioral sciences (excluding psychology).

International Education

For FY 2019, we urge Congress to provide at least \$76 million in funding for the Department of Education's Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs. These programs are crucial to addressing the critical need for expertise in foreign languages and deep knowledge of all world regions. Deep cuts implemented in FY 2011 severely eroded our international education and foreign language infrastructure. These cuts resulted in 25% fewer resource centers, 18% fewer undergraduate and

doctoral fellowships, fewer training opportunities for students and teachers, and fewer outreach activities to government and business. Title VI and Fulbright-Hays have still not recovered from those reductions. Many of our most pressing challenges at home and abroad are global in nature – from climate change, pandemics, and refugee crises, to food security and threats to communications, transportation, and financial systems. These challenges require a workforce with international, cultural, and language skills in many disciplines.

National Historic Publications and Records Commission

For FY 2019, we urge Congress to provide at least \$6 million for the NHPRC grants program and to oppose any efforts to eliminate the program. NHPRC funding has been cut substantially in recent years, and it is important to ensure that its capacity not be depleted further. The grants-making arm of National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), NHPRC was established by Congress in 1934 to promote the preservation and use of the American documentary record. NHPRC grants support many activities to preserve and increase access to historical records and to publish the papers of significant figures and themes relating to the history of the United States.

Institute of Museum and Library Services

For FY 2019, we urge Congress to support funding for the Institute of Museum & Library Services. This request includes full funding for the Office of Museum Services, which is authorized at \$38.6 million, and \$182.7 million for library programs through the Library Services and Technology Act. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The mission of the IMLS is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. In addition to grant-making, the IMLS provides critical leadership to the museum and library communities through support for research and policy development.