

A Higher Education Act (HEA) for the 21st Century Learner

Today's learners are people you know: working adults, single parents, military personnel and their families, veterans, caregivers, farm families, and others. For them, classroom-based learning creates enormous challenges of time, access, and cost. While technology-mediated education greatly expands opportunities in higher education, the current federal regulatory system was designed for the traditional students of the past who were educated in a static setting that is very different from the reality experienced by the vast majority of postsecondary students today. In other words, *current law and regulation trails innovation*.

The Guiding Principles

Our members suggest the following principles when considering current laws and regulations in the use of educational technologies, either at a distance or in the traditional classroom:

- **Fairness** – Provide access to Federal financial aid for students learning at a distance or via innovative methods (including but not limited to competency-based education and adaptive learning) as for "traditional" students. Do not treat students differently based upon mode of instruction. Issues include:
 - Access to Federal Financial Aid (including year-round Pell Grants)
 - Changes to Existing Financial Aid Rules (cost of attendance calculations, regular and substantive interaction, last day of attendance, academic year)
 - Support for Underserved Populations
- **Innovation** - Rules grounded in the traditional classroom hinder advancements. Since innovations will continue to emerge between HEA's, consider authorizing particular innovations in the HEA itself and allow greater flexibility in statute for the Department to waive rules or conduct further "experimental" or "demonstration" projects to help incubate future innovations. Issues include:
 - Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Adaptive Learning
 - Accessibility of Educational Technologies
 - Alternative Credentialing
- **Accountability** - Holding colleges to standards for student performance and protection of financial aid funds need not add to the burden of over-regulation. This balanced approach to any new laws and regulations should be narrowly tailored to address specific needs. Issues include:
 - Quality Assurance for Distance Education, Innovations, and Alternative Providers
 - Identity Verification to Combat Financial Aid Fraud
 - Identity Authentication for Assessments
 - State Authorization

Our Organizations

Our three organizations represent more than 1,000 higher education institutions throughout the United States. Our members have long been leaders in the innovative use of technologies to increase access and improve educational outcomes. We are ready to help.

Online Learning Consortium (onlinelearningconsortium.org; Karen Pedersen, Ph.D., karen_pedersen@onlinelearning-c.org)

University Professional & Continuing Education Association (upcea.edu; Jordan DiMaggio, jdimaggio@upcea.edu)

WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (wcet.wiche.edu; Russ Poulin, rpoulin@wiche.edu)



The changing face of higher education.

THAT WAS THEN 1965



The typical student was 'college-aged' and full-time.



The federal policy architecture in support of regulation of higher education was just being established.



The Internet was two decades away.



...THIS IS NOW 2016



85% of Americans enrolled in post secondary institutions are "non-traditional" learners.¹



For many, the challenges of **time**, **distance**, and **cost** make online learning **more accessible.**"



1/4 of US students are taking at least one online course.²



The Internet is a necessary component of our personal, educational, and professional lives.



In 2012, nearly 63% of U.S. colleges offered fully-online degree programs.³ That's almost double what it was a decade earlier, at just 32.5%.



Nearly 70% of online education occurs within the traditional nonprofit sector.⁴

It's time for a Higher Education Act (HEA) for the 21st Century Learner.

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SOURCES 1. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Choy, S. Non-traditional undergraduates. Washington, DC 2. Babson Research Survey Group and Quahog Research Group, LLC, Grade Level – Tracking Online Education, 2015 3. U.S. News & World Report, Online Course Enrollment Climbs for 10th Straight Year, January 2013 4. IPEDS Fall 2013: Higher Ed Sectors Vary Greatly in Distance Ed Enrollments, WCET Blog