

**Opening Statement of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA)
Chairman, House Education and Labor Committee
Hearing on “*The Department of Education Inspector General's Review of
Standards for Program Length in Higher Education*”
Thursday, June 17, 2010**

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Good morning.

The Education and Labor Committee meets this morning to examine reports from the Department of Education Inspector General looking at higher education accrediting agencies.

The Inspector General's reviews focus on institutions' policies on credit hours and program length.

As the cost of higher education and, subsequently, the Federal investment in student aid rise, and more students go into debt to finance their educations, it is critical that we ask what students and the taxpayers -as Federal investors- are paying for.

The IG's report found that some accrediting agencies do not have any established definitions of a credit hour, which could result in inflated credit hours and misappropriated student aid.

This is alarming and could result in serious implications both for students and the future of this country.

Now more than ever, the strength of our economy rests on our ability to produce a highly educated workforce.

A study this week by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University projected that in 2018, there will be more than three million jobs that require at least an associate's degree and not enough people available who are qualified to fill them.

The system we have today provides aid to students based on the number of credit hours they take at an accredited institution. Each institution sets those credit hours, and we rely on independent accreditors to see to it that institutions do so properly.

However, the recent IG reports highlight a lack of clear standards and policies on this issue, as well as a questionable decision by one agency to accredit an institution which peer reviewers observed had “egregious” credit hour policies.

I am particularly concerned about institutions inflating credit hours in order to garner more student aid than is justified.

This is increased revenue to the institution, but raises the cost of higher education for their students, and for the taxpayer.

Students could be paying more money than they should be without getting the product they had hoped for - a coursework or degree that is worth something in the workforce.

This Committee and this Congress have worked diligently and in a bipartisan way to help ensure students have access to the resources they need to obtain a college degree.

We've helped bring down the cost of college for families by increasing the Pell Grant. We've lowered the interest rates on need based student loans and made it easier for the students and the families to manage their debt.

We've created income based repayment programs that ensures a borrower will only have to pay back fifteen percent of their discretionary income and after 25 years, the debt will be completely forgiven.

This is why we have a responsibility to ensure the students who are eligible to receive federal student aid are receiving it and that the institutions which serve these students are upholding the integrity of the programs.

Accrediting agencies, in their role of overseeing educational quality, are important gatekeepers to student financial aid.

Just like our federal student aid programs, they

have to work in the best interest of students.

The significant investments in Federal student aid this Committee has made in recent years makes it all the more critical and timely that we be assured accrediting agencies are providing the checks and balances needed to keep institutions of higher education accountable.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony.

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