

## INTRODUCTION

Nebraska statute 85-1416(2)(c) requires the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education to prepare biennially the *Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid Report*. College affordability is an important component of the Commission's *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education* (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2016), which includes a major statewide goal that states:

*Nebraska postsecondary institutions and policymakers will collaborate to ensure that lack of financial resources will not prevent students from accessing and completing postsecondary education in a timely manner without unreasonable student debt.*

This report studies the public policy issues relating to tuition, fees, and financial aid for students attending Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions. It examines significant, interrelated issues facing the state's students and its institutions of higher education, such as:

- The affordability of attending a public postsecondary institution;
- The state's level of investment in higher education; and
- Trends in financial aid, including Nebraska's state grant program.

The appendices of this report offer in-depth information about Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions in relation to their peer groups in:

- State appropriations per full-time equivalent student;
- Student payment share and affordability;
- Tuition, fees, and enrollment trends;
- Tuition and fee increases compared to inflation; and
- Financial aid.

### Data Caveats

Most data for this report were obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), a database of educational statistics collected and maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. All postsecondary institutions that participate in federal financial aid programs must complete a number of IPEDS surveys annually. Some financial aid data used in this report were obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid (FSA). Because the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture is treated as a component of the University of Nebraska Lincoln by FSA, its financial aid information was obtained from the Coordinating Commission's Supplemental Form.

Comparisons with peer institutions in the appendix allow each of Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions to assess key indicators in relation to data from similar institutions. As discussed in the Commission's *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education* (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2016), comparisons also provide a method of assessing an institution's progress toward

specific goals and outcomes. This information should also help promote attainment of the major statewide goals in the *Comprehensive Plan*.

New sets of peer institutions for the community colleges were selected in 2014 by the Coordinating Commission in consultation with the presidents of each respective Nebraska community college and were used for the first time in the 2014 report. New peers were selected for the state colleges in consultation with the Nebraska State College System office and the University of Nebraska campuses in consultation with the University of Nebraska Central Administration in 2014 and 2015. Those peers are being used for the first time in this year's appendix.