

CONCLUSIONS

In this *2016 Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid Report*, findings for each of the three interrelated areas of affordability, state investment, and financial aid identify some areas of concern and suggest that incremental changes are needed. These concerns are especially important considering the *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education's* (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2016) aims that Nebraska be among the top ten states in educational attainment.

Affordability of Higher Education

Affording higher education has become more difficult for students and their families in Nebraska, a situation common throughout the country. Not only has there been a significant increase in the amount students pay in tuition and fees, but the total cost of attendance has increased considerably as well. Even with grants and scholarships available to assist with the cost of education, with the exception of two institutions, the net price of attendance has also increased. Therefore, families are contributing more of their incomes to the costs of educating one or more family members. Nevertheless, these increased costs are less dramatic at most Nebraska institutions than at their peers in other states.

- All of Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions charge less than the 2014-15 average tuition and mandatory fees for a resident, undergraduate student charged *by their peers*.
- Compared to 2014-15 resident tuition and fees, the percent of 2014-15 non-resident tuition and mandatory fees is considerably less than the peers' average at all but three of Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions (the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska Medical Center).
- All but three of Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions (Central Community College, Northeast Community College, Western Nebraska Community College) showed a decrease in the student payment shares from 2004-05 to 2014-15, and all but Southeast Community College were lower than their peers' average.

State Investment in Higher Education

While Nebraska has increased its appropriation to public postsecondary institutions, state investment in higher education will continue to be vulnerable to other state obligations in future years. Therefore, families will likely be contributing larger portions of their income to educate their students in Nebraska, and/or student debt loads will continue to increase.

Comparisons with Peers

- When comparing 2014-15 state appropriations at Nebraska's community colleges to those of their peers, Central Community College, Metropolitan Community College and Mid-Plains Community College have a lower appropriation per full-time equivalent student when compared to the average of their peers. The other three community colleges have a higher appropriation per full-time equivalent student when compared to the average of their peers.
- The amount of 2014-15 state appropriations per full-time equivalent student at all three state colleges and at all five University of Nebraska campuses is greater than the average of their peers.

Financial Aid for Higher Education

Financial aid for higher education has become increasingly important for students and families in Nebraska. While Nebraska has historically been supportive financially of the Nebraska Opportunity Grant, per-student state-provided support for needy students remains low when compared to the rest of the country. Without the state increasing its appropriation, it is highly unlikely that ranking will improve. Because of this fact, student loan borrowing will likely continue to increase in the near future.