The Ohio Access Network (OCAN) is the first and leading statewide coordinating body for college access programs in the nation. OCAN member college access programs across Ohio help students pursue and complete education beyond high school, with particular focus on low-income students and aspiring first generation college students. As a voice for college access, OCAN provides advocacy through a three-tiered approach by:

(1) Educating Ohio legislators to influence public policy  
(2) Creating public awareness of available college access and success services  
(3) Building partnerships with like-minded organizations to advance a college-going culture

OCAN has fervently worked to be the voice for those students who are oftentimes not heard. Our work includes: developing the nation’s first and only College Access and Economic Opportunity Caucus within the Ohio legislature; hosting annual Partners in College Access and Success Policy Breakfests; conducting one-on-one legislative meetings; connecting legislators with programs serving their constituency; conducting the KnowHow2GO social media campaign; fostering collaborations with national college access organizations; circulating industry-related literature; and publishing monthly issues of The Collegium. Experience has taught us that it is also important that the students are given the opportunity to speak on their own behalf regarding issues that affect them.

Conceptualized over a conversation with Florida’s ENLACE (ENgaging Latino, African-American, and other Communities for Education) program, OCAN’s leadership visualized a student institute that culminates in a two-day education policy summit in which students debate the issues affecting their education and economic success and create an advocacy action plan to take their policy analyses and recommendations to policymakers. The goals of this student education policy institute are three-fold:

(1) To increase engagement and participation of students in the policymaking process  
(2) To influence the education debate through student-passed policy resolutions, specifically, issues of Preparation, Access, Success, and Economic Opportunity.  
(3) To coordinate policymaking efforts between community organizations, colleges, students, and Legislators.

The institute will begin its initial work by selecting students from colleges and universities with active public policy, public affairs, civic engagement and leadership programs. Those schools in Ohio that will be participating in 2011 are: The Ohio State University John Glenn School of Public Affairs, The Ohio University Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs, and The University of Akron Bliss Institute. For the first Ohio Education Policy Student Institute, students will be selec-
ted through a competitive application process by faculty leaders at the participating universities. These students will study, analyze, and develop policy recommendations on four critically important policy issues:

- Financial aid and college accessibility
- Persistence to degree and college retention
- Economic opportunities from postsecondary completion

From February to April, the students, with guidance from faculty, staff, graduate students, legislators, and other interested entities, will be guided through the policymaking process, ultimately debating recommendations as to how these policies will enhance the quality of education for students in Ohio. From April 10-12, 2011, students and their advisors will convene in Columbus, Ohio for an opening ceremony dinner and initial meetings with their institute-specific teams. On the second day, the teams will deliberate policy issues and collaborate to develop a set of common policy recommendations and prepare for the following day. On April 12th, the Ohio Student Education Policy Summit will take place at the Ohio Statehouse. Students will be given the opportunity to discuss their policy research and recommendations with the Ohio General Assembly, display their policy information to legislators, policymakers, and education stakeholders in the Capitol Museum Gallery, and testify to the Senate Education Committee.

Quantitative and qualitative data will be gathered at the culmination of the conference and a complete program evaluation will be conducted.