



September 11, 2024

Dear Candidate,

As you navigate these final months of your campaign to become the next President of the United States of America, I reach out to share the attached memorandum outlining the ways that, as President, you can leverage America's unparalleled colleges and universities to build a stronger nation.

We know that if elected President, you will face numerous challenges in securing our country's economic, cultural and security goals. In all of these areas, colleges and universities are central to meeting your objectives and ensuring a brighter future not just for the tens of millions of postsecondary students and their families, but for all of America.

American higher education comprises thousands of community colleges, liberal arts colleges, research universities, religious institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions and many other institutions. All of these schools together, in partnership with the federal government and the states, contribute to the most powerful system for learning, training, research and innovation in the world.

We urge you to review the proposals included in the memorandum, and if elected, pledge to work with your administration to advance the kinds of growth and opportunity for all Americans that only our colleges and universities can deliver.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Mitchell", is positioned above the printed name.

Ted Mitchell  
President

## **ACE Policy Recommendations to 2024 Presidential Candidates**

### **September 2024**

Our nation faces numerous challenges, from growing economic and military competition abroad to a rapidly evolving economy that requires new ways of learning and working. The key to unlocking America's potential lies in strengthening and utilizing our world-leading colleges and universities.

This is because of one simple truth: higher education builds America.

Community colleges, liberal arts colleges, research universities, religious institutions, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and many more—all build the workforce. They all build our country's regional economies. They all build ideas and innovation. They all build our culture, our arts, and our humanity.

Most importantly, they all build real opportunity, social mobility, and the political fabric of the country.

The founders knew this before there was a United States of America, and their successors embraced it. Thomas Jefferson knew it when he enrolled in a colonial college (William & Mary) and when he founded a public flagship (University of Virginia). Abraham Lincoln knew it when he signed the law that created major universities throughout the country. Franklin Roosevelt knew it when he signed the GI Bill to provide education for returning World War II veterans.

As president, you would step into this legacy. Your administration would have an enormous ability to shape the future of learning, research, and work in ways that will empower all Americans to achieve their goals while also furthering America's global lead in education, culture, economic innovation, and national security. But that will require making the right choices.

When we support more financial aid for disadvantaged students, we develop the talent that builds America. When we support state colleges and universities, we deepen each state's commitment to America as a whole. When we support academic freedom, we safeguard the robust exchange of ideas that defines—and builds—America. When we support research funding, we strengthen national defense, create new technologies, and lay the groundwork for medical breakthroughs to prevent and cure disease. All of that builds America and takes us to the nation we know we can be.

Despite this potential, we know there are real challenges that must be met in this moment. Once in office, the next administration would have the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of tens of millions of students, staff, and educators. Below, we offer key recommendations for federal policy targeted to create the greatest benefit for our students and our nation. These recommendations arise from the collective experience of educators, researchers, and experts across the political spectrum, and are offered as an overview to help inform your campaign's approach to higher education policy.

## **Making College Affordable**

Families across the country recognize the importance of higher education to realizing their economic and educational goals. For far too many Americans, though, those dreams are clouded by concerns about costs. America has thrived in those periods when we ensured that cost wasn't a barrier to education, whether that is skills training in a new technology, a degree opening a pathway to a new field, or an advanced degree providing specialized training in medicine, engineering, or business.

Currently, more than ten million students participate in federal financial aid programs comprising a range of grants, loans, and work opportunities. Continued federal support is necessary to ensure that our educational, economic, and security needs are met. In particular, restoring the purchasing power of the Pell Grant by increasing the maximum award to \$13,000 would make college affordable for the vast majority of current and future students.

We ask that the next administration work with Congress to increase the maximum Pell Grant and prioritize investing in the remaining need-based aid programs by increasing funding for these programs equal to the requested levels from the Student Aid Alliance. We also ask that the next administration support efforts in any legislation renewing the Higher Education Act to protect and strengthen these programs, as well as expand access to postsecondary education for all students.

## **Supporting Students**

**Supporting Active Duty and Veteran Learners** - Since its founding as an emergency council during World War I, the American Council on Education (ACE) has advocated for policies to ensure that veterans and service members have access to—and the opportunity to succeed in—higher education. In addition, colleges and universities recognize the important role that Congress and the administration play in the oversight of military and veterans education benefits. Congress has made a significant investment in these programs, and it is critical that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect against waste, fraud, and abuse—both to protect taxpayer dollars and to ensure veterans are receiving a high-quality education—while not inadvertently creating unnecessary compliance burdens on colleges and universities that are serving veterans well.

**Student Mental Health** - The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the already critical mental health crisis among college students, with 41% screening positive for symptoms of depression in 2022–23, a 20-point increase since 2014. Unlike K-12 students, college students have received limited federal support. The Garrett Lee Smith Campus Suicide Prevention Grant Program is the only federal initiative targeting college mental health, funded for \$2.4 million in FY 2024, far less than the scale of the support needed.

To address this growing crisis, ACE proposes new federal funding estimated at \$13.8 billion over ten years to provide essential services, training, and research at colleges and universities to combat urgent mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and suicide.

Additionally, telehealth has proven essential for delivering mental health services to students. We urge the next administration to prioritize expanding telehealth options, including authorizing interstate telehealth services for students enrolled in institutions of higher education in any U.S. jurisdiction from health care providers who are licensed to practice or provide such care in any one state or territory or through an interstate licensure compact.

**Food Insecurity** - Research has shown that food insecurity hurts academic performance and lowers higher education retention rates. The 2024 Government Accountability Office estimated that fewer than two in five food-insecure students met the criteria to be potentially eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); about 59% of food-insecure students who are potentially eligible do not report receiving SNAP benefits.

The current SNAP eligibility requirements for college students are overly complex and difficult to navigate, creating unnecessary barriers for students already facing the challenges of food insecurity. These eligibility requirements also make it challenging for institutions of higher education, as well as state and local governments, to effectively reach out and ensure that eligible students receive SNAP benefits. We strongly encourage the next administration to take a proactive role in simplifying SNAP eligibility requirements for college students and make these benefits more accessible for those students who need assistance.

**Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals** - The bipartisan DREAM Act would create a process for young, undocumented, high-achieving individuals brought to our country as children to apply for conditional residency, receive work authorization, and eventually be eligible for permanent residency. We ask that the next administration work with Congress to establish a permanent program for these Dreamers that have already made incredible contributions to our country and its economy and security.

### **Advancing Research**

**Research Support** - Colleges and universities across the country partner with the federal government to address national challenges and create the cutting-edge innovations that drive our economy and improve lives. Federal funding comes from a number of agencies, including the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Defense, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the Department of Energy, among others. Sustainable funding for these research agencies is a priority for ACE and our member institutions, as well as increases that have been previously authorized by Congress, including the promised and planned funding included in the bipartisan 2022 CHIPS and Science Act. In addition, we support efforts to ensure research funding reaches the various sectors of higher education, including our Minority Serving Institutions.

**Research Security** - Institutions are committed to securing our advanced research and work closely with the federal government on issues of research security, foreign gift and contract reporting requirements, and efforts to limit technology transfer of sensitive materials, especially with countries of concern. We have worked to address these issues, most recently with both the Trump and Biden administrations to develop and implement regulations and measures to ensure transparency around foreign funding and partnerships, as well as

addressing national security concerns. ACE looks forward to continuing to work with the next administration on these important issues, especially the impacts on under-resourced or non-R1 institutions.

**Sustainability** - Colleges and universities serve as living laboratories where innovative research, cutting-edge technologies, and community engagement converge to develop practical solutions for addressing climate change. The next administration has a unique opportunity to leverage institutions' research capabilities, address climate workforce development needs, enhance climate literacy among students, and expand community outreach to advance national sustainability goals while leading climate mitigation and adaptation efforts across the country. Additionally, we call for federal funding to support climate change workforce development, particularly for low-income and students of color, through institutions of higher education.

### **Campus Safety**

**Speech and Protests** - Colleges and universities are strongly committed to creating campus environments that foster and promote open, intellectually engaging debate informed by a diverse set of voices and perspectives. Freedom of speech, free inquiry, and academic freedom are fundamental to the quest for knowledge and to the educational mission of higher education institutions. Institutions take seriously their obligations to uphold the laws protecting these freedoms, which, for public institutions, include the First Amendment. Consistent with these obligations, institutions must also provide safe learning environments that are free from discrimination and harassment and in compliance with applicable federal and state laws, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We ask that any efforts by the next administration to address Title VI or campus free speech not undermine campus efforts to foster free speech and to meet institutional legal obligations to provide safe learning environments free from unlawful discrimination.

**Title IX** - America's colleges and universities share Title IX's commitment that "[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

Each of the past three administrations has worked to regulate Title IX, specifically around campus sexual assaults. As a result, these complicated regulations have changed at least three times since 2011. The most recent regulations have been stopped by federal courts, causing confusion for institutions as they work to implement the final 2024 rule. The next administration should work to provide clarity and certainty to our students and our campuses, and if new changes are made to Title IX, institutions of higher education should be included in stakeholder conversations.

### **Higher Education Tax Policy**

**Student and Family Support** - Tax benefits are an important tool to help low- and middle-income students pay for postsecondary education, though several policies need to be modernized to improve their efficiency and impact. We ask that the next administration work with Congress to solve these issues by:

- Repealing the taxability of scholarship and grant aid, particularly the Pell Grant. This would permit low- and middle-income students to retain more of this aid and address the Pell-American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) interaction issue, which harms the lowest-income students attending the lowest-cost schools.
- Consolidating and simplifying the AOTC and the Lifetime Learning Credit into a single credit that maximizes its impact on enhancing access to higher education for low- and middle-income students.
- Modernizing Sec. 127 employer provided education assistance, which has not been updated in almost 40 years, by increasing the benefit to \$12,000 per year and making permanent the expansion to include student loan repayments.
- Reinstating and expanding the universal charitable deduction, which would enhance charitable giving to institutions in support of student financial aid, teaching, research, and their public service missions.

**Endowment Excise Tax** - Certain private nonprofit colleges and universities are subject to an unprecedented and damaging tax on their charitable resources, undermining the teaching and research mission of the affected institutions without doing anything to lower the cost of college, enhance access, or address student indebtedness. In fact, many of the institutions subject to the tax lead the nation in providing debt-free access to low- and middle-income students, relying heavily on institutional and endowment resources. We ask that the next administration work with Congress to repeal this tax or at least reform it by mitigating the effect of the tax on covered institutions that devote more resources to student financial aid.

### **Support for Our International Students, Faculty, and Staff**

**Visa Processing** - Protecting our national and economic security while ensuring that the United States remains the destination of choice for the world's best and brightest students, faculty, and scholars are not mutually exclusive goals. We must remain a welcoming country to international students, scholars, scientists, and researchers who enrich our campuses and play an important role in performing the research that creates knowledge, supports U.S. economic growth, and fuels American innovation. Particularly in the fields of graduate education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, American education is the "gold standard," attracting brilliant and talented students and scholars from across the globe. Some of these scholars end up staying and working in the United States and make significant contributions to our economy and domestic job creation, and those that return home often serve as ambassadors for American values, democracy, and the free market. We urge the next administration to improve the visa processes and pathways that attract global talent to the United States.

All of American higher education stands ready to work with you in building a stronger and fairer America through our thousands of colleges and universities. We appreciate your time and attention to these proposals and look forward to working with the next administration.