

INTRODUCTION

Nebraska's statutes require the Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education to prepare biennially the *Tuition, Fees and Financial Aid Report*. As an important component of the Commission's *Comprehensive Statewide Plan for Postsecondary Education*, this report studies the public policy issues relating to tuition, fees, and financial aid for students in Nebraska. It examines the significant, interrelated issues facing the state's students and its institutions of higher education, such as:

- The affordability of attending a public postsecondary institution;
- The state's level of investment in higher education; and
- The trends in financial aid, including Nebraska's state grant and student loan programs.

The appendixes of this report offer in-depth information about Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions in relation to their peer groups in:

- State appropriations per full-time equivalent student;
- Student payment share and affordability;
- Tuition, fees and enrollment trends;
- Tuition and fees as compared to inflation; and
- Financial aid.

Data Caveats

Comparisons with peer institutions allow each of Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions to assess key indicators in relation to data from similar institutions. As discussed in the Commission's *Comprehensive Statewide Plan*, comparisons also provide a method of assessing an institution's progress toward specific goals and outcomes (Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2006). This information should also help promote attainment of the major statewide goals in the *Comprehensive Plan*. Two limitations may affect the validity of the data: 1) the accuracy of information submitted by the peer institutions used for each Nebraska institution, and 2) the return rate of the surveys of those institutions.

The lists of peer institutions created more than a decade ago were based on the following criteria:

- Similarities among states
- Closeness in enrollments
- Comparable budget levels
- Comparable types of accreditation
- Comparable level and distribution of degree programs
- Similarities in selected measures of instructional characteristics

Because institutions change over time, the Commission plans to review each of the peer lists before the development of the *2012 Tuition, Fees and Financial Aid Report*.

The second data limitation in this report is the return rate of the surveys sent to peer institutions. Although some of the data for this report were taken from published literature, the survey information was based largely on self-reported data provided by a range of individuals working in Nebraska's public postsecondary institutions, along with their peers from other institutions. While the Commission obtained a 100 percent return rate on the surveys from Nebraska's institutions, there was only a 64 percent return rate from out-of-state peer institutions.

The return rate of the surveys within different sector peer lists varied significantly. For example, 92 percent of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln's peers returned the surveys, while only 50 percent of Southeast Community College's peers replied.¹

For institutions that did not return their surveys, the Commission attempted to obtain institutional information through a variety of sources, such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and peer institution and state higher education Websites.

¹ Campus-based institutional researchers are busy, and there are limits to the amount of time they will or can devote to answering surveys from other states. Commission staff will consider other possible approaches for future reports.