



## **Fast Blast**

**From the California Student Aid Commission**

**Fast Blast for February 9, 2007**

### **From Diana Fuentes-Michel**

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*In support of the Commission's ongoing goal of providing California's financial aid community with proactive and current updates, we are providing this update on programs, issues and recent legislation. Please share this with any interested staff who may not have received this newsletter.*

### **Cal Grant Public Awareness Campaign at full speed**

Over the last two months, the Commission has strongly supported getting the word out to students and families regarding the availability of Cash for College workshops and financial aid through the Cal Grant Program. The Commission developed several press events, television call-in shows in English and Spanish, attention-grabbing television and radio advertisements, telephone messaging projects, interviews with Commission staff, newspaper coverage, and Internet activities to reach students around the state.

**More online information in Spanish-** Recently, the Commission updated the student-friendly [calgrants.org](http://calgrants.org) Web site and added a Spanish language section. Please take a look and tell us what you think. Callers to the Commission's automated telephone Interactive Voice Response system can also hear a Spanish-language reference to the new [calgrants.org](http://calgrants.org) Spanish information section.

### **📞 Submitting at the last minute? Call the Commission**

If any of your students complete their Cal Grant financial aid forms at the last minute and they have questions— they can get answers. On Friday, March 2, Commission telephone staff will be available from 8 a.m. **until 10 p.m.** to answer questions and help callers through the process. Just call toll free at 1-888-224-7268.

### **Text messaging statewide**

The Commission's 2007 Cal Grant public awareness campaign features an exciting new text messaging option. Students may text "49700" (which means "for \$9700") to sign up for text-messaged Cal Grant Alerts via their cell phones. These Alerts will remind them to complete the application process before the March 2 deadline.

The Commission has completed arrangements with Sprint, Nextel, Boost, T-Mobile, Cingular and Verizon for text messaging coverage. So, encourage your students to try the 49700 option- and they will be one step closer to applying for a Cal Grant and other financial aid.

### **Cash for College has 350 workshops featuring \$1,000 scholarships**

The Cash for College program— of free workshops where students and parents get help filling out a FAFSA and other forms— is in full swing now. About 350 workshops, most with Spanish-speaking counselors, are scheduled, with more than 200 offered in February and right up to the March 2 Cal Grant deadline! To find a February workshop in your area and learn about what to bring, you and your students can go online at [calgrants.org](http://calgrants.org) or [californiacashforcollege.org](http://californiacashforcollege.org).

Please remind your students- if they attend a workshop, fill out an exit survey at the workshop and submit a FAFSA on time, they are entered in a later drawing for a \$1,000 scholarship!

**Cash for College Organizer Tips-** Workshop organizers can visit the "For Organizers" page at [calgrants.org](http://calgrants.org) to download workshop evaluations and FAFSA, and AB 540 resources. As a reminder, workshop evaluations need to be returned as soon as possible to the California Cash for College office, so that we can contact students who still need help to complete the FAFSA and Cal Grant GPA Verification form. To ship evaluations, please ship to CCFC/CSAC, 10811 International Drive, 2nd Floor, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670. For priority mail evaluations, please send to CCFC/CSAC, P.O. Box 419026 Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-9026.

### **Commission to hold comment period public meetings on draft Interagency Participation Agreement**

In an effort to complement input already received from the Commission's Grant Advisory Committee and our valued stakeholders, Commission staff will hold two comment period public meetings and Web conferences for interested parties to provide further comment on the draft Interagency Participation Agreement. This agreement is considered the binding contract between the Commission and the colleges and technical and career schools receiving Cal Grant funds for their students. Once approved, the new agreement will guide how these institutions are to administer and manage these funds. The current agreement expires June 30, and the new version will cover the next five years. Details are still being arranged on the specifics of these meetings, which will most likely be held in March, with one located at Commission headquarters in Rancho Cordova and the other in Southern California. Staff is also looking at complementing the meetings with Web conferencing. Interested parties, which include those receiving our Fast Blast, will be sent an advisory soon that outlines the specifics of this comment period.

### **WebGrants for Students is valuable resource- 24/7**

Students can take advantage of a great online service offered by the Commission. They can log on any time at [calgrants.org](http://calgrants.org) or [csac.ca.gov](http://csac.ca.gov), click on *WebGrants for Students*, quickly set up their own confidential account and track their application for financial aid. After students submit a FAFSA, they can track their application process and: see when their application information has been received by the Commission, check on their Cal Grant or Chafee Grant award status, change their address with the Commission, click on links to other financial aid Web sites, and more. If awarded, students can track their Cal Grant or Chafee Grant payment history each school term and check on their remaining grant eligibility.

**You can order materials-** You can order *WebGrants for Students* posters and bookmarks (use form numbers G-146 and G-147 for high school items, and G-148 and G-149 for college items) from the Commission/EDFUND shipping center by calling direct at 916-526-7282 or faxing your order at 916-525-8838.

Please remind your students that this popular online service is a great tool that allows them to manage and update their personal information with the Commission.

### **Chafee Grant Update**

The Commission continues to make Chafee Grant awards to foster youth and former foster youth for the 2006-2007 academic year, as funds are still available. The California Department of Social Services has directed the Commission to use the same criteria to make Chafee Grant awards for 2007-08 as were used for the 2006-2007 academic year. Based on this, the Commission is currently working on the 2007-2008 online application and making every effort to provide institutions sufficient time to process new applicants and renewal students for 2007-2008.

### **APLE allocations still available for 2006-2007**

The Assumption Program of Loans for Education, or APLE, is still accepting applications for the 2006-2007 academic year. APLE is a state-funded, competitive teacher incentive program designed to encourage outstanding students to become teachers and serve in areas within California where there is a critical shortage. A total of 7,200 allocations were made available for 2006-2007 and, to date, the Commission has selected approximately 2,000 participants. The priority filing deadline for 2006-2007

APLE applications is March 30, 2007, but if all allocations have not been met by that date, the Commission will continue to accept eligible applications.

### **Governmental Relations**

The state Legislature returned January 3 and the bills have begun to flow. Commission staff continues to meet with Legislative staff to educate new and returning members on Commission programs and financial aid for college and career/technical school students with financial need.

**New state bills-** Some bills have been introduced as place-holders or “spot bills.” You can follow the progress of state bills– just log on to [leginfo.ca.gov](http://leginfo.ca.gov) and enter the bill number in the search box. Bills with implications for financial aid are:

- AB 111 (Blakeslee)- Changes the date on which the National Guard Assumption Program of Loans for Education (NGAPLE) becomes inoperative.
- AB 120 (Laird)- The 2007-08 Budget bill, SB 54 (Ducheny) is the Senate’s version of the Budget bill. They are the same now, but will change due to each house’s hearings and budget decisions.
- AB 175 (Price)- Concerns the Cal Grant Program, and relates to the Cal Grant B Entitlement Awards. Requires the maximum award for access costs for the 2008-09 award year to be an annual amount that equals *at least* \$1,551. *Note: This appears to be a spot bill (introduced as a placeholder) that will be amended to increase the award later during the process.*
- SB 139 (Scott)- Relates to the State Nursing Assumption Program of Loans for Education (SNAPLE). Makes a person who is currently employed as a registered nurse in a state-operated 24-hour facility ineligible to enter into an agreement for loan assumption under this program.
- SB 160 (Cedillo)- Enacts the California Dream Act. Requires that a person who has attended and graduated from a California secondary school, rather than high school, is exempt from paying nonresident tuition at the California Community Colleges and the CSU. Includes persons attending and graduating from technical schools and adult schools.

**State Budget-** The Governor introduced his proposed State Budget on January 10, 2007. As state personal tax information is received from the public’s filings, the Governor and the Legislature may revise revenue forecasts for budget proposals. The Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) will release its analysis of the Governor’s Budget the week of February 19. The Legislature uses the LAO’s analysis as a blueprint for Budget Committee and Budget Subcommittee discussions. Once the May Revision of the Budget is released around May 15<sup>th</sup> budget hearings begin.

**New federal bills-** The new Congress, led by Democrats, has acted quickly to establish its priorities in the new session. The House has adopted a requirement referred to as “paygo” which means that each bill that costs money must be offset by another that saves money. It appears that in many cases, the offset has yet to be identified.

- HR 5 (Miller Ge)- Creates the College Student Relief Act of 2007 which reduces the interest rates for student borrowers. This bill has passed the House and has been sent to the US Senate.
- HR 472 (McKeon)- Amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to address the issues of college affordability and transparency.
- HR 601 (Biggert)- Expands the definition of “independent student” in the Higher Education Act of 1965 to include homeless youth.
- HR 81 (Wu)- To express the sense of the House of Representatives that the maximum Pell Grant should be increased to \$5,800.
- S 301 (Clinton)- Provides higher education assistance for nontraditional students.
- S 359 (Kennedy)- Amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide additional support to students. This bill includes phased-in annual increases to the Pell Grant maximum to \$5,100 in 2007-08 and up to \$6,300 in 2011-12.

**Federal Budget-** The following is from the NASFAA Web site, at <http://www.nasfaa.org/Home.asp>. President Bush released his \$2.9 trillion budget proposal for fiscal year 2008 early February among much fanfare over the proposed \$1,350 Pell Grant increase over the next five years. However, some are concerned about the elimination of some need-based aid programs and additional cuts to lender

subsidies used to offset the \$19.8 billion needed to increase the Pell Grant. The President's FFY 2008 budget proposes raising the maximum Pell Grant award to \$4,600 in 2008 and then increasing the maximum by \$200 in every year thereafter until 2012.

### **Commission launches Student Expenses and Resources Survey (SEARS)**

Every three years since 1972 the Commission works with each segment of higher education to randomly select a group of students and request that they fill out a survey on their income and college costs. Responding students include some who receive financial aid and some who do not receive aid. Statistics from the anonymous survey will provide an up-to-date picture to members of the state Legislature and Administration regarding what financial resources and costs students are faced with while attending college or career/technical school.

In early February the Commission started contacting students and inviting them to participate in the survey. The survey is primarily online this year, but the Commission is distributing paper surveys to some institutions as well.

Several months will be needed to analyze and prepare survey statistics. A summary of the results of the SEARS survey will be reported to the Legislature in late 2007.

### **New liaison to Executive Councils**

The Commission appointed Bryan Dickason to be the new liaison to CASFAA and CCCSFAAA Executive Councils. Bryan has been with the Commission since 1990 and has been a trainer and manager for more than six years. He will present information on the Commission's outreach and financial aid programs at governing board meetings and advise on Commission policies and procedures. He will also take back important feedback and suggestions from the meetings to strengthen the voice of the financial aid community as it pertains to Commission business. "I'm looking forward to contributing to the efforts of these agencies," Bryan commented on his appointment. Bryan replaces Cheryl Lenz, who shifted to other projects.

### **Commission verifies student self-certification data**

Commission staff and Grant Advisory Committee members recently completed a project to determine the accuracy of students self-reporting graduation data on their FAFSA. The survey used the anonymous results from 502 students at 149 schools. It was found that students *are* correctly reporting graduation data on their FAFSAs, allowing the Commission to continue current procedures for graduation data from student FAFSAs.

**Talk with us-** The Commission appreciates any comments or feedback you may have regarding the *Fast Blast*. Please forward your comments to [fastblast@csac.ca.gov](mailto:fastblast@csac.ca.gov).

On behalf of the Commission and Commission staff, I want to wish our financial aid partners a successful 2007.



**February 9, 2007**