The University of South Carolina Student Government
Congressional Advisory Board

2014 Annual Report to the South Carolina
Congressional Delegation
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**Mission Statement**

The Congressional Advisory Board serves as the voice of the University of South Carolina’s student body to the federal government. The board researches the most critical issues pertaining to students and addresses South Carolina’s Congressional Delegation to find better solutions to academic, financial, and social problems.

The board works to solicit input from institutional constituents such as students, faculty, administrators and staff. The board strives to educate the university community about federal higher education initiatives and investments, enabling students to realize their potential for active involvement in national politics.

As student advocates, we believe we can transform both the state and the University of South Carolina by informing our elected leaders of issues that are relevant to our generation. By doing this, we can enhance their future—benefiting our community and leaving a lasting heritage for future students.
Acknowledgements

Without the assistance of several members of both Student Government and the Carolina community, this report would not exist. The entire Congressional Advisory Board thanks the following:

Mrs. Theresa Sexton, coordinator for Student Government, greatly assisted the board in reserving meeting venues, scheduling visits with administrators, and in planning the logistics of its travels. Mr. Jerry Brewer, associate vice president for student affairs, provided advice for the proposals. Mr. Chase Mizzell, student body president, provided valuable guidance in choosing worthwhile topics and writing them into policy proposals. Ms. Haley Guyton, student body treasurer, greatly assisted with the board’s financial arrangements.

Individual board members would like to thank the following:

Erika Kalkofen, Erin Duck, and Sarah Koslov wish to thank John Dozier, University of South Carolina’s Chief Diversity Officer, for his guidance and for volunteering his time for interviews. They also appreciated the help of Mary Wagner, Director of Admissions, and Scott Verzyl, AVP of Enrollment Management.

Caroline Brock wishes to thank Dr. Paul Beasley, Director of the University of South Carolina’s TRIO Programs, who volunteered his time for an interview.
Member Biographies

**Austin McCullough** is a senior in the South Carolina Honors College majoring in Political Science, History and Religious Studies with a minor in Business. He is originally from Mount Pleasant, SC and serves as the Secretary of Government Affairs for Student Government. After graduating, Austin plans to attend law school and aspires to a career in public service focused on educational policy.

**Cameron Nickle** is a senior at the University of South Carolina from Beaufort, South Carolina. He is majoring in Physics and Mathematics. As a student he has enjoyed opportunities to intern at national labs such as Thomas Jefferson Accelerator Facility and NASA Langley Aerospace Research Center. After graduating, Cameron plans to continue his studies in physics as a graduate student.

**Caroline Brock** is a senior Political Science major at the University of South Carolina. She is originally from Lyman, SC and is actively involved on and off campus with organizations and extracurricular activities. After graduating, Caroline plans to attend graduate school for security studies.

**Sarah Koslov** is a senior in the South Carolina Honors College majoring in Philosophy. She is originally from Houston, TX and remains involved in organizations both on and off campus focusing on art, community, and politics in the Columbia area. After graduating, Sarah plans to continue participating in political society and hopes to pursue a career in public policy.

**Erin Duck** is a senior in the South Carolina Honors College majoring in Economics and International Business. She is originally from Nashville, TN, and will be teaching elementary school in Mississippi as part of the 2014 Teach For America corps.

**Erika Kalkofen** is a senior International Studies major with a minor in Asian Studies at the University of South Carolina. Originally from Washington D.C., she spent two years studying abroad in China and Japan before returning for her senior year. In the future, she aspires to become a Foreign Service Officer for the Department of State.

**Rendell Stokes** is a senior at the University of South Carolina majoring in International Studies with a minor in History. He is originally from Irmo, SC and currently serves as an associate consultant for S.C. Association of Taxpayers. After graduating, Rendell plans to continue his education as a business graduate student.

**Parker Craig** is a senior at the University of South Carolina from Columbia, SC majoring in Political Science with a minor in Business Management. He is heavily involved on campus holding multiple student government chairs as well as executive and leadership positions in Omicron Delta Kappa, Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity, and Mortar Board. In the future he plans to become a practicing attorney at law and eventually start a political career.
Message from the Director

Dear Representative or Senator,

Over the past six months, members of the 2014 Congressional Advisory Board have vigorously researched issues pertinent to the University of South Carolina student body. They administered an online poll, used social media and conducted interviews to gauge the opinions of students. Their findings reflect the views of many, and included in this report are three policy proposals that address federal issues. These reports were unanimously supported by the Student Senate and have the backing of the student body.

All members of the board were selected on academic merit. Applicants were subjected to a rigorous interview process. Please note that many who wanted to join the board in this endeavor were not able to. The university's Student Government chose the best students for the board, and I am confident that you will be impressed by their thoroughness, dedication, and intellectual curiosity.

It is with great honor and appreciation that the board presents this report for informing you of the issues that are most important to South Carolina students.

With sincerest gratitude,

Austin McCullough, Student Congressional Advisory Board Director
Secretary of Government Affairs,
University of South Carolina Student Government
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

A Proposal to Strengthen the Job Market for America’s College Graduates

As America recovers from the most devastating financial crisis in decades, the United States’ economy has yet to regain a degree of stability that adequately supports and effectively utilizes the country’s workforce. Students at the University of South Carolina responded to outreach efforts that the status of the economy and the post-graduation job market were their top concerns. The employability of university graduates is a national priority. A fully employed youth workforce is imperative for sustainable economic growth. In order to attain long-term growth and a stable economy, Congress must structure economic policy so that it broadens the opportunity for employment in a way that utilizes graduates’ skill sets effectively and appropriately.

Struggling Economy

The recession has negatively impacted companies’ willingness to hire new young employees, increasing the scarcity of gainful employment. There are currently 14.2 million unemployed people in the U.S., and while the unemployment rate has fallen, there are still over 2.1 million people that are marginally attached to the labor force, but have not searched for a job in the past month. Figure 1 illustrates the trend of high unemployment after the Great Recession of 2008 and a steady but slow decline since 2009. Of the 2.1 million workers classified as unemployed, 750,000 are discouraged workers who have not searched for a job in several months and are not included in monthly unemployment reports by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. The remaining 1.3 million workers cited family
responsibilities and continuing education as reasons for leaving the workforce. These statistics and Figure 1 indicate the poor performance of our struggling economy.

Figure 1

Rising Cost of Education

The struggling economy and high unemployment rates have increased the difficulties working students face as they attempt to pay for college. The average student debt almost doubled from $16,928 in 2000\textsuperscript{ii} to $29,400 in 2014\textsuperscript{iii}, and the number of students graduating with debt increased from 54\% in 2008\textsuperscript{iv} to 70\% in 2014. One out of ten of these 70\% of students will graduate with over $54,000 in debt\textsuperscript{v}.

With all of the troubles graduating students are facing, many are beginning to question if a college education is still worth the cost. Historically, more education has been a sound investment in one's future, but for today's students this no longer seems to be the case. As William Bennett wrote in his book Is College Worth It, “a lot
more of the public has questions about whether it's worthwhile to go."vi Polls have shown that increasing numbers of Americans believe that higher education no longer guarantees a higher income and success. In 2008, 81% of adults felt that college was a worthwhile investment; that number has dropped to 57%. This change in the perception of the value of college is greatly attributed to the nation’s lagging economic recovery and the burden of student debt.

**Weak Job Market for Graduates**

With substantial student debt and without significant job experience, graduates are struggling to compete with workers already searching for employment. Recent graduates have experienced the brunt of the United States’ shrinking workforce. The National Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports that people ages 16-24 have the highest unemployment rate of all age groups.vii Former Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke in a 2012 Congressional hearing declared that the economy is growing slower than necessary to absorb new entrants to the labor force, with the rate of students entering the workforce exceeding the rate of economic growth and opportunity.viii This slow growth has contributed to the lackluster long-term economic recovery.

A 2011 report on the long-term economic outlook by Macroeconomic Advisers stated, “we will not see a complete recovery in the job market until 2017 — five graduating classes from now.ix” The solution many economists give is for students to stay in college or continued training, and wait years for the economy to recover. This mindset is shared by many stemming from the understanding that entering the job market during a recession can have permanent negative effects on
an individual’s career earning potential and achievements. This causes recent graduates to choose between incurring greater amounts of debt in the pursuit of a post-graduate degree and adding themselves to the already substantial statistics of underemployment. College graduates are faced with a tough decision on how to best use their resources and talents.

Most students do not have prior work experience upon graduating and usually become underemployed. Unemployment and underemployment represents wasted resources. American college graduates earn degrees from prestigious universities every year yet find themselves out of work. Underemployment also negatively impacts graduates because once underemployed, it becomes less likely graduates will find another job utilizing their educational investment.

**Fiscal Legislative Policy**

The issues of unemployment, underemployment and an overall weak job market for college students must be addressed.

Given the lagging economic recovery, extremely competitive and shrinking job market, and rising burden of student debt upon graduation, students must be protected by legislative measures to ensure their ability to have a lasting financial contribution. We urge you to support legislation similar to the H.R. 3959, Pay It Forward College Affordability Act of 2014. This legislation does not collect payment from students during time of unemployment. Under this bill, students would no longer have to limit their career choices as a result of going into debt right after college due to a contract they will enter with their university to pay back a fixed rate of 3% if receiving a four year degree, and 1.5% if they are receiving a two year
degree from a state college or university. This bill addresses the issue of employability for college graduates in the 21st century by accepting the fact that a college degree no longer ensures a well-paying job. It saves students from paying back and potentially defaulting on loan payments.

Legislative actions similar to H.R. 3959 will contribute to fixing the employment outlook for college graduates, but only if Congress acts now. We urge you now, to not just work together to help the nation’s economy quickly recover, but to come together and create economic policies conducive to students’ transition into the workforce, a workforce that uses them effectively. Congress must act together to implement the necessary changes before current short-term cyclical economic issues devastate entire generations of our nation’s human capital.
COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Higher Education Act 2014 Reauthorization

The faltering economy has significantly weakened the job market for recent college graduates, forcing many prospective students to decide that higher education is no longer an attainable goal. Now more than ever there is a pressing need to ensure that the rising cost of financing a degree is brought back to affordable levels. Universities must be held accountable to those they serve, their students, to ensure that all resources are available to maintain the pursuit of higher education as a rewarding and worthwhile investment.

Rising Cost of Education

An affordable college education is the cornerstone of middle class security in today’s job market, but rising costs are increasingly making this option unfeasible for many Americans. Average tuition and fees at public four-year colleges have increased more than 250% over the past three decades. During the same time typical families’ income grew by only 16%. Despite the Obama administration’s efforts to make college affordable for all hard-working students, college costs are on the rise and more and more students are being burdened by massive amounts of loan debt. Since the 2008 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, tuition at four-year public colleges has shot up by 27%, but state spending on higher education has fallen by 11%. In 2007-2008, average tuition and fees at four-year public colleges was about $6,800, and in 2012-2013 the average tuition was around $8,600. With HEA set for reauthorization this year, it is imperative that lawmakers address the rising cost of higher education so that academically qualified students
from all socioeconomic backgrounds have an equal opportunity to attain a postsecondary degree.

**Federal Support of Higher Education**

Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 outlines federal government involvement in financial aid to students and colleges, mainly in the form of loans, grants and work-study programs. The average borrower now graduates with over $26,000 in debt. There are four federal student loan programs - the Federal Perkins Loan, the Direct Subsidized Loan, the Direct Unsubsidized Loan, and the Direct PLUS Loan - all of which must be repaid with interest. For Direct Subsidized Loans and Direct Unsubsidized Loans, undergraduate students may receive between $5,500 and $12,500 per year and the award amount is dependent on a number of factors including the student’s grade level. Depending on one’s financial need and amount of other aid received, undergraduates may receive up to $5,500 per year in Perkins Loans. For the 2012-2013 academic year, undergraduate students received 39% of their funding in the form of loans (though this figure includes nonfederal loans as well).

**Pell Grants**

The Pell Grant is awarded to top students who demonstrate the most financial need, providing a maximum of $5,645 for the 2013-2014 Award Year. The amount of money a student receives from the federal Pell Grant is dependent on a number of factors including Estimated Family Contribution, the cost of attendance for the student’s school, and whether the student is a part-time or full-time student. These grants have helped over 60 million students pursue postsecondary
education since 1972, including 9.8 million students in 2013.\textsuperscript{xvii} Though the Pell Grant has seen an increase in the past few years, the continuous increase in tuition costs means that the Pell Grant does not cover as much of the cost for postsecondary education as it had in the past.

**TRIO Programs**

TRIO programs, including the Upward Bound program, Talent Search, and Student Support Services, increase access to post-secondary education for low-income students and help to ensure that social mobility is still a possibility for every generation. At the University of South Carolina an average of 120 freshmen annually enter the university with the financial support of the TRIO programs, with 150 freshmen participating in 2013-2014. Dr. Paul Beasley, Director of the University of South Carolina's TRIO Programs, says that the majority of USC's need-based aid comes from the federal government.\textsuperscript{xix} Any cuts to Title IV funds would have a large impact on the university's accessibility and affordability.

**Gamecock Guarantee Program**

In 2008, USC launched the Gamecock Guarantee program, a need-based financial and academic support program with the goal of providing assistance to academically qualified students from the state of South Carolina. The original class of Gamecock Guarantee recipients graduated in May 2012, and from the 93 original recipients from 2008, 52 students graduated, a graduation rate that is on par with the national average for low-income students.\textsuperscript{x} Further investments and developments in programs like these will aid in increasing the graduation rate
among low-income students as these programs ultimately aim to close the widening gap in educational achievement among social classes.

**Ensuring Accountability**

With the key role the federal government plays in ensuring accessibility and affordability in higher education, it has a vested interest in protecting its taxpayers and consumers, college students. As Doug Lederman of *Inside Higher Ed* writes, “The federal government needs to improve upon its vital role in ensuring that students and consumers receive accurate information about institutions and their programs.”

With rising tuition costs and a bleak economy after graduation, accountability in colleges and universities must be a focus of the HEA reauthorization.

Currently students are overwhelmed with scores of often-duplicative information about their prospective schools as they seek to make a decision. Federal law requires institutions to provide at least 62 different types of consumer information to prospective students, creating unnecessary confusion at this crucial juncture. Collecting and maintaining this information puts an excessive burden on colleges, who pass the cost on to the students in the form of higher tuition. The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators found that 82% of administrators identified the greater regulatory and compliance workload as the major cause of resource shortages in their offices, driving up their costs and cutting into counseling time. Pertinent consumer information must be shared with everyone as they make their college decisions, but the process of reporting should not create an undue burden for the institutions or their students.
Of all the information that must be shared, clear and accurate reporting about prices at each institution is the ultimate importance. The most recent reauthorization of HEA in 2008 added a requirement in an attempt to address this by providing data on the “net price” of college attendance.\textsuperscript{xxiv} However, College Navigator, the Department of Education’s chief tool for comparing costs, does not provide accurate cost analysis between institutions that report in different formats, academic year or program based.\textsuperscript{xxv} As students are increasingly forced to accept the reality of massive amounts of student loans, it’s time to reevaluate eligibility and participation in federal financial aid to take into account a number of key factors – retention and completion rates, return on investment and graduate’s employment and earnings.

With the vested interest the federal government has in higher education through its grants and lending programs and its investment in social mobility, equality and a more proficient workforce, the federal government has a responsibility to hold colleges and universities accountable.

**Recommendations**

We urge our elected representatives to place an increased focus on issues of higher education this year as HEA comes up for reauthorization.

Federal oversight of colleges and universities should ensure that students are provided with clear and concise facts when making their decisions, but not overwhelm the institutions themselves that ultimately serves as a detriment to the entire educational product. The focus must be on tracking federal dollars given in student aid and reporting key statistics like graduation and retention rates in
conjunction with accurate price projectors to ensure all students have the opportunity to make a fiscally responsible decision.

Title IV funding allows for more social mobility among classes by giving low-income and often first-generation college students the opportunity to obtain college degrees and improve their socioeconomic situation. There must be a continued investment in all federally funded programs, particularly those that increase college access for low-income students like the TRIO programs. There must also be a continued investment in the federal Pell Grant program as it is crucial for the success of postsecondary education. As tuition costs continue to rise there must be a complimentary rise in federal support to ensure higher education, the gateway to success and social mobility, is accessible and affordable for all.
STRENGTH OF DIVERSITY

Promoting Diversity to Increase Access to Higher Education

Diversity is a primary concern of USC students. Institutions of higher education across the nation lack consistency and unwavering success in their diversity initiatives. In order to provide high quality education in a college or university, it is in the best interest of the institution to create a diverse environment representing a full spectrum of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and religious and socioeconomic background. The institution is responsible not only for achieving this diversity in an absolute sense but also creating systems that support learning and interaction between these groups. Federal support, financially and legislatively, is essential to maintaining and prompting diversity initiatives in American universities as well as in all aspects of American society.

University Admissions

The role of race and ethnicity as part of the college admissions process remains a contentious issue throughout the American higher education system. This past summer, Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin challenged the legality of taking individual applicant’s race into account as one of several factors in admissions programs. While the case was returned to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to undergo further scrutiny, the trial’s national spotlight inspired a deeper look into the ways by which universities across the country achieve diversity and provide opportunity to individuals of various ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Supreme Court ruled both in the 2003 Grutter V. Bollinger case and the 2013 Fisher case in favor of allowing colleges to continue using race as a component of
their admissions policies. However, given continued challenges to its legality, it is essential to recognize the current status and ongoing trends reflected in applicant success in relation to their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Studies indicate and the Supreme Court affirms that it is in the best interest of an institution of higher education to cultivate a diverse community of scholars that reflects the full spectrum of race, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic statuses of United States citizens. However, this goal is achieved with varied degrees of success based on criteria used during admissions evaluations. A popular race-neutral diversity initiative that some universities have implemented for college admissions is the X% program. Schools in California, Texas, Washington, Florida, Georgia, and Michigan have all experimented with the X% programs as a race-neutral alternative to affirmative action in their admissions practices. The premise of this system involves automatic admissions to the university based on academic standing for the students within a specified percentile. In a recent national study conducted by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington, research indicated that X% programs are not successful in achieving the same cultural richness or ethnic diversity that race-sensitive programs have yielded historically. The University of Texas does use the X% program as one part of their admissions, and then extends admissions to other applicants using different, holistic criteria. Fisher falls in the later category, where race remained one factor in the overall review of individual applicants. Based on the research and evidence indicating that race-conscious initiatives remain the most successful in yielding diversity, the government should aim to protect and uphold the university's
right to use race and ethnicity as one factor evaluating students as candidates for admission.

Since 2002 at the University of South Carolina Columbia campus, general minority representation has declined from 23.3% to 17.7%. According to the 2012 census, individuals who identified as African American made up 28% of the state population; however, only 10.8% of the 2012-2013 USC Columbia admitted students identify as African American. These declining percentages and numerical discrepancies speak to a weakness in the current university admissions system, as it does not reflect continued access to the full range of its constituents. The University of South Carolina currently uses a holistic application process, but the degrees by which race, socio-economic background, and ethnicity are considered remain somewhat arbitrarily based on the individual reviewing the application. These declining percentages are at least in some part due to the increasing SAT/ACT standards set by the university, which creates a threshold that a large pool of low-income applicants are not meeting. Scores on these tests are not a reliable reflection of student aptitude or a strong indicator for future success, yet they continue to play a large role in admissions decisions. According to both The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education and research published in The New York Times, there is a direct correlation between family income and these standardized test scores. “For both blacks and whites, as income goes up, so do test scores.” Consequently, designating standardized test scores as a threshold that students must meet to qualify for admissions automatically favors a particular demographic and unfairly excludes otherwise competitive, low-income applicants.
In addition to this correlation, studies indicate that there is a noticeable and continuing scoring gap on the SAT between various racial and ethnic groups, raising additional concerns about using the SAT as a means to assess applicants on an even playing field.\textsuperscript{xxxii} William G. Bowen and Derek Bok, former presidents of Princeton and Harvard Universities respectively, provide substantive support for the use of holistic admissions practices. In their book \textit{The Shape of the River}, Bowen and Bok show that “of the 700 or so black entering students from the class of 1976 who would not have been admitted to one of the nation's more selective institutions had strictly race-neutral criteria been applied, 225 obtained professional or graduate degrees, 70 became doctors, 60 became lawyers, 125 became business executives; and as a body, they earned an average of $71,000 annually.”\textsuperscript{xxxiii} These findings support the need for race-conscious admissions practices. Students whose applicant profiles fit outside the conventional parameters for acceptance and still gained admission to these universities remained competitive with their peers in school and in their subsequent chosen career tracks. Alan Wolfe of the New York Times affirms that the SAT tests are “not a one-to-one stand-in for merit; not only do they predict academic performance poorly, they also say little about who will contribute most to other students or will become eventual leaders in their fields.”\textsuperscript{xxxiv}

A multitude of factors contribute to an individual’s success as an applicant for college admissions. Yet records show that diversity initiatives centering on the economic standing of applicants, remaining race-neutral, often exclude low-income minority students due to circumstances that are outside of their control. While concerns have been raised about the use of race and ethnicity as features worthy of
consideration, social patterns and outcomes prove that race-neutral affirmative action overlooks factors that make the application criteria inherently unequal. In an effort to rectify these inherent obstacles and provide access to a broad range of applicants, universities must be able to take all of these components into account while evaluating their applicants. Race-conscious admissions practices allow for greater latitude in recognizing various advantages and deficiencies that raw test scores and numerical class rank ignore.

**Primary and Secondary Education**

The inequalities that are problematic to colleges and universities are developed in the earlier stages of education. Scholars have noted repeatedly that, “Since the 1960s, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds have been much more likely to attend two-year colleges, while their privileged counterparts matriculate at prestigious four-year institutions.” This class-based division is closely linked to the racial divide that persists in education.

There are many reasons for these inequalities that pose challenges in higher education. In grades K-12 there is a free, public option for education. Excluding considerations of quality, education is fundamentally available to all at these lower levels. The onset of personal living expenses, loan and grant management, and personal finance decisions that are an inherent part of the college experience are stumbling blocks for many, if not most, students. Particularly for those from low-income backgrounds, the opportunity cost associated with education versus immediate work is not always equitable or easily perceived. Applicants who would be first-generation college students must overcome the fact that their life choices
may not be accepted or supported emotionally and financially by their families. In the American Sociological Review, Sigal Alon supports empirically that inequality persists and deepens when college admissions are most competitive.³xxxvi

Historically, higher education is a privilege, one that is naturally most enjoyed by those with the easiest access, the largest income or base of assets. Though college admissions are based on the merits of the applicant, the system of higher education is insensitive to the barriers that persist in allowing people of all backgrounds to secure the time and resources to attend four-year universities.

**Campus Outreach & Diversity**

Federal and state initiatives are important in increasing diversity in higher education, but university outreach programs are the driving force behind overcoming the inequalities that minority students face while preparing for school. As previously noted, there has been a decline over the past decade in minority students attending the University of South Carolina. This is not because state diversity guidelines have changed. Rather this has come about because of increasing secondary school and university standards. John Dozier, USC’s Chief Diversity Officer, spoke on this trend saying the “pool of qualified minority applicants has not kept up with the increasing pool of accredited high school graduates overall.³xxxvii” This implies that minority students are falling behind academically during secondary school. At the university level, the traditional focus has been promoting diversity on campus and fostering diversity directly in higher education. However, secondary education needs more attention from universities, as well as the state and federal government, to ensure that a diverse range of students remain competitive.
for university admission. If a student does not have the necessary resources and support to prepare for college, their chances of admission into university are substantially lower than their more educated peers. Rather than leaving a child’s access to quality education up to circumstances of birth, concentrated efforts must be made to improve general education on a fundamental level.

The University of South Carolina currently has several outreach programs, such as Project Lead the Way and TRIO, which engage the surrounding community’s middle and high school students. They promote STEM fields and introduce examples of university coursework so that students can begin forming the skills needed for admissions and success in college. These measures have shown some success; from 80 students in 2001, Project Lead the Way has grown to 20,000 students as of 2012. Without this program, 20,000 students might have never gained the skills needed to attain university admittance, diminishing their chances of future success. These programs are limited by funding and reach; as a university-implemented initiative, they do not have as much support as federal or state government implemented programs. Not all universities can afford to finance outreach programs like these and some were forced to abandon such programs due to sequester budget cuts. Funding is needed to create, maintain, and grow these programs. Through federal backing of legislation that supports funding for higher education, minority students can strive for a better future.

Recommendations

In an effort to rectify debilitating social patterns, the federal government must lead by example in recognizing diversity issues and legislating in a way that
reflects consideration for social constructs that produce unequal circumstances for advancement. Embedded in our national identity is a deep connection to a sense of opportunity, the idea that with hard work and steadfast commitment a person can change and better their circumstances. Some who ardently seek these opportunities lack the platform to effectively achieve their goals. Education creates possibility, it provides individuals with capacities to make informed decisions and construct a vision for their future as participants in society. It is in our shared, social, economic, and political interest that people of all backgrounds and circumstances have access to quality education that empowers them to succeed in the framework of modern culture.

In an effort to create these possibilities, the government must make education a priority, championing the value of promoting diversity within the educational system. Sustained federal funding to colleges and universities will allow for the creation of initiatives that support diversity to all, making higher education attainable to many students who otherwise would not have it as an option. A commitment to diversity in schools and the cultivation of opportunity requires not only finances, but also a consciousness of our current social condition and a vision to confront and counter its inherent challenges. We urge you to support legislation that grants colleges and universities the monetary backing necessary to promote diversity, as well as to serve as an advocate for students from all backgrounds.
Citations

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