

United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training

**“Keeping College Within Reach: Exploring
State Efforts to Curb Costs”**

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Committee on Education and the Workforce

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Thank you, Madam Chair, Ranking Member Hinojosa, and members of the Committee.

I am honored to be with you today.

My name is Joe May and I am the President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

On behalf of the great state of Louisiana and Louisiana's community and technical colleges, I want to thank you and the members of the Sub-committee on Education and Workforce Training for inviting me to be part of these important deliberations.

The Louisiana Community and Technical College System is comprised of 14 colleges which last year served 111,000 unduplicated students.

Of these 14 colleges, seven have been recognized as among the nation's fastest growing colleges when ranked among colleges of the same size.

Along with being President of the Louisiana Community & Technical Colleges, I am the president of a new organization called Rebuilding America's Middle Class (RAMC).

Our almost 100 members are a group of community and technical colleges that have joined together to insure that federal policies support, rather than hinder, the ability of individuals to acquire the skills needed for today's jobs.

Our economy is in trouble. When our economy is in trouble, individuals and families struggle to find good jobs.

More than ever, the road to economic security runs through higher education and specifically community and technical colleges.

The fear of skyrocketing college costs has put the dream of a middle-class lifestyle out of reach for many Americans.

Yet, community colleges are the low cost, high value educational providers that respond to market demands.

The average annual cost per year to attend a community college is just under \$3,000 compared to over \$8,000 for the average price of annual in-state tuition at a four-year public college.

Author Jim Clifton points out in his book, “The Coming Jobs War,” that today’s global economy is engaged in a war for jobs.

As pointed out by the McKinsey publication of a few years ago, employers are also engaged in a “war for talent.”

The war for jobs and the war for talent are symptoms of the same problem.

As a country, we must do more to align postsecondary programs with the needs of business and industry to enable them to be successful and to equip individuals for good paying jobs.

It is clear that while employers are fighting for the top talent in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to remain competitive in today's economy, individuals badly want those jobs.

Community colleges are the key to bridging this knowledge gap between employers and individuals.

Bringing together employers and individuals has been the story of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System.

Yet like most of the nation, funding at Louisiana’s community colleges and technical colleges has not kept pace with enrollment growth.

Over the past five and a half years, Louisiana’s community and technical college enrollment has grown by 55% while our state support has decreased by 37%.

While the changing funding model creates great challenges, I believe that it is in times like this that community and technical colleges shine.

As institutions, we are problem solvers that find ways to be more efficient while serving more students and meeting the needs of business and industry.

Our colleges are driven to adapt to changing economic realities because we understand that the stakes have never been higher.

In Louisiana, through merging colleges, eliminating redundant programs, aligning programs with market demands, consolidating information technology systems, and sharing backroom operations such as payroll and auditing services, we are saving almost \$30 million annually.

Enrolling almost half of the nation's undergraduate enrollment, community and technical colleges have become the front line for improving student access and student success.

Perhaps most importantly, our colleges are the conduit by which employers secure the talent they need and help students get the jobs they desire.

Louisiana's community and technical colleges are proud to say:

Our colleges have no needs...

We quickly point out that it is people, who have needs,

Employers have needs,

Communities have needs...

Our colleges must use all of our resources to provide the solutions to meet the needs of people, employers and communities.

Transfer Policies

In Louisiana, we have worked hard to help students achieve their goals and objectives, ensuring that employers find the talent they need, while at the same time driving costs down.

One of the greatest opportunities for keeping cost low is to encourage more students to begin their postsecondary career at a community or technical college.

Because our colleges are close to where students live and work, are lower cost, and offer high quality programs, they are an outstanding value for students planning to transfer to a university and earn a baccalaureate degree.

While this has been an obvious benefit of attending community and technical colleges, for many students, the transfer process has been a nightmare.

In fact, in Louisiana, if a student earned an associate's degree at a community college and transferred to a public university, the student would, on average lose between 21 and 24 semester credit hours in transfer.

The solution to this problem was clear: develop a state-wide transfer agreement to ensure that students can transfer without losing credit hours regardless of which university they chose to attend.

When the Louisiana legislature debated our transfer policy, it was supported by not only two-year colleges but university faculty as well.

Referencing the transfer policy in testimony before the Louisiana Senate, Louisiana State University Faculty Senate President, Kevin Cope stated, "I urge everyone to think long and deeply about this system and how it will impact the educated person. I believe that with this legislation we finally have the chance to get it right."

Today, students can enroll at any community college in Louisiana, earn the Louisiana Transfer Degree—either an Associate's of Arts degree or an Associate's of Science degree and transfer to LSU or any of the state's 14 universities with junior status.

Thus, for the first time in the history of our state, two-year college advisors can actually encourage students desiring to transfer to complete the associate's degree.

Prior to this legislation, advisors knew that if the student earned the associate's degree that he or she would take more hours than needed and spend more dollars than necessary.

As the result of this initiative, the average student saves \$2,117 while the state of Louisiana saves \$1,930 per transfer student.

In addition, this means that \$ 2,750 less Pell funds are needed by students who transfer to a university having already earned an associate's degree.

It is estimated that, on average, students would save over \$10,000 of the cost of a Bachelor's of Arts by starting their college careers at a community college and transferring their credits seamlessly to a four-year school.

Establishing a General Education Common Core

The legislation didn't stop with policies related to student transfers, it also allowed for the development of a common general education core of 39 semester credit hours.

These courses would be the same regardless of the institution attended and would be guaranteed to transfer to all public institutions in Louisiana.

Capping Associate Degree Programs

As we streamlined the process for students, we realized that one of the transfer barriers was inconsistency with the number of hours needed to earn an associate's degree.

Over time, many of our programs had grown from the standard 60 semester credit hours to as many as 75.

This sort of credit hour creep had to be changed.

Therefore, in 2010 the Louisiana Legislature passed a bill that limited all but selective associate's degrees to 60 semester credit hours.

Reducing the number of credit hours results in a reduction in cost of approximately \$1,100 to the student and their family. The state of Louisiana additionally saves \$792 per student and most importantly, it reduces time to degree.

Accountability, Retention, and Graduation Rates

We also support legislation in Louisiana that holds colleges accountable for retention and graduation rates as part of the higher education funding formula, which ensures that students are getting more value for their dollar.

Common Course Numbering

Another important policy measure passed in the 2012 legislative session was a bill to require common course numbering at all 2-year and 4-year colleges.

This means that English 101 at any community college is the same English 101 at LSU or any other 4-year college in the state, ensuring that the course will transfer no matter when or where it was taken, which has not always been the case.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to mention that the Louisiana Community and Technical College provides something we call the **Day One Guarantee**.

Our colleges guarantee that a graduate of any of our certificate or associate degree programs will have the knowledge, skills, and abilities expected by employers on day one or we will retrain them for free.

This is about guaranteeing quality and market relevance to our graduates and our employers.

This guarantee is posted in every college and listed in every college catalog and we stand behind it.

Our goal is to ensure that both students and employers know that there is guaranteed value in every educational dollar they spend.

As both the President of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System, and the President of Rebuilding America's Middle Class, I have learned the importance of policy in impacting the ability of colleges to respond to business and industry, to meet the needs of students, and to rebuild America's middle class.

In Louisiana, we have been successful in growing enrollment while reducing costs, improving services, enhancing quality, and guaranteeing relevancy.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this important story today.

I welcome your questions.