

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee Hearing

"The Future of College: Harnessing Innovation to Improve Outcomes and Lower Costs"

Tuesday, November 18, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome back! It's been quite a while since we have seen Republicans in town. Democrats came back a few times to see if we could entice you back.

It was good to see you then, and it's good to be back at work.

Innovation in higher education is crucial if we want to ensure that all Americans can access and graduate from college. Practices such as offering flexible learning options, leveraging digital tools, and providing student services and financial support can improve students' college experience and completion. But not all innovations make a difference, and some even come at the expense of student outcomes or equity. Our core responsibility as federal policymakers is to make sure every student can succeed, regardless of their background.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration and my Republican colleagues are intent on undoing the progress we have made.

The so-called "Big Ugly Law" is a prime example. It eliminates Grad PLUS loans, pushes students into the predatory private loan market, and makes it easier for predatory for-profit colleges to defraud students. Cutting these programs without offering an alternative solution to address the rising costs of college will adversely affect low-income borrowers and those who have less access to capital. This isn't just a policy mistake. It's a moral failure that threatens the futures of aspiring doctors, nurses, and researchers.

In fact, the elimination of Grad PLUS loans in the 'Big Ugly Bill' makes it nearly impossible for students who could attend school today to attend medical school under the new rules. If they can't come up with about \$50,000 to complete their education.

But it doesn't stop there. We've also seen the Trump Administration circumvent Congress and dismantle the Department of Education (ED), including hollowing out the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Now we know that without IES, we are robbed of essential evidence and research that helps inform good policymaking. Without this institution, we lose the capacity to measure whether our investments in education are working—whether students are succeeding or whether we're simply throwing money into programs that aren't making a difference.

As a result, we lose the ability to hold publicly funded schools and colleges accountable. We can't even properly track student outcomes, let alone identify and fix what's broken.

Moreover, we've proven that innovation in higher education can work when we focus on evidence-based best practices. Federal initiatives, such as the Postsecondary Student Success Grant (PSSG), are a perfect example of how we can help states and institutions innovate and implement programs with proven track records of improving

students' success. These grants are designed to help students not only gain access to academic support, such as tutoring and advising, but also to help students graduate on time.

Regrettably, the Trump Administration has already made clear that it has no plans to fund these grants.

Despite Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration's intentions to take us backwards, the world around us continues to move forward. For better or worse, new technology and artificial intelligence are in our workplaces and in our classrooms.

Our challenge now must be to understand how we can best leverage innovations without sacrificing student outcomes. We cannot allow innovation to intentionally or unintentionally leave certain students behind. True innovation can only be achieved if we prioritize addressing disparities in student outcomes and follow the evidence and research.

We are responsible for ensuring that any student, no matter their wealth or background, can attend college and achieve their dreams. This is a future we must continue to build, not one where access to opportunity is restricted, but a future where we can push forward, expand access, and lift every student.

Thank you, and I yield back, Mr. Chair.