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*Promoting high quality, ready access, and efficient use of resources
in Nebraska higher education.*

LB 657 Testimony
Marshall A. Hill, Executive Director
Feb. 7, 2011

- The Commission as a whole has not recently discussed the issues presented in LB 657, nor has it provided any specific direction regarding my testimony. However, the Executive Committee of the Commission has asked that I provide some information and analysis excerpted from recent reports that we have prepared or that we have drawn from other recent studies.
- The Commission is concerned about LB 657 because the educational attainment of Nebraska's minorities (and those of every other state's) persistently remains below that of whites and Asians, leading to higher social support costs, missed economic opportunities, and potentially less rewarding lives.
- Our Commissioners struggle with the complex issues of illegal immigration, but on the issue of allowing the children of undocumented immigrants – students who graduate from our high schools and meet other conditions – to attend our public institutions at in-state tuition rates, the Commissioners have in the past come to the pragmatic realization that better-educated residents are better for the state than less-educated residents.
- They have also acknowledged that the students in question are likely from low-income families and, for that reason alone, are less likely to attend college in the first place. Finally, because those students are not citizens, they cannot receive federal or state financial aid. Unless they have a helpful patron, access to in-state tuition rates would provide the only favorable financial encouragement available to them.
- The Coordinating Commission is charged by the Legislature to do statewide higher education planning. The resulting policy document is the *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education*. We periodically report to the Education Committee on updates. I would like to bring to your attention some sections of the *Comprehensive Plan* that speak to the continuing need to increase the educational attainment of our minority students. The three excerpts that follow represent the considered opinion of the Commission, developed and reaffirmed over time, with full engagement of the institutions. Relevant excerpts are as follows:

Commissioners

Dr. Joyce D. Simmons, Chair
Valentine

Dr. Ron Hunter, Vice Chair
Hay Springs

Colleen A. Adam
Hastings

Clark Anderson
Ogallala

Riko Bishop
Lincoln

Dr. Dick C.E. Davis
Omaha

Mary Lauritzen
West Point

Eric Seacrest
North Platte

W. Scott Wilson
Papillion

John Winkleblack
Tilden

Carol Zink
Lincoln

1. “Nebraska’s population is becoming more diverse each year, with growing numbers of Hispanics, African-Americans, Native Americans, and Asians. The changing demographics of the state are reflected in the increasingly diverse student bodies of the campuses, yet issues and barriers to higher education—either real or perceived—still exist for many in these population groups. This is especially true for first-generation college students. Overcoming these barriers will benefit these students and their families as well as the state by increasing the numbers of Nebraska citizens who have the education and training needed to contribute to the state’s economic and social well-being.” (*Comp Plan*, “Meeting the Educational Needs of Students, Diversity,” page 2-4.)
 - Along those lines, recent estimations by Commission staff show that if the educational attainment of the state’s black and Hispanic populations were raised to that of the white population, and if salaries increased for those minorities at the same rate as is the case for the increased educational attainment of whites, those black and Hispanic workers would together earn an additional \$228.7 million per year and state income tax revenues from them would increase by \$15.5 million per year.
2. “Nebraska institutions and policymakers will seek methods to increase participation and success in higher education and to ensure that access to higher education institutions’ programs and services is not restricted by factors such as geographic location, economic status, age, culture, disability, color, national origin, or gender.” (*Comp Plan*, “Meeting the Educational Needs of Students, Major Statewide Goal: Participation and Access,” page 2-1.)
3. “Minority populations are a growing component of Nebraska’s population and workforce. Unfortunately, minority populations are underrepresented in postsecondary education participation, although their participation levels are improving. Encouraging more minorities to participate in higher education could help address the state’s need for more trained workers.

Enhance educational and workforce development opportunities for minority populations who have been underrepresented in the workforce.

- Develop and implement programs to prepare racial/ethnic minority students for entry into postsecondary education and the workforce.
- Encourage and support campus-based programs that support the recruitment and retention of minority students and create an open and supportive campus culture.

- Work with middle schools and high schools to encourage students of color, first-generation college students, and academically at-risk students to complete high school with courses that prepare them to succeed in college.
- Explore methods of bringing educational and work experience opportunities to minority populations in their own communities that encourage enrollment in postsecondary education.”

(*Comp Plan*, Meeting the Educational Needs of the State, Expanded Workforce Diversity,” page 3-4)

- Recent studies indicate that economic mobility (moving from the ranks of the poor to join the middle class, for example) has not changed much in 30 years. For most people, education continues to represent the best way to improve their economic situation. Indeed, a 2008 Brookings Institution study suggested that “someone born into a family in the lowest fifth of earners who graduates from college has a 19 percent chance of joining the highest fifth of earners in adulthood and a 62 percent chance of joining the middle class or better,”¹ compared to a 50 percent chance of middle class attainment for those without college degrees. The study’s authors also state that widening disparities of college attendance will lead to increasingly wide economic disparities. “In recent years, 11 percent of children from the poorest families have earned college degrees, compared with 53 percent of children from the top fifth.”²
- According to a 2009 report by the College Board, in-state tuition legislation like Nebraska’s has not added financial burdens to a state’s education system. “In fact, these measures tend to *increase* school revenues by bringing in tuition from students who otherwise would not be in college.”³ That report further stated:

“The scale of population growth among Hispanic, Asian and other immigrant populations compounds the economic importance of their educational attainment. Giving undocumented students the opportunity to pursue a higher education and move up the career ladder would boost the economic potential of these populations and the U.S. economy as well. Conversely, denying this opportunity to undocumented students would send precisely the wrong message at a time when raising the educational attainment of Hispanics, Asians and other immigrant groups is increasingly important to the nation’s economic health.”

As the Legislature struggles with these difficult, complex, and often emotional issues, the Commission encourages you to keep in mind the interests of all students and their potential contributions to our State and society.

¹ “Higher Education Gap May Slow Economic Mobility,” *New York Times*, February 20, 2008.

² *Id.*

³ The College Board, *Young Lives on Hold: The College Dreams of Undocumented Students*, April 2009.