

## Improve Access to Higher Education

The American Association of University Women is committed to making the dream of higher education a reality for all women. As the skill requirements of jobs continue to increase, so too should access to postsecondary education. Recently, Congress passed the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (CCRA) and reauthorized the Higher Education Act.<sup>1</sup> If properly implemented and funded, both of these laws could greatly improve access to higher education. AAUW supports the following measures to build on those successes and make higher education more attainable for all.

- **Improving and Expanding the Pell Grant Award Program:** The maximum Pell grant for the 2008-2009 school year is \$4,731, which covers only 33 percent of the total cost at a public 4-year institution.<sup>2</sup> AAUW supports increasing the maximum award level to \$7,000 and advocates mandatory appropriations to provide the necessary resources for the program. This additional funding is timely because AAUW successfully pushed 2008 legislative changes that allow students to qualify for Pell grants based on a year-round enrollment schedule, and also provide part-time students with access to Pell grants. Given the economic downturn, more students are seeking aid and additional people are returning to school to retrain, making additional funds critically important.<sup>3</sup>
- **Making College More Affordable and Managing Debt:** Over the past decade, debt levels have more than doubled for graduating seniors with student loans, from \$9,250 to \$19,200—a 108 percent increase (58 percent after accounting for inflation).<sup>4</sup> Because women are more likely to borrow money for college than men and will earn less on average after graduation, female graduates are more likely to struggle with their loan debt.<sup>5</sup> When CCRA became law, it reduced subsidized student loan interest rates by up to 50 percent, capped loan repayment at 15 percent of an individual's discretionary income, and created loan forgiveness plans for graduates who enter public service.<sup>6</sup> The Department of Education's proposed regulations regarding public service loan forgiveness will need immediate attention from the new administration; there are problems with how spousal incomes are counted, as well as clear certification issues regarding how and when a job can be deemed "public service."
- **Creating Economic Stimulus for Students:** In response to the current economic slowdown, Congress passed legislation to ensure that student loans remain available and accessible. AAUW continues its work with Congress and the Department of Education to ensure that students have access to all the federal loans for which they are eligible—even during tight economic times. Congress and the administration should also provide a limited "emergency access" student loan pool for colleges that commit to providing adequate need-based aid. In this economic climate, students who have exhausted all available aid may increasingly be forced to turn to risky private loans or leave school because of lack of funds. These students should have access to additional, affordable federal loans. To ensure the responsible use of "emergency access" loans, colleges would have to meet certain criteria and bear at least part of the risk.
- **Raising the Income Protection Allowance:** AAUW urges Congress to allow single, financially independent students to keep more of their income when determining eligibility for financial aid. As of May 2008, the income protection allowance is \$3,750 for a dependent student, and for an independent student the amount is \$7,000 if single or married to another student, and \$11,220 if married to a non-student.<sup>7</sup> AAUW supports raising the income protection allowance to \$9,000 for dependent students and \$12,000 for independent students. This increase is a more realistic reflection of the cost of living, and will allow more students to access the aid they desperately need.
- **Implementing Programs to Help Nontraditional College Students:** The 2008 HEA reauthorization authorized innovative programs that would help nontraditional students (e.g. older, parenting, working, or attending school part-time<sup>8</sup>) achieve success in college. These programs—Student Success Grants and the Pilot Project to Increase Persistence and Success in Community Colleges—should be fully funded.
- **Increasing Funding for Campus Child Care Programs:** AAUW strongly supports providing support services to help students balance the demands of work, family, and education. The Child Care Access Means Parents in School



(CCAMPIS) program provides funds to schools for campus-based child care and after-school programming, primarily to serve the needs of low-income students. AAUW urges Congress and the administration to substantially increase CCAMPIS funding. This increase is necessary to not only expand the program but also to, per the parameters set out in the HEA reauthorization, trigger an increase in the minimum grant a school receives and expand the eligibility of the types of institutions that can receive CCAMPIS funding. AAUW believes the need for such support services will only grow during the current economic downturn.

- **Improving Title IX Enforcement:** The Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education must become an agency of action rather than reaction. This can be done through the issuance of clear guidance on the law's application, speedy investigation of complaints, strong technical assistance, and proactive compliance reviews to enforce all aspects of Title IX. In addition, AAUW believes the 2005 "Additional Clarification of Intercollegiate Athletics Policy: Three-Part Test — Part Three" should be rescinded. This guidance, which allows schools to prove that they are meeting students' athletic interest by using a SPAM email survey, is a dramatic departure from the strong previous standards under which schools could demonstrate compliance with Title IX.
- **Diversifying the Professoriate:** Minorities make up less than 20 percent of all collegiate faculty.<sup>9</sup> Further, although women make up 39 percent of full-time collegiate faculty, they tend to be concentrated in less-senior instructional positions and at two-year institutions, as opposed to research universities.<sup>10</sup> HEA reauthorization included the Patsy Mink Graduate Fellowship Program, which authorized fellowships for students interested in obtaining a doctorate, or other terminal degree, with a specified service requirement to teach at degree-granting institutions of higher education after graduation. AAUW urges sufficient funding and timely implementation of the program.
- **Increasing Awareness of Hate Crimes on Campus:** Every year, more than half a million students endure bias-motivated slurs, vandalism, threats, and physical assaults on college campuses.<sup>11</sup> AAUW led the effort to pass a provision that aligns the HEA hate crimes reporting categories with those used by the FBI, providing parents and students a more accurate sense of campus safety and colleges a better picture of their campus climate. AAUW urges Congress and the administration to fund and initiate the education, training and outreach necessary to fully implement this new reporting mandate.

For more information, call Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, 202/785-7720 or Tracy Sherman, Government Relations Manager, 202/785-7730.

<sup>1</sup> The Higher Education Opportunity Act was signed into law in 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The College Board. (2008). *Trends in Student Aid: Pell Grants*, 2008. Retrieved December 19, 2008, from [http://www.collegeboard.com/html/costs/aid/3\\_2\\_pell\\_grants.html](http://www.collegeboard.com/html/costs/aid/3_2_pell_grants.html)

<sup>3</sup> Sanchez, Leonel. (Nov. 3, 2008). "More Students Spring from Tough Times." *San Diego Union-Tribune*. Retrieved December 18, 2008, from <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/education/20081103-9999-1m3train.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Project on Student Debt and the National Center for Education Statistics. *Quick Facts About Student Debt*. Retrieved December 14, 2007, from [http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/File/Debt\\_Facts\\_and\\_Sources.pdf](http://projectonstudentdebt.org/files/File/Debt_Facts_and_Sources.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> AAUW Educational Foundation. (April 2007). *Behind the Pay Gap*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> The College Cost Reduction Act was signed into law in 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Federal Pell Grant, Academic Competitiveness Grant, National Science and Mathematics Access To Retain Talent Grant, Federal Perkins Loan, Federal Work-Study, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Federal Family Education Loan, and William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Programs, 73 Fed. Reg. 104. (2008). Retrieved December 19, 2008, from <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/E8-11953.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). Special Analysis 2002: Nontraditional Undergraduates. Retrieved December 17, 2007, from, <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2002/analyses/nontraditional/>.

<sup>9</sup> American Council on Education. (2006). *Minorities in Higher Education: 22nd Annual Status Report*.

<sup>10</sup> West, Martha S. and John W. Curtis. "AAUP Faculty Gender Equity Indicators 2006." American Association of University Professors. Retrieved December, 18, 2006, from, <http://www.aaup.org/NR/rdonlyres/63396944-44BE-4ABA-9815-5792D93856F1/0/AAUPGenderEquityIndicators2006.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center. (2004) "10 Ways to Fight Hate on College Campuses." Retrieved December 17, 2007, from, [www.tolerance.org/campus](http://www.tolerance.org/campus)