Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to inform you that a news release will go out tomorrow announcing that all of the regional accrediting commissions will be conducting a special review of institutions to address low graduation rates and high student loan default rates or low loan repayment rates. This announcement is a part of the reason I asked you for permission to use the data you supply to the National Student Clearinghouse.

The review will encourage institutions to place additional focus on crucial measures and ensure that we fully understand exactly what is happening at institutions that have subpar performance in the areas of low completion rates and high student loan default rates. By taking a common approach, we are signaling the need for institutions to accelerate progress and demonstrate that they are doing all they can to help students complete college and pay their loans.

SACSCOC and other regional accrediting commissions will review available data and pay special attention to four-year institutions that have graduation rates at or below 25 percent and two-year institutions that have rates at or below 15 percent (reflecting half the national average for each type of institution). We also will look at other factors and additional information, such as the number and percentage of students counted and transfer rates, to provide valuable and thorough context to the Federal data.

We will request additional information from institutions with low graduation rates and student loan problems, including information about the conditions that may have led to the low graduation rates and low default rates and/or high default rates and what an institution is doing to improve its performance in each of these areas. The review - and any ensuing action - will be conducted using the Commission’s normal accreditation process.

We recognize that a high proportion of the colleges to be reviewed are community colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving institutions, and that these open-access institutions serve higher proportions of economically disadvantaged and academically underprepared students than do most other institutions. For that reason, the review will take into consideration the institution’s mission and the context within which it operates. In addition, we will offer whatever assistance possible to help improve the performance of institutions that are struggling.

Regional accreditors also have joined forces to encourage the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that we have more accurate data. We have noted that in some cases, the graduation data reported by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDs) Data Center on its main webpage, and IPEDS data used by the College Navigator and separately for the College Scorecard can report three different rates for the same institution, which can vary by as much as 25 percent, resulting in confusion for institutions and students alike.

I hope that you will support us in this effort and that you will feel free to ask any questions you may have.
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