



Kansas Independent College Association

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Testimony for the House Education Budget Committee

February 6, 2012

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Kansas Independent College Association

Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the Kansas Independent Colleges and their place in the state's budget building process. I am Doug Penner, president of the association that represents 18 of the state's independent colleges, all of whom are North Central Association, Higher Learning Commission accredited and not for profit.

I have distributed a booklet we prepare annually that shows in some detail the role played by our colleges within the state's higher education system. The booklet summarizes a variety of data for the sector as a whole and for individual institutions. The data includes 10-year trends in enrollment and graduation patterns, our colleges' role in the state and local economies, patterns of student costs, and finally, financial aid sources for our students. The booklet may serve as a reference document for you as issues arise during the session—and of course, I'd be pleased to answer any questions you might have as you look more carefully at the booklet this afternoon or later.

The pattern of information presented in this booklet will be familiar to those of you who have heard testimony from our colleges in recent years. The data make the case, in a variety of ways, that our state's independent colleges are an integral part of education in the state—for the state as a whole, for the local communities in which they work, and most importantly, for the students they serve.

The last three years have been challenging ones for our colleges, as they've been for public post-secondary and K-12 schools across the state. The Great Recession has had its impact on college finances and enrollment strategies, including significant increases in institutional student financial aid designed to help make college a possibility for lower income students in the state. Without the Kansas Comprehensive Grant program, the centerpiece of the state's support for high need students attending public and private non-profit colleges in the state, many fewer students would have been able to enroll and the viability of some of our colleges would have been in question.

Key information highlighted in the booklet tells a story that hasn't changed much in recent years:

- The KICA colleges consistently enroll around 12% of the state's total post-secondary enrollment, two- and four-year combined, and about 20% of the state's enrollment of students at four-year colleges and universities.
- KICA colleges annually award about 21% of the state's bachelor's degrees and about 29% of the state's master's degrees.
- Our colleges continue to play a particularly important role in reaching out to older students, advancing their technical or managerial skills for an existing employment role, or preparing for a lateral or vertical shift in career path.

- The demographic profile of students attending independent colleges in Kansas is virtually identical to that of students attending public institutions in the state—our students are slightly more ethnically diverse than those attending the four-year regents institutions, and they come from virtually the same family economic circumstances.
- Page six shows percentages of graduates who have completed their degrees in four years or less. This is not the percentage of students entering in a given year who graduate four years later—that figure is lower, for both public and private institutions. Looking only at students who walk across the stage to receive their bachelor's diploma, and asking the question, how many accomplished the task in four years or less, these are the numbers, 73% for our private colleges—almost three in four. The statistic underscores the reality that the systems of advising, faculty interaction, retention counseling and class availability at our colleges do indeed make it possible for students to complete in the four years many have been led to expect.

For years our colleges have focused their strategic attention and resources on managing costs and staying affordable to students from diverse financial circumstances. This kind of disciplined fiscal care contributes to the fact that by national and regional standards, tuitions at our colleges are relatively low. At the same time, institutional financial aid to students is substantial and higher than national averages. On average our colleges return approximately 50% of their tuition dollars in student financial aid. The average student institutional grant is significantly larger than grant aid coming to them from federal or state scholarship and grant programs. All of this makes the point that the independent colleges consistently have done their part to try to control the cost of a college education and to provide educational opportunity to a wide range of students in our state.

As in prior years and unlike other agencies reporting to your committee this week, the independent colleges do not receive direct institutional appropriations in the state budget. But for decades, the state has provided significant support indirectly via grants to students through the Kansas Comprehensive Grant program—the grant program managed by the Board of Regents that merged need-based grant programs in the public and private sectors a dozen years ago. The program annually serves about 10,000 students, 2,400 of whom attend our colleges and the balance the regents' institutions and Washburn. This year, 2,408 students at KICA colleges received comprehensive grants. Another 2,765, or 54%, were eligible for the funds but were not funded.

The independent college portion of comprehensive grant dollars represent about 1% of the state's total expenditure on higher education—but it is clear that this 1% has a powerful impact. Moreover, there is little question that the fiscal viability of our colleges is closely tied to the comprehensive grant program and its continuing role in providing access and affordability to needy Kansas students. In light of the crucial importance of this program, we are strongly supportive of the inclusion in the governor's budget of funds to restore losses in recent years of federal student aid funds tied directly to the comprehensive grant program.

As our country focuses its attention on addressing 1) the steady decline in the percentage of adults with college degrees, and 2) the increasing gap in education achievement between the US and other developed countries, it is essential that all of our resources, public and private, be leveraged to achieve a higher level of education for our nation's workforce. In our state, private colleges are and must continue to be key players in the effort.

Our colleges and especially our students are grateful to legislative leaders in Kansas who for years have had the foresight and commitment to support the Kansas Comprehensive Grant directed to an independent system that generates thousands of graduates each year, graduates ready to serve and to lead, ready to make Kansas stronger and more resilient.