



HILDRETH  
INSTITUTE

20  
23

# IMPACT REPORT

**Seizing the Opportunity**

# Message from our Managing Director



**Dr. Bahar Akman  
Imboden**  
Managing Director

Dear Friends,

In 2023, we embraced the theme 'Seizing the Opportunity,' a concept that vividly came to life through our impactful work. This year marked a significant milestone for us, as our actionable, equity-driven recommendations garnered key advocates and decision-makers' attention and played an instrumental role in securing major affordability victories in Massachusetts. These achievements underscore our commitment to delivering balanced, comprehensive insights that inform the development of equitable solutions in higher education.

In an exciting leap forward, we have expanded our horizon to national matters. We have developed policy proposals for federal student loan relief, which were recognized for their originality, and were incorporated into a legislative bill.

Additionally, we have embarked on an exciting journey by integrating AI-powered data science into our research methodology. This cutting-edge advancement, made possible through new

partnerships with expert data scientists positions us on the cusp of unveiling real-time, groundbreaking insights. Our initial focus is on the rapidly evolving landscape of student loan borrower complaints.

Looking ahead to 2024, we're excited to launch new initiatives and expand our research capacity. These efforts will enable us to play a more influential role in shaping educational debates and crafting equitable policy solutions. We invite you to stay engaged with our journey; there will be numerous opportunities to partner with us in these transformative endeavors.

As our organization continues to mature, we're focused on enhancing our governance structure and expanding our network of supporters. The energy and dedication of our collaborative partnerships have been vital in our pursuit of systemic change. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that higher education is equitable, affordable, and of world-class standards.

We are immensely grateful for your continued support and partnership. Together, let's keep this momentum going, seizing opportunities to make a significant and informed impact.

Sincerely,

*Bahar Akman Imboden*

# About Us

## Our Mission

The Hildreth Institute, a trusted source of independent research, is committed to driving systemic change in higher education by promoting affordability, accountability, and equity; and empowering advocates and decision-makers with student-centered, evidence-based policy analysis, thereby fostering an inclusive and transformative educational landscape.

## Our Strategies

- Conduct Research with an Equity and Empowerment Lens
- Inspire Transformational Policy Change in Higher Education
- Work Towards Achieving Equitable Outcomes and Closing Racial Wealth Gaps

## Our Vision

At the Hildreth Institute, we envision an inclusive world-class higher education system that ensures all students have the support and financial resources they need to fully realize their educational and career goals.

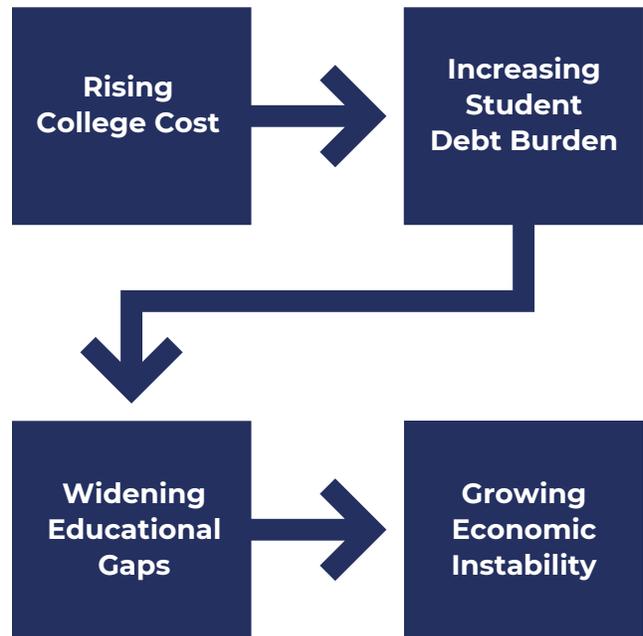
“There are no achievement gaps. Only opportunity gaps.”

**\$ 1.6 TRILLION**  
Total student loan debt

**43.6 MILLION**  
Borrowers with student debt

**\$37,718**  
The average federal student  
loan debt balance

A college degree should not be a debt sentence.



“

“My family moved to Massachusetts from Lima, Peru when I was 6. My parents made this decision to provide me access to better education and the opportunities that come with it. But even in high school, I knew that many decisions about higher education would be based on money. I graduated UMASS Boston this last spring with a degree in Economics and \$35,000 in debt. With the help of my family and by working over seven jobs over the five years it took me to graduate, I have already paid off \$10,000 of this mountain. But student debt repayment is an uphill journey, and I’m slowly learning that my five-year education has quickly turned into a potential decade long drag on my life choices.”

- Armando V

# Our Year in Action

## Learning with Purpose

By engaging directly with those most affected by soaring educational expenses, we have turned stories into strategies, empowering local organizations to craft solutions that resonate with their unique challenges.

## Engaging and Informing

Our active listening and engagement clearly indicates a growing momentum for systemic transformation in higher education.

Armed with our accessible research and briefs, advocates and policymakers have been empowered to strongly advocate for policies that are both equitable and inclusive.

By combining our expert testimonies at hearings with the compelling voices of students, parents, and borrowers, we have successfully called for simplified financial aid and access to affordable, high-quality education.

Our efforts this year emphasize a resolute stance: the time for accessible, debt-free, world-class public higher education in Massachusetts is now.

2

Major research reports, cutting through complexity to guide policy.

4

Expert public testimony, influencing legislative frameworks.

7

Presentations at conference, coalitions, and the Higher Ed Caucus shaping the dialogue in higher education.

9

Policy Briefs, Factsheets & Explainers providing clear and compelling guides shaping policy ecosystems.

27+

Media mentions and appearances, amplifying our voice for change.

# Our Year in Innovation

## Harnessing AI for Insight

We are integrating big data and AI-powered data science into our research methodology to enhance our understanding of student and borrower experiences. Collaborating with Babson College, Georgetown University, and with DataKind's support, we launched several projects to create practical recommendations for stakeholders in the educational and financial sectors.



With invaluable support of DataKind, we have deepened our insights into the narratives of students and borrowers. We are developing a consumer complaints dashboard, distilling student borrower complaints into actionable intelligence to drive reforms.



**BABSON  
COLLEGE**

In an innovative collaboration with Babson University, we engage a class of 42 students to harness cutting-edge AI social listening tools, capturing the real-time conversations and concerns of borrowers. This initiative will not only amplify the voices of individuals grappling with educational debt but also equip us with valuable insights to advise stakeholders on the pressing issues facing borrowers today. Stay tuned for our upcoming findings!



We're collaborating with Georgetown University's graduate students to train AI to more accurately forecast issues that student loan borrowers face during repayment and in dealing with their loan servicers.

# Our 2023 Impact

In 2023, we focused on **'seizing the opportunity'** to achieve impact. We are proud that our recommendations resonated powerfully within Massachusetts, influencing advocates and decision-makers to achieve key affordability victories. This success in Massachusetts is just the beginning, as our ideas are now gaining traction in national conversations, marking the start of our expanding influence across the country.

## Nationally

At the federal level, we have made significant strides in student debt relief. Our innovative student loan model, which eliminates interest rates for borrowers without burdening taxpayers, has gained recognition. This approach is now featured in the 'Student Loan Interest Elimination Act,' a testament to our impactful contribution to national education finance reform.

Additionally, we joined the voices for increased Pell Grants and greater accountability from higher education institutions, ensuring a comprehensive approach to education finance reform.

## Massachusetts

**\$147 M**

Representing 84% increase in new student grants towards a Tuition-Free public degree

**\$12 M**

To study the expansion of the Tuition-Free Community College

**\$14 M**

To student support services ensuring inclusion and completion

**\$20 M**

Preserving the vitality of Higher Education Institutions via the Endowment Match Program

**11,600+**

Undocumented students now eligible for in-State tuition and financial aid

“Affordability in higher education is a social justice issue.”

# Acknowledgements

We thank you for your continued support in our research.

## Our Board

We would like to thank our board members for their continued support and guidance, Bob Hildreth for his encouragement, enthusiasm and relentless advocacy for students and borrowers.

- Sally Currier
- Dr. Charles Desmond
- Dr. Stacy L. Scott
- Bob Hildreth

## Our Supporters

- Hildreth Stewart Charitable Foundation
- The Boston Foundation
- The Barr Foundation
- DataKind
- The Cummings Foundation
- Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee
- AlphaBold Inc.

We would like to thank Professor Michael McGuirk from Babson College and his 42 wonderful students for their expertise and collaboration, as well as DataKind for their in-kind assistance with our data dashboard.

We were proud to mentor students from Georgetown University Capstone Project and John Guerra, Samiksha Kale and Melissa Cirtain, our fellows for the fall.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to all of our partners working hard to shine a light on this important topic.

Finally we would like to thank legislators and policymakers for their commitment, attention and dedication.

**Interested in supporting our work to reclaim the promise of higher education?**

Click the link below to donate!

[\*\*Donate now\*\*](#)

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## Contact

Hildreth Institute, Inc  
100 Belvidere St. Apt 10E, Boston MA  
617-752-3701

[www.hildrethinstitute.org](http://www.hildrethinstitute.org)  
[news@hildrethinstitute.org](mailto:news@hildrethinstitute.org)