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 199,000 undergraduate students and 180,000 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. Given the tremendous disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing ramifications for colleges and universities, AICCU strives to promote and support policies that provide relief to institutions and aids their recovery.

For the 2021-22 Policy and Advocacy Priorities Plan, AICCU and member institutions will focus on these policy priorities:

Student Financial Aid
During the 2019-20 legislative session, AICCU was part of a stakeholder group, convened by the California Student Aid Commission, that was charged with developing recommendations for how to improve the Cal Grant program. AICCU has continued to advocate for equitable investments in student financial aid. In 2021, AICCU was able to secure a $5.4 million investment in the final budget agreement to provide a modest increase in the maximum Cal Grant award amount. AICCU also worked with other higher education segments to advocate for the removal of the Selective Service verification requirement for participation in state aid programs.

On the federal level, AICCU advocated for the doubling of the maximum Pell Grant award, joining with member institutions, the University of California, NAICU, and ACE for coalition advocacy, as well as individually engaging with members of Congress. The work to double the Pell Grant will continue in 2022, the 50th anniversary of the program.

Looking ahead to 2022, AICCU will advocate for:
- A broader, more nuanced measurement of the sector’s commitment to transfer pathways.
- A strong, stable award amount for students in the ICCU, set by a policy-based formula.
- Equitable access to financial aid programs, including the transfer entitlement, and supplemental awards for current and former foster youth and for students with dependent children.
- Doubling the Pell Grant award, through coalition efforts with our federal partners, coordinating with campus leaders and students at member institutions, and direct advocacy to federal lawmakers.

**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. Over the last year, AICCU worked with the Intersegmental Coordinating Committee to formalize an intersegmental working group tasked with developing recommendations for how to move forward in a coordinated manner towards resolution of California’s non-participation in NC-SARA. AICCU also secured a significantly discounted rate for member institutions to participate in the State Authorization Network (SAN), which provides up-to-date, centralized resources to manage compliance with other state regulations.

While SARA remains the preferred solution to this issue, AICCU will continue to explore innovative policy and legislative solutions that move California law towards SARA, working with our partners at the public colleges and universities. AICCU will also continue to engage external stakeholder groups who potentially stand in the way of California entering SARA.

**Cradle-to-Career Data System**

AICCU is a member of the state’s Cradle-to-Career Data System Governing Board. Over the past two years, AICCU has engaged in this work with the goals of ensuring the system provides important information for policymakers, institutions, and students and the families, and also protects student privacy, but adds minimal burdens on colleges and universities. This work has been greatly assisted by the formation of a working group consisting of institutional staff. AICCU will continue to pursue these goals, while also advocating for a system that functionally works well for the ICCU sector.

**Promoting Regional Partnerships**

While AICCU continues work to improve ADT promotion and data collection, the value of regional partnerships remains as important as ever, particularly as student decision-making patterns in the wake of COVID-19 potentially change. AICCU recently secured a planning grant from The Teagle Foundation to build and improve transfer opportunities to liberal arts colleges and universities, and that work is now underway in the Inland Empire and Los Angeles regions.

AICCU will continue to engage with the public segments and other stakeholders to identify opportunities for new collaboration among willing partners to promote new pathways and partnerships for member institutions, while also addressing policy barriers that discourage or incumber student transfer to ICCUs.

**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, teacher education, healthcare workforce, faculty diversity, Title IX, and transfer students.
- AICCU will continue to be the organizational voice for independent higher education on legislation that impact member institutions’ day-to-day 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 advocate at the federal level on legislation and regulations on topics such as federal financial aid, burdensome oversight, funding mechanisms that are fair and equitable to all segments of higher education, Title IX reform, support for DACA students, and more.
As private, 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).

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