



APSCU Now Blog

The Official Blog of the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU)

Thursday, April 14, 2011

Response to Sen. Harkin's guest column in the Iowa State Daily

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In response to Sen. Harkin's guest column, "[Public loses with for-profit colleges](#)," a few points of fundamental clarification, context and balance:



- Private sector colleges and universities (PSCUs) account for 25 percent of federal student aid for the simple reason that we educate 25 percent of needs-based students. What's wrong with this picture? Nothing. Perhaps Congress wants to mandate that traditional schools accept higher percentages of lower income students so they account for a higher percentage of federal aid? No? I didn't think so.
- The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP) hearings have focused on a small number of anecdotes in which students have not been in an ideal situation. We feel for dissatisfied students whatever type of school they attended. But this small sample, which has not even attempted to include unhappy students from traditional schools, is hardly representative of the 3.2 million students attending private sector colleges and universities or indicative of widespread problems. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) report so critical of our sector has been widely discredited for containing misstatements and exaggerations, and lead to the "transfer" of the head of the project.
- Private sector colleges and universities educate primarily non-traditional students, most at-risk for graduation because the likelihood of completing studies is impeded by situations such as job obligations, military service, child bearing and rearing, elderly parent care and other developments. These "life gets in the way" students are much rarer at traditional schools. Yet even with these challenges, the dedicated students who attend PSCUs have completion rates much higher than students at traditional schools with similar student demographics.
- Critics have lost the enormous advantage to taxpayers of PSCUs by overly focusing on risks. For instance, our higher education system has not done well educating minorities. Yet PSCUs educate 12 percent of postsecondary students overall but award 25 percent of the postsecondary degrees and awards earned by minority students. These are individuals unlikely to attend more selective colleges and universities or to gain entry to popular, overcrowded and resource constrained programs at state institutions. Individuals with a college credential are more likely to be fully employed, to avoid layoffs, and to rise in their careers. The social costs avoided in areas such as welfare payments, tuition subsidies, government paid health care benefits and unemployment benefits are substantial.
- While reference is made to manipulative and misleading PSCU marketing campaigns, Title IV eligible institutions must be accredited and meet accrediting agency standards for school operations, including marketing. Accreditation is rigorous and backed by on-going external audits. PSCU tuition is more expensive for students, though not taxpayers, because the cost is not heavily subsidized by the government as it is at state colleges and universities and community colleges, many of which have graduation rates in single digits. College Board studies show that PSCU tuition, averaging \$14,000, is much less expensive than private, not-for-profit tuition.
- HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin states that he will introduce legislation to reform federal oversight of PSCUs and says this effort deserves bipartisan support. There has been, of course, nothing bipartisan about the hearings his committee has conducted to date. In fact, yesterday ten U.S. senators, including HELP Committee Ranking Member Michael Enzi sent Chairman Harkin a letter, labeling his hearings "disorganized and prejudicial." Hardly the stuff that

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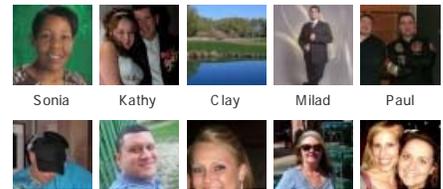
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builds confidence, much less an approach that unifies higher education in the effort of putting students and a more globally competitive U.S. economy first. We are ready to work with Senator Harkin and all other stakeholders to find ways to improve the return on investment for students and taxpayers that is based on unbiased research and is applicable to all of higher education. An institution's outcomes for its students and taxpayers, not its tax status, should be all that matters.



Featured Video - Student Rally at Career Day 2010

Harris N. Miller
President, Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities

Posted by APSCU User at 3:36 PM

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- 2011 (24)
April (4)
Response to an Opinion Piece in The Sacramento Bee...
Response to Sen. Harkin's guest column in the Iowa...
Responding to Articles on the LA Times and Shanker...
APSCU Responds to an Editorial in the Rome Sentinel...
February (7)
January (13)
2010 (224)
2009 (33)

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