



# Chairman Tom Cole

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*Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
House Committee on Appropriations*

## **Oversight Hearing: Closing the Achievement Gap in Higher Education March 18, 2015 Opening Statement As Prepared**

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Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome our witnesses today to the Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education to discuss closing the achievement gap in higher education. We are looking forward to hearing your testimonies.

Our country's system of higher education is unparalleled in the world. Our institutions of higher education have produced advancements in science, technology, and the humanities, and have been critical in making the United States economically competitive. Our higher education system has also made a difference in the lives of millions of Americans, by helping individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their economic prospects and enter the middle class.

Despite its many successes, our higher education system faces challenges. Minorities and children from low-income families are less likely to attend college compared to their white and wealthier counterparts. Additionally, entering college does not guarantee success. Students from these same groups are also less likely to persist in higher education and eventually obtain a degree. While the cost of higher education is certainly a factor, it's not the only factor. Often, these students lack a network of family and friends who have attended college and are familiar with the ins and outs of applying for aid, choosing classes, and preparing for a career after graduation.

There is a role for the Federal government to play in helping disadvantaged students to be successful in higher education. A more educated populace strengthens our workforce and our international competitiveness. Individuals who complete their course of study and obtain a degree are more likely to be employed and earn more than their counterparts who didn't do so. The Department of Education's loan and grant programs make higher education a possibility for millions of Americans. But programs such as TRIO and GEAR UP help students to make use of these financial resources. Through these programs, the federal government partners with states, school districts, institutions of higher education, nonprofits, and private industry to help disadvantaged students prepare for, enroll in, and complete a higher education. This preparation is essential to helping these students make use of financial aid.

Today, we look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the ways in which the efforts I've mentioned can improve college access and completion among first-generation college students.

Today I'm pleased to welcome—

- Dr. Gail Mellow, President of LaGuardia Community College in Long Island City, NY, who will testify about successful interventions that have been piloted at LaGuardia and elsewhere to help students succeed in completing their chosen degree programs.
- Dr. Brian Fitzgerald, CEO of the Business-Higher Education Forum, who will testify about private sector partnerships to increase educational attainment for underrepresented populations, particularly in areas aligned with workforce needs.
- Dr. Ben Castleman, Assistant Professor of Education and Public Policy at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, who will testify about his research on the impact of relatively low-cost interventions providing information on financial aid on keeping disadvantaged students in school.
- Dr. Aaron Thompson, Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education and Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Eastern Kentucky University, who will testify about efforts in the State of Kentucky to develop partnerships to improve higher education, and
- Dr. Carol Fischer, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Dows Institute for Dental Research at the University of Iowa and Adjunct Professor of Biology at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, IA, who will testify about her experience with the McNair Program—which is part of TRIO—which helped her to overcome obstacles as a first-generation college student and obtain a Ph.D.

I look forward to hearing all of your testimonies.

I would like to yield now to my Ranking Member, the Gentlelady from Connecticut for her opening remarks.

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