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As President-elect Obama prepares to take office with an unprecedented “to-do” list, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide the transition team with recommendations on how the federal government may better promote postsecondary student success. In this time of economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever that we ensure access to postsecondary education and provide for the success of all students who seek to further their education. We must not lose sight of the long-term goal of preparing our nation – both in its current situation and in the promise of a brighter future – for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With more than 11,000 members at 1,400 campuses, NASPA members serve a variety of functions and roles, including the vice president and dean for student life, as well as professionals working within housing and residence life, student unions, student activities, counseling, career development, orientation, enrollment management, racial and ethnic minority support services, disability services and retention and assessment. It is those in student affairs who work with students from admission to commencement, ensuring that they are provided the tools and skills necessary not only to compete in a global workforce, but to become effective and engaged citizens.

Preparing the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce means giving students the opportunities and tools to make solid, ethical decisions and solve problems that will continue to confront our complex society. It means that we must anticipate the latest technologies and instruct our students in the emerging applications. It means that we must teach students the most essential communication, critical-thinking, and decision-making skills and help them increase their ability to adapt and respond to a range of situations. Interactions that engage problem-solving skills through the combination of classroom learning and intentional educational experiences outside the classroom provide the best model for deep learning. In carrying out these roles, we demonstrate our commitment across all sectors of higher education.

Thank you for hearing our comments on the critical issues facing the future of our nation, and the role that postsecondary education plays in helping to meet the challenges ahead. Please feel free to contact me for further discussion.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director



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NASPA stands ready to work with the new Administration and Secretary of Education to act on the following comments and recommendations regarding postsecondary student success.

### ***Who are our Students?***

Institutions of postsecondary education are serving an ever changing student population:

- The preparedness of those entering college directly from high school is far more variable than in the past.
- Eighteen years after passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and decades after passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), more and more students with a range of disabilities are pursuing postsecondary education.
- Institutions of postsecondary education continue to mirror the increasing diversity of society, including greater numbers of students for whom English is a second language.
- Globalization brings increased numbers of international students to the United States and allows for more study abroad opportunities.
- As postsecondary education increasingly becomes a necessity, more first-generation students are enrolling in the nation's institutions of postsecondary education.
- With the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, postsecondary institutions are welcoming an increased number of servicemembers and veterans.
- This is perhaps the last year of growth in the number of "traditional" aged students. The increasing population of returning adult learners is often comprised of working adults with families and other priorities and life experiences far different from the "traditional" student.

All along this continuum of students, institutions of postsecondary education are faced not only with meeting unique needs, but also with seeing that the potential contribution each student has to make to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce is realized.

### ***What is Student Success?***

Success looks different for different students. What we *do* know in preparing students to compete globally in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce is that success is more than just academics. It is both meeting expressed learning outcomes and achieving personal goals. It is the attainment of the most essential communication, critical-thinking, and decision-making skills necessary to be able to adapt and respond to the uncertainties of tomorrow.

### ***What is Necessary to Ensure Student Success?***

- **A commitment to access and affordability.** Prior to the economic downturn, the most pressing concern for postsecondary institutions across the nation was how to handle record enrollment. Finances must not be a barrier to students otherwise accepted into an institution of postsecondary education.

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- **Need-based aid.** Need-based aid must not only be increased, but re-examined to ensure such aid is meeting its intended purpose and truly closing the gap for students. Wherever possible, the process should be simplified. Finally, we must do a better job of making students and their families aware of the resources available to them.
- **Middle-class access.** Particularly during this time of economic uncertainty, access to postsecondary education for the middle-class must be shored up. Too often, students fall in this category whose family income is above the cut-off for need-based aid, but less than adequate to meet the expected family contribution. Increased access to low-interest student loans and other forms of aid must be made available to ensure that finances do not become a barrier to these students' selection of the postsecondary institution most prepared to help them meet their potential.
- **Innovative partnerships.**
  - **K-12 partnerships.** Postsecondary education is no longer a luxury, but increasingly a prerequisite for competing successfully in today's global economy. To that end, the nation must think more in terms of a K-16 continuum, with incentives for meaningful collaboration – not just a “feeder school” relationship – between K-12 and postsecondary education that better support students in their transition to higher education. This should also include support of bridge programs.
  - **Partnerships across the postsecondary system.** A key factor in student success is “fit” with the institution of their choice. For some time now, students have been transferring among institutions of postsecondary education. In order to ensure student success and entry into the workforce, the nation must blend the strengths of public and private institutions alike, honoring the unique contributions of each type of institution, and ensuring more seamless transferability.
  - **Business/industry partnerships.** If we are to ensure successful preparation of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce, innovative partnerships with business/industry must be further developed. No matter the economic situation, students want to know they'll have a job upon graduation. How much more, in today's economy, must we ensure our students are successfully placed in positions where their skills can be immediately put to use?  
This should also include innovative ways of looking at the ***role of postsecondary education in short-term workforce development***, such as for infrastructure projects, skill enhancement for already trained individuals, and further educating such students regarding business/entrepreneurship skills.
- **Strong support services for continuum of students.**
  - While we speak of the continuum of students and the increasing diversity of students entering postsecondary education, we also know that not all students persist at the same rates. A body of ***research is emerging about the “missing male”*** on college campuses and the supports needed to ensure student success for our college men. ***Innovative mentoring programs*** are needed to ensure the success of any number of student populations, from first-generation students to returning adult learners and those from a diversity of backgrounds. ***IDEA funding*** should follow students with disabilities in their pursuit of postsecondary



- education to ensure a seamless transition with no loss of services geared to ensure the success of this student population.
- Just as success looks different for different students, so, too, does it look different on different campuses. Student affairs educators and those in higher education must be given the support necessary to ensure student success, while allowed the flexibility to determine in their expertise how that takes shape. Particularly in light of campus violence over the past years, higher education administrators across the nation have implemented procedures regarding threat assessment, notification of the campus community to any emergency as appropriate, and other such policies best implemented on a campus-by-campus basis.
  - Students are most successful when living and learning in community, yet the aging infrastructure of many of the nation's residential campuses has not kept pace with rising enrollment. In the case of public institutions, the current financial situation means campuses simply cannot get state funds fast enough to address their infrastructure demands.
  - Historically, students deepen their learning through experience. With higher education's emphasis on service learning, students are becoming more civically engaged as they pursue their education. Such opportunities for service learning and civic engagement must continue to be supported, especially with increasing demands on students' time to work in addition to their studies.

## **Conclusion**

Recognizing the unprecedented "to-do" list President-elect Obama faces even before entering office, we also know the power of higher education and the role it plays in helping to meet the challenges ahead. It is precisely in the most critical times faced by our nation that federal support of postsecondary education and ensuring student access has proved most essential. As student affairs administrators, our focus is on ensuring student success and, as a result, preparing a successful workforce for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We join with other higher education associations in calling for meaningful support of access to postsecondary education for all students who wish to further their education.



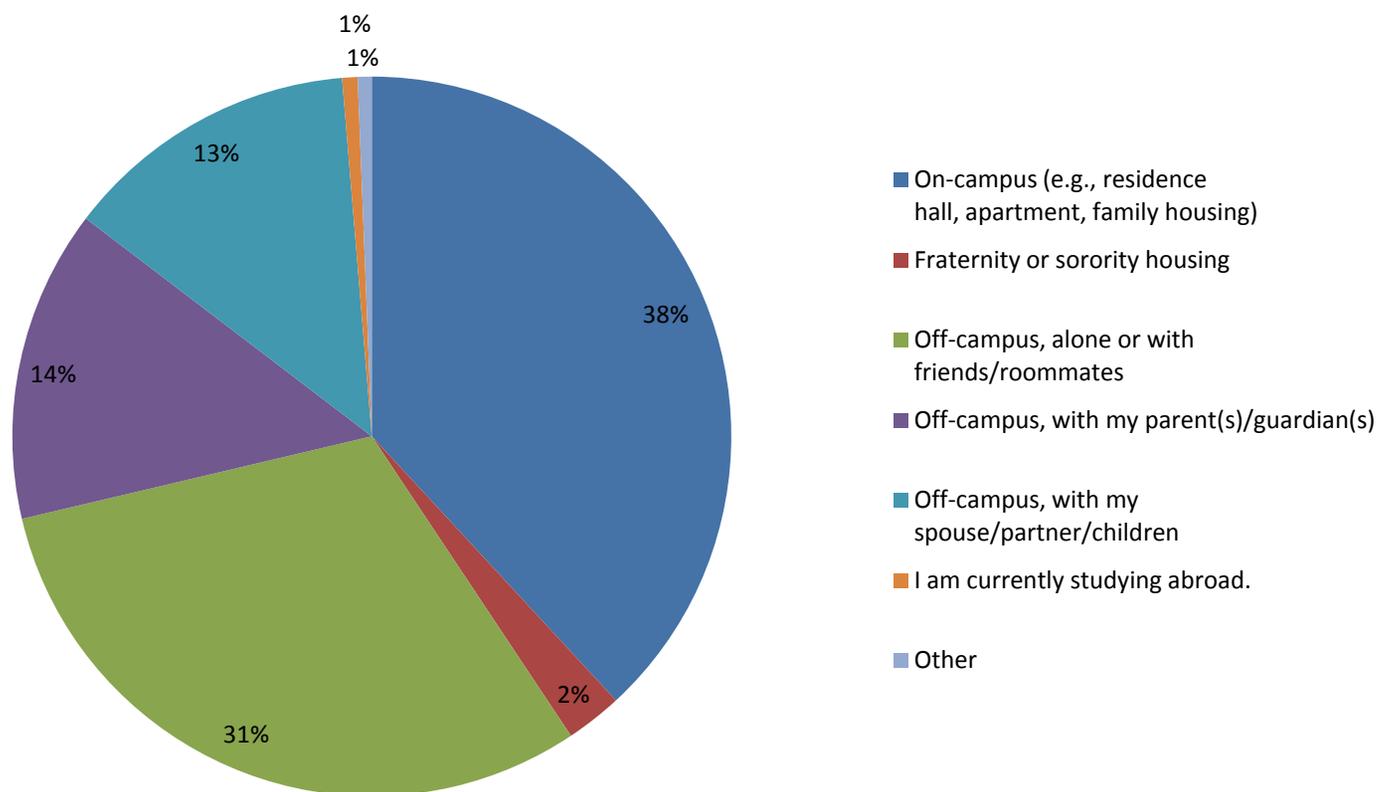
# PROFILE OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENT

## Who Are Our Students?

information extracted from NASPA's Profile of the American College Student, 2008

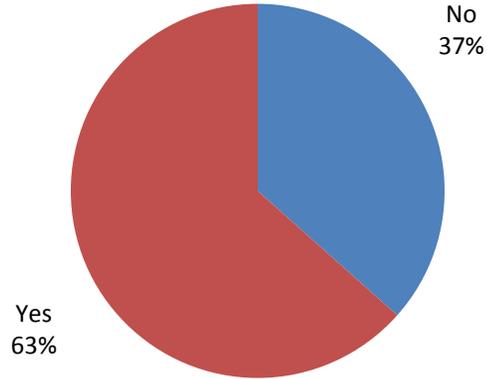
[www.naspa.org/divctr/research/profile/](http://www.naspa.org/divctr/research/profile/)

### Where do you currently live?

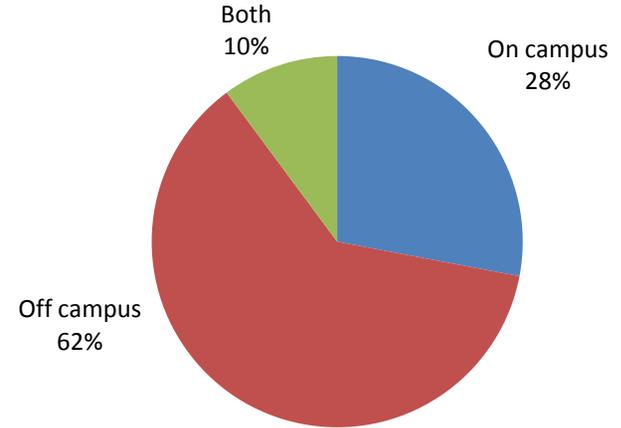




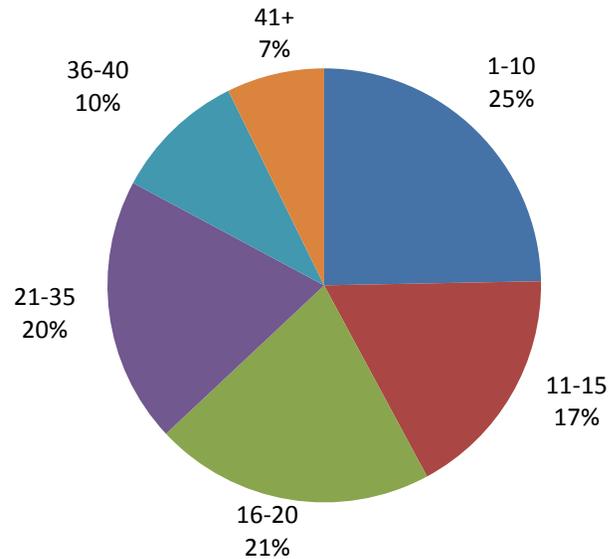
### During the academic year, do you work for pay?



### Where do you work?



### How many hours do you work per week?





### Primary reason for working

