

**INDICATORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY IN THE UNITED STATES—2020 TREND REPORT**

**“WILL CRISIS OPEN A PORTAL TO EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY OR WILL MORE DOORS CLOSE?”**

**SHARED DIALOGUE DISCUSSION GUIDE**

*Prior to the shared dialogue discussion, each participant is encouraged to record any particular data points of interest as well as personal reactions to the narratives presented.*

**Part 1. Consideration of the Data (20 minutes)**

**Part 2. Consideration of Student Narratives (10 minutes)**

**Part 3. Shared Dialogue Session (30 minutes)**

**Each group will be staffed by a COE facilitator who will take notes and help keep track of the time.**

*Please craft responses to each of the following questions. In doing so, you may wish to consider the policy proposals briefly outlined below.*

- In what ways has the movement towards mass virtual education that has resulted from the COVID-19 crisis provided insight into the potential to expand equity or exacerbate inequality in postsecondary education?
- What steps should the federal government take in order to ensure that we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with a more equitable system of higher education?
- What steps should state governments take in order to ensure that we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with a more equitable system of higher education?
- What steps should institutions of higher education take in order to ensure that we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis with a more equitable system of higher education?

Potential Policy Proposals for Consideration

- ***Federal/State Partnerships to Ensure Debt-Free College for All.*** Debt Free College for All proposals typically involve a federal/state partnership and also include a major infusion of funds into the Pell Grant program. In contrast to “Free College” proposals, which typically focus only on tuition, Debt

Free College for All proposals also include other elements of student need, such as room and board, transportation, books, and childcare.

- ***Support Pell Grant Restoration.*** When Pell Grants were first legislated, they were intended to cover three-fourths of the cost of postsecondary education. While this goal was never reached, by the late 1970s, the maximum Pell grant covered two-thirds of the average cost of attendance.<sup>1</sup> Since 1980, the maximum Pell Grant has fallen and covered only 25 percent of college costs in 2018. Meanwhile, the average college costs for all institutions, weighted by full-time undergraduate enrollment, were 2.5 times higher (in constant 2018 dollars) in 2017-18 than in 1974-75. To restore Pell to its 1970's proportion of college costs would require a Pell maximum of about \$16,484 rather than the maximum of the \$6,195 of 2019-20.
- ***Increase the Reach and Resources for College Access and Success Support Programs.*** Recognizing that financial aid was not enough to foster a more equitable education system, the Higher Education Act of 1965, included provisions for the provision for services that would eventually become known as TRIO. TRIO fosters greater inclusivity, positive identity, empowerment, leadership, academic excellence, emergency aid, and engagement of the students they serve. Despite the mounting evidence from rigorous evaluation studies that *TRIO Works* and can increase access and completion rates as much as 40 to 50 percent, TRIO reaches less than 2 percent of eligible students with intensive programs, and about 5 percent with light touch programs.
- ***Transition from Competitive Merit Based Admissions to Inclusive Mastery Requirements.*** Our current stratified system of higher education where upper income students are over-represented at highly resourced elite institutions and low-income students are over-represented at under-resourced institutions relies on the assumption that because places at the most highly resourced institutions are limited, admission to them (and funds to attend) should be given to individuals with the most “merit” as determined by grades, test scores, extracurricular activities, recommendations, etc. Proposals to move to a “mastery-based system” include “entry level or competence levels” that need to be demonstrated for admission to a particular institution. Then, from among the students qualified to attend, individuals are chosen for admission by lottery.
- ***Address Systematic Inequities That Disproportionately Limit Options for Low-Income, First-Generation Individuals and Communities of Color.*** The pandemic has brought into clear focus the extent to which American society is inequitable and the extent to which these individuals, families and communities are held back because of these structured inequities. A so-called “invisible and blind” killer like COVID has disproportionately resulted in deaths of African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. Climate change, food insecurity, lack of access to health care all combine to create obstacles to educational opportunity. Initiatives such as the Higher Education Sustainability Act or efforts to expand eligibility of students to food stamps, rental assistance and child-care address would help these structural inequities.
- ***What other policy proposals would you suggest at the institutional, state, or federal level?***

**Please post your answers to the Google Document available at [\[link\]](#).**

To read a full version of *Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States—2020 Trend Report*, please visit <http://pellinstitute.org/indicators/>.

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<sup>1</sup> Mensel, F. (2013). Birth of the Pell Grant: The Community College Role. In *Reflections on Pell: Championing Social Justice through 40 Years of Education Opportunity*. Washington, D.C.: Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Education.