

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY 2025

ACTION AGENDA

As a new administration comes into office and Congress begins its first session, the **American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA)** calls on our representatives to turn their attention to American higher education and finally take decisive action. There is much to be done, but change is most urgently needed in the following five areas:

AFFORDABILITY

Student loan forgiveness cannot be the solution to the high cost of college. We need to prioritize transparency and accountability by strengthening reporting requirements, scrutinizing programs that produce poor outcomes for students (such as low return on investment and high debt), and forcing colleges to have some skin in the game. Colleges and universities must take responsibility for reducing administrative bloat, and the federal government should continue to require institutions to report data that power accountability tools such as ACTA's **HowCollegesSpendMoney.com** website.

ACCREDITATION

There is broad, bipartisan agreement that our current system of accreditation is failing in its mission of quality assurance. We need to open federal recognition to new and specialized accreditors that will better serve our institutions. Accreditors should no longer be able to strong-arm trustees as the exclusive gatekeepers of federal funds. Congress should provide for a consumer-friendly, expedited alternative for reaccreditation, focused on mandatory auditable disclosures on key measures of student achievement, not expensive inputs.

FREE SPEECH

Higher education's core academic mission is threatened when universities do not commit to and uphold the rights of students and faculty. Efforts must be made to ensure that universities fulfill their obligations to the members of their campus communities, while respecting trustees' institutional autonomy as fiduciaries. Governing boards should take the lead in design and implementation, and lawmakers can support their efforts with laws that remove barriers to free speech and mandate policies that are consistent with the First Amendment.

INNOVATION

Colleges are approaching the demographic cliff weighed down by an ineffective bureaucracy. We must accelerate federal review of innovative programs, including the 90 credit-hour degree, micro-credentials, certificate programs, online learning, and apprenticeships. These and other innovations are key to building the economy of tomorrow and retaining our advantages against overseas competitors.

HEA REAUTHORIZATION

For over a decade, colleges and universities have been subject to a seesaw of policymaking by executive order because Congress has not met its responsibility to legislate. The result has been instability, uncertainty, and an incredible waste of taxpayers' resources. Congress needs to overcome its paralysis and provide long-lasting solutions to the problems facing higher education rather than relying on the executive branch, the Department of Education, or the courts to fill the void left by its inaction. Legislators must, moreover, scrutinize the Department's many funding programs to increase cost-effectiveness and eliminate those that cannot demonstrate their value-added. This Congress must show the necessary courage to reauthorize the Higher Education Act and put control back in the hands of the first branch. America's students, teachers, and taxpayers deserve no less.