

February 10, 2003

Dear Colleague:

On behalf of the American Council on Education, I write regarding an important and timely matter of public policy.

Last week, the Pentagon announced a mobilization of 16,979 reservists and National Guard members, bringing the total number of call-ups to 111,603 in the past several months. That total is the largest since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, and will likely grow to as many as 265,000 – the number mobilized for the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Based on previous experience, we believe that roughly one-fourth of those called to active duty will be college and university students.

Students called to active duty have their academic progress disrupted. During previous call-ups, institutions responded with policies that returned tuition, provided for course completion at later dates, and otherwise showed flexibility to ensure that no service member suffered a loss of funds or educational opportunity because he or she was called to serve our country.

In the fall of 2001 in response to the terrorist attacks, the U.S. Department of Education directed lenders and higher education institutions to provide relief from student loan obligations by postponing student loan payments for borrowers called to active duty service. Additionally, the Department urged colleges and universities to provide full refund of tuition and other institutional charges, and encouraged flexible re-enrollment options for affected students. The federal government has never legislated in this area, in part, because of the cooperation and sensitivity shown by higher education institutions in assisting these students.

While it may be difficult for some campuses, this is one important way that we can support our students in their efforts to fulfill their military commitment. Thank you for working with these students.

Sincerely,

David Ward  
President

DW/cms