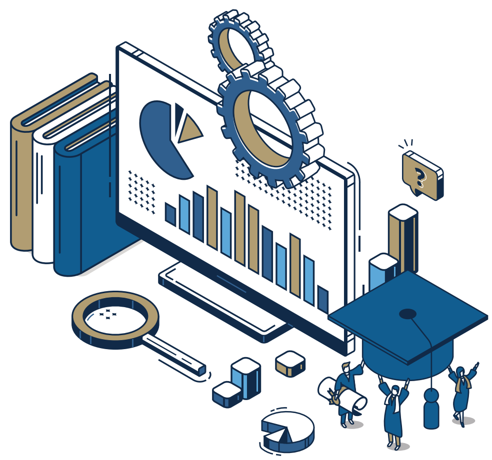
Higher Education Accreditation Oversight

States rely on accreditation when deciding how to allocate college funding. But accreditation isn't actually linked to program quality. There's no connection between whether an undergraduate institution is accredited and its graduation rates, student loan default rates, or graduates' earnings.[1]

Rather than taking action against poorly performing schools, accreditors prioritize interference with legitimate institutional governance or undermining state laws.

One accreditor put the University of Virginia on warning status after the school's president was fired.[2] Another accreditor focuses its policies on DEI rather than academics, while others have engaged in legal battles or offered trainings at odds with state laws prohibiting racial and gender discrimination.[3] These bad-faith actions are not the exception but the norm.[4]



THE SOLUTION

The U.S. Department of Education already sets basic standards for accreditors, which serve as the gatekeepers of federal funding.[5] States can build upon these standards through biennial accreditor evaluations that specifically consider:

- **Alumni earnings**
- **Compliance with state law**
- **Respect for institutional governance**
- **Credit transferability**

These biennial evaluations will motivate accreditors to improve their standards and ensure their continued approval.

To end monopolistic accreditor schemes, states should require their education authority to **identify and approve at least three separate accreditors** for institutions of higher education. This will give universities more flexibility to prioritize student outcomes over intrusive procedural restrictions.

WHY IT MATTERS

During the 50 years following 1970, the average inflation-adjusted undergraduate **tuition at four-year universities more than doubled**.[6]

Today, **47% of borrowers** with a bachelor's degree report at least **$25,000 in education debt**, and the **average cumulative debt** load for graduate degree holders **exceeds $102,000**.[7,8]

What's more, **nearly one-third of college graduates** report that the **benefits of their degrees do not exceed the costs**.[9]

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Strengthened oversight of approved accreditors will encourage schools to improve their program outcomes or face increased pressure from accreditors that influence their funding. When states enact meaningful oversight of college accreditors, taxpayers and students win.

SOURCES:

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