

Public Higher Education Network Of Massachusetts

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Advancing Public Higher Education: PHENOM's Principles

Massachusetts deserves the finest, most affordable, and most accessible public higher education system in the country. We pledge to work to achieve all of these goals, not to the exclusion of any of them, and call on the Commonwealth to:

1. Fund public higher education so it can serve the Commonwealth

First to be cut, last to be restored, our state colleges and universities are chronically under-funded by the state. In good times we gain back only a portion of what was lost during budget crises. In the best of times, the system has not been funded at a level for us to achieve our common goal: creating one of the top systems of public higher education. The Commonwealth must provide a substantial increase in year-to-year operating budgets, funds to address long deferred maintenance of buildings, and a means to ensure stable state funding for public higher education.

2. Make higher education affordable

Students have been asked to pay dramatically more to make up for the deficiencies in state funding. As a result, the poor, the working class, and increasingly the middle class are being squeezed out of higher education, at exactly the same time that college is becoming increasingly necessary for the well-being of our residents and for the economic future of the state. All residents of the Commonwealth should be able to afford public higher education, and all costs associated with higher education - from tuition and fees to housing charges to textbook costs – should be made affordable for all. In the long run higher education should be free – just as high school is.

3. Make higher education accessible to all

All our institutions of public higher education should serve the full range of students in the Commonwealth; for example, neither race, class, disability nor age should serve as a barrier to attending and completing college. Today high school students of color and working-class students are less likely to attend and graduate from college than their white middle class peers. There should be a place for every motivated learner, with a high school diploma or equivalency, in a public college or university. The Commonwealth should actively provide clear pathways, appropriate supports, and greater resources to

ensure that underrepresented youth and adult learners have access to, succeed in, and graduate from our public institutions of higher education.

4. Hire more teachers, researchers, and staff

Over the past decade the number of full-time faculty and essential support staff at virtually every single one of our state colleges and universities has been in decline, despite a constant number of students. The steady decrease in the number of full-time faculty and staff is undermining the teaching, research, and economic development mission of our public higher education system. An outstanding system of higher education is founded on teachers and researchers who are given the compensation and resources to do their best work. Our system of higher education has become dependent on a contingent workforce that is poorly compensated and too often lacks basic supports such as health insurance. Our public colleges and universities must hire sufficient numbers of full-time research and teaching faculty, for whom salaries and benefits should be competitive nationally, and improve the conditions under which part time and non-tenure-track faculty work, resulting in better service for our students, our communities and our economy. As we rebuild the faculty we must also hire the staff needed to support both students and faculty.

5. Honor and expand democratic institutions of governance for public higher education

Unions and governments increase the democratic capital of a community. The state should respect collective bargaining by making timely salary offers and honoring union contracts negotiated in good faith and agreed to by the parties. Colleges and universities should respect the autonomy of campus governance bodies, particularly student governments and student organizations, and increase democracy on campus and throughout public higher education. Changes to institutional structures should support and increase the influence of the stakeholders of public higher education, and persons appointed to higher education governance bodies should champion public higher education.

