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Major Higher Education Associations Pledge New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability at CHEA Annual Conference

National Associations Commit in Newly Released Statement to Principles and Actions to Improve Quality of Student Learning and Accountability of Higher Education

Washington, DC — At the annual conference of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), Judith Eaton, president of CHEA, Carol Schneider, president of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and leaders of seven associations representing more than 3,000 colleges and universities pledged their leadership to continue advancing meaningful approaches to assessing essential student learning outcomes with the release of *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability*, a statement that describes six principles and eight action steps to guide institutional accountability and assessment efforts in the coming years.

The statement stresses that “the primary responsibility for achieving excellence falls on colleges and universities themselves,” and “quality standards must be set and met by institutions themselves and not by external agencies.” The statement also recommends, however, that all colleges and universities “develop clear descriptions of educational goals and assessments anchored in the curriculum that faculty teach.”

Moreover, the statement expresses the commitment of CHEA and AAC&U leaders to work with foundations, campus partners and faculty to “substantially expand the array of educationally valid and useful means—qualitative as well as quantitative—of assessing the full range of learning outcomes” essential in today’s world.

“Our higher education system is our secret weapon in America’s competition in the world marketplace,” said Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander in May of 2007. “I believe excellence in American higher education comes from institutional autonomy, markets,

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competition, choice for students, federalism and limited federal regulation . . . But, if colleges and universities do not accept responsibility for assessment and accountability, the federal government will do it for them.” Senator Alexander addressed attendees of the CHEA annual conference this morning.

New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability: A Statement of Principles, Commitments to Action sketches out a set of principles and action steps through which colleges and universities can, indeed, take responsibility and exercise leadership for assessment and accountability.

“We in the higher education community must continually seek, and find, better ways to reach our common goal of helping all the students we serve realize their full potential. We need to make clear, for ourselves and our various constituencies, what our aims are, how we seek to achieve them and how well we do so.” These are a few of the commitments made in the statement released today by CHEA and AAC&U.

“Little is more important to the higher education community than sustaining and enhancing the leadership role of our colleges and universities in defining and judging academic quality,” said CHEA President Judith Eaton. “This statement provides a platform from which our institutions can strengthen this leadership role while, at the same time, addressing the important public accountability and transparency expectations that are now part of the social context in which we operate. The statement demonstrates a powerful commitment on the part of the higher education community to use its traditional leadership role in the service of effective consideration of institutional performance and student achievement.”

“Intellectual freedom and institutional diversity are hallmarks of American higher education. But the corollary of freedom is responsibility,” said AAC&U President Carol Geary Schneider. “As educational leaders, it is our responsibility to define our core educational purposes and act on them. There is no getting around it—some learning outcomes really are essential for success in today’s world. And we are committed to taking the lead in defining these outcomes and ensuring that every student achieves them.”

Other leaders taking part in the release event included:

- David Ward, president of the American Council on Education
- Peter McPherson, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges
- George Boggs, president of the American Association of Community Colleges
- Richard Ekman, president of the Council of Independent Colleges
- Ed Elmendorf, senior vice president for government relations and policy analysis, American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- John Vaughn, executive vice president, Association of American Universities

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- David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability was developed jointly by AAC&U and CHEA with support from the Teagle Foundation and in dialogue with many colleagues, including leaders in the nation's major higher education and accrediting associations. Print and online copies of the statement are available for use in higher education meetings. AAC&U and CHEA are encouraging a wide dissemination of the statement and vigorous debate about the issues the statement raises.

The full text of *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability* can be read at www.aacu.org or www.chea.org.

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) is an institutional membership organization that coordinates institutional and programmatic accreditation in the United States. CHEA is a national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation. CHEA represents the interests of its members to the federal government on matters of accreditation and academic quality, reviews and affirms ("recognizes") the quality of accrediting organizations and provides a range of membership and other services. Founded in 1996, approximately 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities are now members of CHEA. For additional information, please contact CHEA at chea@chea.org or visit the CHEA Website at www.chea.org.

AAC&U is the leading national association concerned with the quality, vitality, and public standing of undergraduate liberal education. Its members are committed to extending the advantages of a liberal education to all students, regardless of academic specialization or intended career. Founded in 1915, AAC&U now comprises more than 1,100 accredited public and private colleges and universities of every type and size.

AAC&U functions as a catalyst and facilitator, forging links among presidents, administrators, and faculty members who are engaged in institutional and curricular planning. Its mission is to reinforce the collective commitment to liberal education at both the national and local levels and to help individual institutions keep the quality of student learning at the core of their work as they evolve to meet new economic and social challenges.

Information about AAC&U membership, programs, and publications can be found at www.aacu.org.