



The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Friday, February 23, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, HELP Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), we thank you for soliciting comments regarding the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and for working in a bipartisan manner to reauthorize the legislation. **As you set out in this process, we ask that you keep higher education accessible by preserving federal student aid programs. Any simplification of these programs would have to ensure that the needs of undergraduate and graduate students are still met.**

Founded in 1936, SPSSI is an organization of scholars, educators, and students who are deeply invested in using psychological science to benefit society. Our membership includes researchers who study access to and success in higher education settings across historically underserved groups, including especially racial- and ethnic-minority students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation college students. **Since federal grant and loan recipients are more likely to be from lower socioeconomic status families and to be students of color, cuts to federal student aid programs would disproportionately affect these students** (Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow, 2016).

From the Morrill Act of 1862 to the Post-9/11 GI Bill of 2008, the United States has a long tradition of supporting students who might not otherwise be able to obtain an undergraduate or graduate degree. The Higher Education Act is the driving force behind that tradition today. It authorizes the major federal grant, loan, and loan repayment programs that benefit millions of students each year, including: Consumer Price-Indexed Pell Grants; subsidized undergraduate loans; income-driven loan repayment plans; Public Service Loan Forgiveness; Work-Study eligibility for both undergraduate and graduate students; and PLUS Loan availability for undergraduate students' families and independent graduate students.

Wendy Williams, President Elizabeth Cole, President-Elect Chris Crandall, Past-President Richard Wiener, Secretary-Treasurer

Council: Glenn Adams Tiffany Brannon Adrienne Carter-Sowell Kim Case Jamie Franco-Zamudio Sam Gaertner Kimberly Kahn
Katya Migacheva Mary Murphy Luis Rivera Isis Settles Linda Silka Peggy Stockdale Ashley Weinberg Keon West
Executive Director: Anila Balkissoon

As noted in a recent National Center for Education Statistics report (Radwin et al., 2018), 54 percent of all undergraduates in 2015-16 received one or more forms of federal Title IV aid. Among undergraduate students from families earning less than \$60,000/year, that number is higher than 80 percent. Federal Title IV aid programs are also critically important to graduate students. According to the same report, 40 percent of all graduate students in 2015-16 received Direct Unsubsidized Loans, and 10 percent received Direct PLUS Loans.

At the same time, never before has a higher education been more important to individuals and their families. Bachelor's degree holders experience significantly greater employment opportunities and higher earnings potential than non-degree holders (Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2017). Positions requiring a master's degree are expected to grow 17 percent between 2016 and 2026. Thirteen percent growth is expected in positions requiring a doctoral or professional degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

The benefits of a higher education also accrue for the United States as a nation. Because of their greater employment opportunities and higher earnings potential, bachelor's degree holders contribute far more in taxes than non-degree holders. As compared to non-degree holders, they report better health and are much less likely to be imprisoned. They are also less likely to rely on federal means-tested programs, more likely to be politically engaged, more likely to volunteer in their communities, and more likely to give to charitable causes (Trostel, 2015).

Graduate degree-holders also provide services that greatly benefit the nation. For example, graduate degree-holders in psychology conduct research that touches every area of Americans' lives, from education to healthcare to criminal justice. Psychologists provide essential mental health services in public and nonprofit settings, identify and tackle the organizational needs of businesses across every sector, and educate and mentor the next generation of students.

We recognize the many challenges that lawmakers face as they seek to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. We need to boost degree-completion rates, lower student loan default rates, make higher education more affordable and price-transparent, and ensure that students and their families are protected against bad institutional actors. **Making cuts to federal student aid programs will not solve these problems. Making cuts to federal student aid *will only* make undergraduate and graduate degree programs less accessible to people who have fewer resources.**

Thank you for considering our comment and for working to reauthorize this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,
Executive Committee, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Wendy Williams, Ph.D.
President

Elizabeth Cole, Ph.D.
President-Elect

Chris Crandall, Ph.D.
Immediate Past President

Richard Wiener, Ph.D.
Secretary/Treasurer

Tiffany Brannon, Ph.D.
Council-Elected Representative to the Executive Committee

References

- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, January 30). *Employment, wages, and projected change in employment by typical entry-level education (Employment in thousands)* [Data file]. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_education_summary.htm
- Ma, J., Pender, M., and Welch, M. (2017). *Education pays 2016*. New York: The College Board. Retrieved from <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2016-full-report.pdf>
- Radwin, D., Conzelmann, J.G., Nunnery, A., Lacy, T.A., Wu, J., Lew, S., Wine, J., and Siegel, P. (2018). *2015–16 National postsecondary student aid study (NPSAS:16): Student financial aid estimates for 2015–16* (NCES 2018-466). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018466>
- Snyder, T.D., de Brey, C., and Dillow, S.A. (2016). *Digest of education statistics 2015* (NCES 2016-014). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016014.pdf>
- Trostel, P. (2015). *It's not just the money: The benefits of college education to individuals and to society*. Indianapolis, IN: The Lumina Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.luminafoundation.org/files/resources/its-not-just-the-money.pdf>