



**Testimony of Dr. Stephen Hicks, President  
Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties  
Senate Education Committee  
May 15, 2013  
Public Hearing on Senate Bills No. 78, 420 and 713**

Good morning Chairman Folmer and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Steve Hicks, and I am the president of the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF). We represent over 6,000 faculty and coaches at Pennsylvania's 14 state-owned universities. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to address the three bills before the committee.

Senate Bills 78, 420, and 713 seek to expand access to higher education for students enrolled in online courses, for middle-income students, and for undocumented students, respectively. These bills collectively recognize that Pennsylvania benefits when affordable, high quality postsecondary education is widely accessible.

This access theme is especially important given the budgetary climate of the past few years. Higher education was targeted for large cuts in state funding two years ago. At that time the budget for the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) was cut 18%, or \$90 million. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) has also been targeted for budget cuts and flat funding. Pennsylvania cannot continue to disinvest in higher education; it will lose out to states, like New Jersey, that are increasing funding, educating more students, and taking advantage of the economic energy generated by an educated citizenry.

PASSHE plays a key role in providing access to higher education for students in the Commonwealth. The state-mandated mission for the State System universities is to provide quality higher education at an affordable cost to students. Inherent in this access mission is providing higher education for those who desire the opportunity, regardless of socio-economic status.

Senate Bill 713—The Pennsylvania DREAM Act – would expand college access for undocumented students. Senator Smucker deserves significant credit for his leadership on this issue; SB 713 is an important step in providing equal opportunities and access to undocumented students. Several other states have already adopted policies to expand this access.

According to the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, approximately 800 undocumented students graduate from Pennsylvania high schools every year.<sup>1</sup> Many of these

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<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, "Why Pennsylvania Should Pass the Proposed Pennsylvania DREAM Act".

students have the desire and the potential to succeed in college, but the existing laws do not allow us to tap their potential. An undocumented student is currently barred from higher education, regardless of ability or effort.

Senate Bill 713 creates a common sense, responsible path to college for these students by charging in-state tuition at our public universities if they commit to applying for permanent residency, have attended a Pennsylvania school for at least two years, and have received a high school diploma or GED. This is a rational approach that provides access to those students who have established a commitment to the Commonwealth.

Senate Bill 713 will also have a direct positive impact on Pennsylvania's economy. According to an American Enterprise Institute Study, every foreign-born STEM student we train and keep in the United States will generate 2.6 jobs for American workers. Seven million dollars in taxable income would be generated by only 20 percent of the 800 annual undocumented high school graduates successfully completing a college degree.<sup>3</sup>

APSCUF respectfully asks committee members to support SB 713 and take the first step towards helping Pennsylvania join at least 12 other states that have realized the benefits of the DREAM Act.

Senate Bill 420 also promotes affordability and access by providing debt reduction for middle-income students. APSCUF has not taken a formal position on SB 420, but our organization recognizes the significant problems that burdensome student debt has on working families. We think the issue needs to be understood in the context of tuition, state funding of institutions, and increased student debt. APSCUF would like to see additional information on the financial needs of middle-income students, as well as information on possible changes in PHEAA policies before taking a formal position on this legislation.

Senate Bill 78 expands access to PHEAA grants for students who take the majority of their classes online. APSCUF appreciates the value of online education; the State System is a significant provider of distance education, which can be an important tool for increasing access. However, our organization stands firmly behind the principle that the best mode of education is to have the professor and the students together in the same classroom.

Recent research illustrates the pitfalls of moving to online learning at the expense of the traditional classroom experience. Studies of community college students found that mid-semester withdrawal rates were 10 to 15 percent higher for online courses than traditional classes.<sup>7</sup> One study of 23 Virginia community colleges found that students who took online coursework in early semesters were less likely to return to school in subsequent semesters and less likely to transfer to a four-year college.<sup>8</sup> Students cite a lack of faculty presence and peer

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<sup>3</sup> Based on 2012 average starting salary reported by National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)

<sup>7</sup> Jaggars. Shanna Smith, "Online Learning: Does It Help Low-Income and Underprepared Student", Columbia University Community College Research Center Working Paper No. 26, page 9.

<sup>8</sup> Jaggars, 17.

interaction as reasons for lower success rates in online courses. Similar research should be conducted in Pennsylvania to monitor student-learning outcomes for online courses.

Expanding this type of access also may allow more state dollars to be diverted to some for-profit institutions, including some that have been the subject of multiple investigations. According to PHEAA, in 2011-12 nearly \$47 million in grant dollars went to for-profit universities. Several of the parent companies of these institutions were cited in the US Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee's report on the for-profit industry for predatory recruiting tactics, misleading marketing, and fraudulent practices. At the least, the committee should consider reviewing the for-profit institutions that stand to receive more PHEAA dollars as a result of SB 78 to ensure they are employing best practices.

APSCUF requests that the committee approach online education cautiously and work with PHEAA's Distance Education Study Group to study the effects of online learning. Over the last year, PHEAA's study group has developed a Distance Education Pilot Program. Under the program, PHEAA would waive the distance education restrictions for a limited number of students enrolled in high priority occupations. Data on student performance and program costs would be used to inform policy changes and modifications to the grant program. While APSCUF does not have a formal position on the pilot program, our organization is pleased that PHEAA is proceeding cautiously to ensure that technology is incorporated in a way that provides students with a quality education.

APSCUF has also established an ad hoc committee to develop policy positions and make recommendations on a variety of higher education issues, including distance education. APSCUF would be happy to share the committee's report with members of the Senate Education committee when it is completed.

These three bills show the fluid nature of the current higher education environment: we are constantly struggling to find ways to provide a quality, affordable, accessible education to hundreds of thousands across the Commonwealth. To fail to do so in both the near and distant future, we all recognize, makes for a bleaker future for Pennsylvania: a poorly educated Pennsylvania is a Commonwealth unlike the historical one with its rich civic and economic tradition. We need to provide quality, affordable, accessible higher education, or we will risk becoming the backwater of the mid-Atlantic region.

Thank you to Chairman Folmer and members of the committee for considering our testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.