

## DRAFT

### **STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS**

As the coordinating authority for public higher education in South Carolina, the Commission on Higher Education is committed to promoting institutional and system wide access, affordability, and excellence. It is our solemn responsibility to assure a balance between student and taxpayer interests, institutional needs and economic development.

We believe that education is a critical component for the continuing economic development and well being of our state, and that every South Carolina citizen should have the opportunity to achieve a certificate or degree through our public higher education system, leading to better jobs and quality of life, and benefitting our state as a whole.

Given the potentially devastating state and national trends in higher education, we believe that it is essential that our state proactively explore options and take steps to:

- a. ensure the health, sustainability and continued excellence of all South Carolina's institutions of higher learning; and
- b. to make academic access and affordability for South Carolinians a priority.

To that end, we submit this **Student Bill of Rights** as a starting point for discussions on how to achieve these goals. We understand that a “one-size fits-all” approach is not feasible, given the different missions of each college and university. For this reason, the metrics and implementation timeline may vary at each institution.

#### **I. SC STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION**

1) Palmetto Fellow and Life lottery tuition scholarship recipients should be granted automatic acceptance to any public institution of higher learning in South Carolina.

2) Qualified in-state students should be first in line in the admission process, and out of state growth should not necessitate institutional expansion and capital spending. Out of state enrollments should be assessed, managed and potentially capped. We welcome students from throughout the country, appreciate the diversity and enhancement they bring to the educational experience, and encourage them to make South Carolina their home upon graduation. Our priority, however, must be to the taxpayers and students of this state. A significant majority of students attending our public universities should be from South Carolina, and institutions should be encouraged to set admission goals consistent with that standard.

3) Tuition breaks for out of state students should be reviewed and potentially capped. We recognize that there is a legitimate benefit for use of some tuition breaks for out-of-state students. It is, however, unfair to the taxpayers of South Carolina to offer broad discounts to students who have not contributed to institutional support through the state tax base. It must also be recognized that by reducing out of state tuition, institutions are reducing revenues that could be used to lower the costs passed on to South Carolina students. With few exceptions, out of state students should pay out of state tuition.

4) Students should be able to freely transfer qualified courses between institutions. A system should be created to remove transferability barriers.

## **II. SC STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO AN AFFORDABLE EDUCATION**

5) Tuition costs should be capped, frozen, or decreased. While there may be rare and extraordinary circumstances that necessitate tuition increases, institutions should actively seek ways to make higher education more affordable. Students should not be faced with the impossible choice of financial burden for their families or crippling debt upon their graduation.

6) Institutions should adopt policies of transparency and consistency in disclosing fees. Students and their families have the right to know exactly what their education will cost. All fees should be clearly stated and transparent, and public institutions should use consistent terminology to allow for comparison.

## **III. SC STUDENTS HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPECT EXCELLENCE AND A RETURN ON INVESTMENT IN THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

7) The Commission on Higher Education should collect, assess and monitor institution budgets (as proscribed by law) and enrollments. Students and their families have the right to expect that at every SC public college and university, they are placing their futures in the hands of strong and financially stable institutions.

8) South Carolina's students have the right to expect that their success and well being will be at the heart of every decision made at every level within the state's higher education system.