The Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) is the organizational voice for over 80 independent, nonprofit higher education institutions in California. As recognized in the Master Plan for Higher Education, the Independent California College and University (ICCU) sector plays an important role by providing higher education choice and access to California’s diverse students. The ICCU sector educates over 180,000 undergraduate students and 148,000 graduate students, helping the state meet its demand for a highly educated, highly skilled workforce.

AICCU advocates for policies that increase college access and strengthen student success; leverage the innovation and efficiencies of independent institutions to maximize education opportunities for Californians; utilize the capacity of the sector to meet the workforce needs of the state in a myriad of sectors; and ensure the ICCU sector has a “seat at the table” during discussions about the future of higher education.

For the 2023-24 Policy and Advocacy Priorities Plan, AICCU and member institutions will focus on the following policy priorities:

**Student Financial Aid**
Over the last two years, AICCU has advocated for financial aid investments at both the state and federal level. At the federal level, AICCU engaged in a nationwide campaign with students and national higher education groups to double the Pell Grant, from the previous maximum level of $6,495 to $13,000. While the campaign continues into the new Congress, we were successful in increasing the award to $6,895 and garnered commitments from both Congressional leaders and the White House to double the Pell over five years.

At the state level, AICCU secured $10.9 million in the last two state budgets to increase Cal Grant award, from $9,084 in 2020 to $9,358. These increases build on the $235 million in total Cal Grant funds that are distributed to eligible students at AICCU institutions. AICCU continued to engage the Newsom Administration and Legislature on the sector’s work to improve transfer pathways and support transfer students, and successfully prevented statutory trigger cuts to the Cal Grant award that would have resulted in an $1,164 reduction in the award amount for newly recipients, or just over $13.1 million in total.

AICCU also secured an agreement to use more nuanced target-setting methodology for the sector’s transfer numbers. Lastly, AICCU successfully advocated for the expansion of supplemental financial aid awards for foster youth, student parents, and transfer students to include those who attend an ICCU, totaling $10 million in additional financial aid for approximately 1,600 recipients and $10.4 million in next year’s budget for the transfer entitlement change (if budgetary conditions are favorable).
In 2023, AICCU will advocate for:

- Elimination of the trigger cut language in the Cal Grant statute and the establishment of a growth mechanism for the award to increase through a policy-based formula. AICCU will continue to negotiate for these policies with the Newsom Administration, while also engaging key members of legislative leadership, budget, and higher education policy.
- $10.4 million in funding to implement the expanded portability of the California Community College Expanded Entitlement Award for students who transfer to an ICCU. Based on AICCU estimates, this funding would expand Cal Grant eligibility to approximately 1,200 additional students at member institutions.
- The implementation of the Cal Grant Reform Act, which would provide a net increase of approximately 4,300 additional Cal Grant recipients at ICCUs. This expanded Cal Grant population would draw approximately $40.2 million in additional Cal Grant funds to students attending member institutions annually.
- Additional investments to realize a doubling of the Pell Grant award, working in collaboration with our federal and segmental partners, coordinating with campus leaders and students at member institutions, and direct engagement at the federal level.

Additionally, over the last two years, there were several instances of out-of-state institutions attempting to access state aid programs for their students. AICCU advocated for policymakers to instead focus limited state dollars on California students and California-based institutions of higher education. Looking ahead, AICCU will continue to advocate for state policies that invest first and foremost in California students and IHEs.

Distance Education and Reciprocity Agreements
As California remains the only state that is not part of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), the process for California institutions to sign individual agreements with other states is inefficient and costly, diverting valuable resources from students. In 2021, AICCU advocated for the California Law Revision Commission to undertake a study and develop policy recommendations addressing the burdens of distance education compliance and ways to ease the process for the state’s colleges and universities; however, those efforts were halted by key legislative staff, indicating that significant resistance remains.

With NC-SARA facing criticism from the attorney’s general in approximately 24 states, it is unclear what the future holds for NC-SARA as currently constituted. To continue efforts to educate key policymakers about the burdens of the status quo, AICCU will organize a series of meetings in Sacramento between those policymakers and university leaders to highlight the specific challenges institutions in California continue to face.

Promoting Transfer
In 2021-22 AICCU implemented a planning grant from the Teagle Foundation to explore partnerships to strengthen transfer between community colleges and four-year independent colleges and universities. This work helped identify the need to both increase visibility of transfer pathways from community colleges to independent institutions and to ensure other critical information on admissions and financial aid is available in a centralized place for students and counselors. Also, AICCU secured $1.5 million in the state budget, including approximately $600,000 in ongoing funds, to integrate AICCU undergraduate-serving institutions into the ASSIST platform. This will provide critical information to transfer students and counselors about how their coursework will transfer.
In 2023, AICCU will work to support strong transfer to the sector by:

- Working with partners at the University of California and member institutions to ensure full implementation of the sector’s integration into the ASSIST platform.
- Seeking additional grant funds from the Teagle Foundation to implement strategies identified during the planning grant.
- Supporting the sector representative on the Associate Degree for Transfer Intersegmental Implementation Committee, created by AB 928 (Berman, 2021).
- Seeking opportunities to strengthen the ICCU sector’s participation in the ADT program through new pathways to independent institutions.

Other important legislative topics

The above priorities are not meant to be viewed as comprehensive of the totality of legislation and policy issues that AICCU is involved in each legislative session. Each year, AICCU is involved in a myriad of legislation, both state and federal, that impacts independent colleges and universities in all aspects.

- AICCU will continue to be the leader on important policy topics such as: student athletics, employment, healthcare and mental health workforce, adult learners, and Title IX.
- AICCU will continue to represent the sector on the Cradle-to-Career data system and will advocate for liability protection for potential data breaches.
- AICCU will continue to be the organizational voice for independent higher education on legislation that impact member institutions’ operations and the students they serve.
- AICCU will work with the state, public higher education counterparts, and coalition partners in the business and social equity communities on workforce education.
- AICCU will support the work of the Education Deans Council and their policy efforts to strengthen the teacher workforce pipeline and address the teacher shortage, increase teacher diversity, and support equity in financial aid access.
- AICCU will advocate at the federal level on legislation and regulations on topics such as federal financial aid, increased funding levels and equitable access to research grants, funding mechanisms that are fair and equitable to all segments of higher education, Title IX regulations, support for undocumented and DACA students, and more.

Statement of Legislative Principles

As independent, nonprofit entities that serve the public good, AICCU member institutions value their autonomy, that allows for diverse educational offerings, innovative approaches, and healthy competition. Along with independence being at the core of our members’ ability to best serve California students and fulfill their unique missions, it is also one reason that California remains a leader in diverse higher education offerings.

The following constitute the core principles guiding AICCU positions on legislation:
1. Work with the Legislature and governor to allow AICCU member institutions to operate independently, particularly in matters of academic affairs and matters related to the internal governance of each university.

2. Seek to influence the outcome of issues that align with, or impede, key policy and legislative priorities for membership, and remain neutral on issues that do not substantively advance AICCU legislative efforts.

3. Seek to preserve the integrity of AICCU member institutions’ independent status, including maintaining the exemption from oversight by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education.

4. Seek to secure representation of AICCU on appropriate boards, commissions, task forces, study groups, etc., whose work may have a significant impact on AICCU member institutions. Representatives to such bodies shall be appointed by the association in consultation with membership through the Government Relations Council (GRC) and subject matter groups.

5. Seek input from the AICCU Executive Committee on legislative proposals/bills that fall out of the scope of the approved AICCU Policy and Advocacy Priorities.