



Southern Regional Education Board
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SREB.org

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SREB Commission on College Affordability in the South

Commission Members

Chair: **Glen D. Johnson**, Chancellor, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

Wayne Andrews, President, Morehead State University, Kentucky

Alan Baker, State Representative, Alabama

Melanie Barton, Executive Director, Education Oversight Committee, South Carolina

Hugh Blackwell, State Representative, North Carolina

Peter Blake, Director, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia

Glenn Boyce, Commissioner of Higher Education, Institutions of Higher Learning, Mississippi

Harry Ray Brooks, State Representative, Tennessee

Julie Carullo, Director, Governmental Affairs and Special Projects, South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

Norman Conway, Former State Delegate, Maryland

Walter Dalton, President, Isothermal Community College, North Carolina

Krissy DeAlejandro, Executive Director, tnAchieves, Tennessee

Russ Deaton, Deputy Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Lee Denney, State Representative, Oklahoma

Joyce Elliott, State Senator, Arkansas

Terry England, State Representative, Georgia

Erik Fresen, State Representative, Florida

Herb Frierson, Former State Representative, Mississippi

James Halligan, State Senator, Oklahoma

Randy Hanna, Former Chancellor, Florida College System, Florida

Jack Hill, State Senator, Georgia

Paul Hill, Chancellor, Higher Education Policy Commission, West Virginia

Sheila Ellis Hixson, State Delegate, Maryland

Hank Huckaby, Chancellor, University System of Georgia

Mac Huddleston, State Representative, Mississippi

Jennie Hunter-Cevera, Former Acting Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission

Robert King, President, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education

Joe Pickens, President, St. Johns River State College, Florida

Bob Plymale, State Senator, West Virginia

John Polk, State Senator, Mississippi

Brett Powell, Former Director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education

Joseph Rallo, Commissioner of Higher Education, Louisiana Board of Regents

Richard Rhoda, Executive Director Emeritus, Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Johnnie Roebuck, Former State Legislator and Retired Educator, Arkansas

Tim Shaughnessy, Former Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Gateway Community and Technical College, Kentucky

Arnold Simpson, State Representative, Kentucky

David Sokola, State Senator, Delaware

Francis Thompson, State Senator, Louisiana

Mark White, State Representative, Tennessee

Yvonne Wood, Finance Chair, Women's Economic Council Foundation, Tennessee

Sandra Woodley, Former President, University of Louisiana System

Executive Summary

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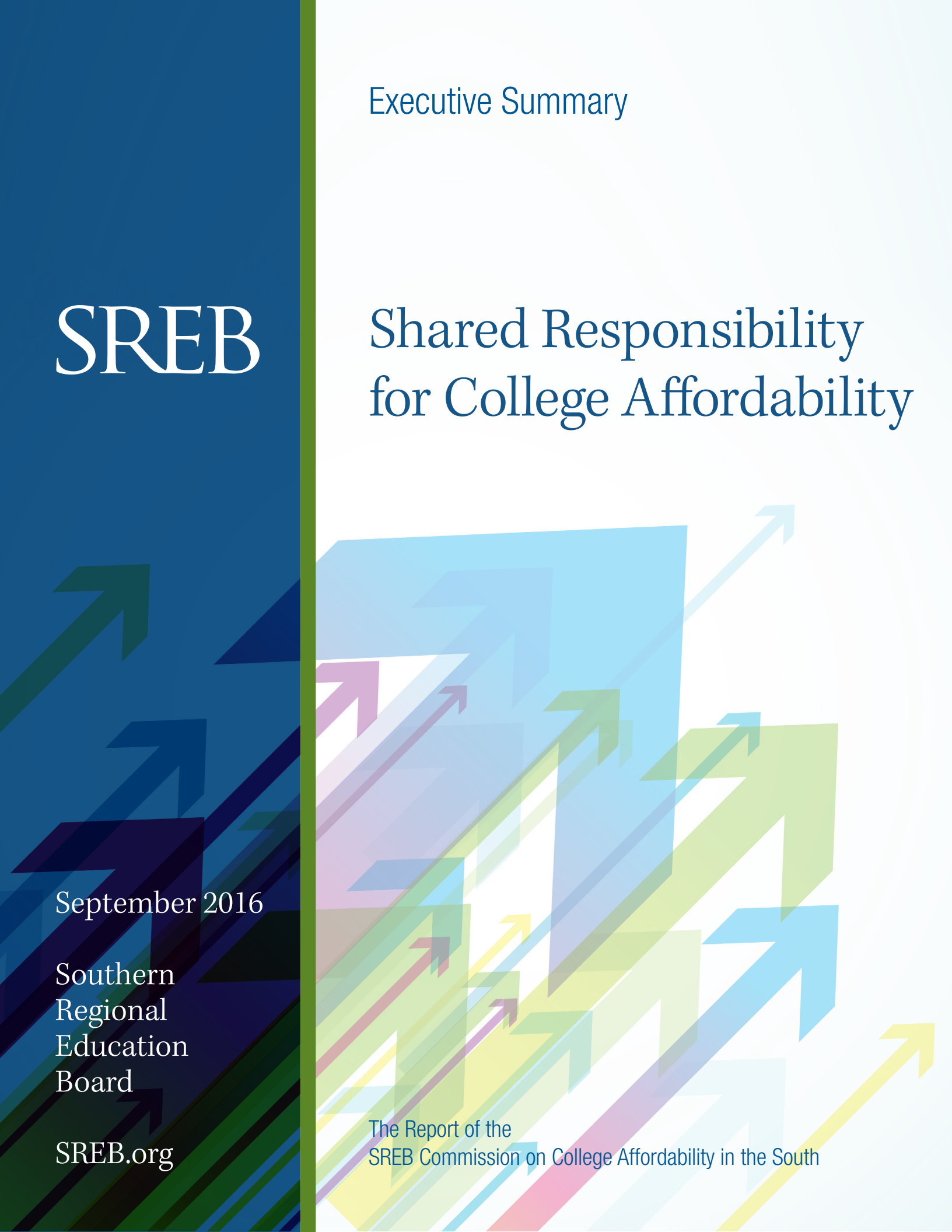
Shared Responsibility for College Affordability

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The Report of the
SREB Commission on College Affordability in the South



Shared Responsibility for College Affordability

The economic and social future of SREB states depends in large part on substantially increasing the number of residents with postsecondary degrees and certificates of value. As the SREB region's population diversifies, with unprecedented growth, states face a critical challenge to help more people succeed in postsecondary education and earn a living wage.

States are confronting this growing affordability issue at a time when their revenue streams are constrained and likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Increasing college completion and educational attainment levels will require major changes in the cultures of all sectors of American higher education. Most important, the SREB region's population is much more diverse in its racial and ethnic makeup, and lower-income families comprise a larger share of the population. Individuals from both of these groups have traditionally entered and completed college at lower rates. States face a critical challenge to help them succeed in postsecondary education, achieve a higher standard of living, and contribute to more prosperous communities.

In the absence of explicit policy, affordability erodes.

To assist states in this effort, SREB created the Commission on College Affordability in the South. The Commission's purpose was to recommend policies and practices to improve college affordability for students by better coordinating state financing policies. Commission members reviewed research and discussed topics such as student debt, part-time students, affordability policy reviews, federal policies, state goals and promising state practices. Individual state affordability profiles and examples of promising policies and practices provided state-specific context for the discussions. (These documents are available at SREB.org/Affordability.) Analyses showed that SREB states have lost substantial ground in college affordability, which has led to increased student borrowing and debt.

Declining affordability could continue to constrain college enrollment and prevent states from reaching educational attainment levels and the competitive workforce required by the global knowledge-based economy. To close educational attainment gaps among groups, states need significant increases in college enrollment among low-income populations, students likely to be the first in their families to attend college, and adults who did not complete as traditional-age students.

Protecting affordability for all students is an SREB priority.

Achieving affordability in higher education means making it a primary postsecondary education goal and adjusting financing policies and procedures. Decisions about institutional appropriations, tuition and fees, and student aid need to produce levels of college affordability that will help the states reach their educational attainment goals. States must have policy coherence and consistency to assure that college is not outside the financial reach of those who are motivated to attend. In particular, states must take steps to assure that tuition, student financial aid, appropriations to institutions, and accountability policies are aligned so that affordability for all students is protected as a critical state priority.

The Commission's findings and recommendations are grounded in a model of shared responsibility, an approach that recognizes that multiple players have to be held accountable for affordable higher education — notably states, students and families, colleges and universities, and the federal government. The Commission recommends the following policies and practices to support states as they take on the challenge of making college affordable, particularly for students from low- and middle-income families.

The Southern Regional Education Board convened the Commission on College Affordability in the South to recommend ways to improve college affordability by better coordinating state financing policies, particularly those for tuition, state appropriations to institutions, and state financial aid to students.

For more information, contact Cheryl.Blanco@SREB.org or visit SREB.org/Affordability.

Recommendations of the Commission on College Affordability in the South

These recommendations call for states to elevate affordability as a primary postsecondary goal and ensure that decisions about institutional appropriations, tuition and fees, and student aid result in college affordability as needed by the state.

- 1. States should develop clear policies and methodologies for setting and adjusting tuition levels.** These policies should explicitly consider factors such as median family income; availability of financial assistance to students whose college enrollment, persistence and completion would be jeopardized by increased costs; and the impact of tuition on student debt. Tuition increases within the framework of state policies should be moderate, gradual and predictable.
- 2. Shared responsibility policies should clearly articulate expectations for student and family financial contributions that reflect the economic circumstances of different student populations.** Family contributions can come from savings, parent and student earnings, and debt. Expectations for student progress toward degree and certificate completion should also be clearly articulated.
- 3. States should establish expectations and accountability for improving institutional cost-effectiveness and productivity.** Colleges and universities also share in the responsibility for affordability. Both academic and administrative improvements should be designed to constrain costs per-student and per-graduate while improving educational quality. Colleges and universities should have broad latitude to develop approaches that match their circumstances and mission, but they should be accountable for measurable outcomes.
- 4. States and institutions should consider strategic, one-time investments in innovations that hold promise to improve educational productivity.** These innovations should be designed to increase the number of students who complete postsecondary certificate and degree programs without increases in cost per student.
- 5. States should develop programs that support working adults, including those who attend part-time, and encourage both enrollment and completion.** Programs to serve adult students should seek funding from multiple sources, including programs that provide financial support to students, such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and workforce and social service agencies. States should leverage resources in other state programs to support costs other than tuition, including living expenses, child care and transportation.
- 6. During times of financial distress and budgetary shortfalls, protecting college access and completion for low-income and middle-income students, including capacity at the institutions that serve these students, should be the states' highest priority.** Need-based student financial aid should be the highest priority for new state higher education resources, toward programs designed to serve low- and middle-income students.
- 7. States should begin by conducting a college affordability policy review to assess their current capacity to address and improve affordability.** The Commission's full report includes questions for states to consider in assessing their current capacity and effectiveness in addressing these issues and recommendations.
- 8. The Southern Regional Education Board should maintain college affordability and implementation of these recommendations among its highest priorities.** SREB should offer assistance in conducting college affordability policy reviews, provide technical assistance in designing policies and programs to address affordability, and monitor and report on these recommendations state-by-state and for the SREB region as a whole.

Addressing affordability will require strategic investments of limited state resources, rigorous attention to state goals and priorities, and leveraging resources already in higher education for greater efficiency and productivity. State affordability policies based on the principle of shared responsibility — among states, students and families, colleges and universities, and the federal government — hold the greatest promise to significantly increase college enrollment and completion. No single approach to college affordability will meet the needs of states whose demographics, economies and education infrastructures vary widely. But it is critical for each and every state to have a clear policy framework in place.