



Building a Stronger Democracy Through an Educated Citizenry

An Open Letter from the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences to the

Next President and Congress of the United States

September 2008

America's success in the 21st century will be predicated upon greater access to higher education for its citizens, greater investment in research and discovery, improved understanding of our diverse cultures and common heritage, and a firm grasp of our role on the world stage.

The Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) – the nation's largest and most active association of Arts and Sciences deans – believes that our colleges and universities can and must drive these trends, all of which are aimed at strengthening our democracy and improving the quality of life for all Americans.

We accept our obligation as deans to make our institutions more attentive and accountable, with special attention to our traditional area of responsibility – the quality and character of the liberal arts education delivered to undergraduate students on campuses across the nation.

In turn, we call upon the next President and Congress of the United States to invest fully in our future by reorienting some existing programs and properly funding initiatives in the traditional arts and sciences.

We purposefully craft this open letter as a statement of general principles, rather than attach specific dollar amounts to the imperatives listed below, cognizant of the financial difficulties facing our nation.

Increasing Access to Higher Education

Access to higher education is essential to the nation's future. CCAS calls for increased funding for Pell Grants to accommodate increased enrollment of low-income students, and to ensure that maximum grants keep pace with the Consumer Price Index. Increased funding for college preparatory courses is also desirable to ensure the success of students coming from underserved populations.

Competing Fairly and Openly for Federal Funding

Federal investment in scientific research and discovery should be distributed as fairly and openly as possible. CCAS calls for more regular, open, and peer-reviewed competition among institutions and scientists for federal funding. This necessitates a concurrent reduction in the number and scope of targeted appropriations; proportionate increases to the funding agencies that conduct rigorous, merit-based review processes, such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation; and restored funding of the Comprehensive Program of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

Investing in Twenty-First Century Facilities

To compete most effectively in the global environment, America's scientists, scholars, and students must work in cutting-edge facilities. CCAS calls for investment in the nation's research and educational infrastructure through the creation of a program of federally-guaranteed, subsidized loans to construct new research and teaching facilities on our nation's campuses. The loans could be allocated on a competitive basis, with preference given to institutions demonstrating financial need, serving underserved populations, or engaging in research that is critical to the nation's future.

Promoting Discovery and Creativity

A nation must know its own heritage to understand its place in the world, and it must encourage artistic creation to fully realize its humanity. CCAS calls for renewed engagement with the arts, humanities, and social sciences, by substantially increasing the annual budgets of the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Meeting the Challenge of Our Global World

America can meet the challenge of working successfully in our global world if its citizens are equipped to understand the world's diverse governing systems and cultures. Accordingly, CCAS calls for increased funding for the International Education Programs Service, additional fellowships for both teacher and language training in languages critical to national security, and subsidized study abroad scholarships for high achieving but disadvantaged students.

Summary

Institutions of higher education are indispensable to democracy. Greater federal investment in the liberal arts and sciences at these institutions will equip the next generation of students to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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About CCAS

The Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1965, is the country's largest association of arts and sciences deans, with a membership of 1,400 deans, associate, and assistant deans, located at more than 400 colleges and universities. Headquartered at The College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, CCAS holds an annual meeting, offers professional development seminars and workshops, and provides data and networking opportunities to improve the quality and efficiency of arts and sciences education. CCAS member institutions educate approximately four million students. www.ccas.net