

Virginia State Conference of the
American Association of
University Professors and the
Faculty Senate of Virginia

Access and persistence of students

ENSURING ACCESS, PROMOTING SUCCESS

Large increases in tuition at Virginia's universities and colleges over recent years have caused much concern about the commitment of the Commonwealth to equity and accessibility to higher education. Virginia's faculty members share these concerns. We call for full funding of the entire public higher education system and enhancement of accessibility and affordability.

SCHEV's 2005 report on Tuition and Fees notes that the rate of increase in the costs of college attendance in Virginia has been declining, from 15% in 2003 to 8.2% in 2005. This slowing of the rate of increase has been made possible by increased support to higher education from the general fund. However, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education's "Measuring Up 2004 State Report Card" awarded Virginia a D- in affordability. Over the last few years the burden of paying for college has shifted towards Virginia's students. In-state undergraduate students now cover 34% of the cost of higher education, compared to 23% just four years ago. The Commonwealth's policy goal for subsidizing these costs has been reduced from 80% to just 67%, a goal it was projected to miss (barely) this academic year. "Measuring Up" also notes that "Virginia has seen a decline in the proportion of students who enroll in higher education over the past decade," and that the gap between young adult enrollment from high-income families and low-income families has increased.

The "Measuring Up" Report states that Virginia's "investment in need-based financial aid (at 35% as compared to the federal investment) is very low when compared with top-performing states (89% of the federal investment)." We note that legislation is proposed this year (HB 50) to repeal the Virginia Work Study program, as it has not been funded at all in recent years. We call on the legislature to find new ways to increase Virginia's need-based financial aid, as this is a critical matter of equity for future students.

Recommendations

- **Student Financial Aid.** Full funding of the Partnership Model would require \$103.6 million in the biennium. The Governor's budget proposes \$21.7 million, covering just 21% of the amount recommended by SCHEV to phase in full funding of this model.
- **Graduate Financial Aid.** Return funding support per student to 1994-95 levels. The Governor proposes \$10 million as part of the Research Initiative, which is a big improvement over the last biennium, but covers just 42% of the amount recommended by SCHEV. The AAUP believes funding in this area is moving in the right direction.
- **Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) Program.** Increase the maximum award to \$3,000 for FY07 and to \$3,500 by FY08. The program needs \$32.4 million in general fund support over the biennium. The Governor's budget proposes to \$13.3 million to support maximum awards at \$2,750 in FY07 and \$3,000 in FY08.