

Information Item

California Student Aid Commission

Executive Director's Report

Enclosed for review is a written report from the Executive Director of the California Student Aid Commission.

Recommended Action: For information only. No action required.

Responsible Staff: Diana Fuentes-Michel,
Executive Director



Executive Director's Report February 15, 2007

Dear Commissioners,

The Commission began the New Year with significant workload challenges as our staff welcomed the start of the new 2007-08 Cal Grant application cycle. The Commission's grant programs now serve almost 300,000 new and continuing students at public and private colleges, schools and universities throughout California. While we maintain services to our current population, the Commission's informational technology and program administration and services staff continue our internal planning and programming for the implementation of the real-time Grant Delivery System in 2008. Phase I funding of this project was provided in the 2006 Budget Act and is supporting this major improvement to the Commission's informational technology system.

In addition, the Commission staff continues its work in implementing the Business Improvement Plan (known as BIP) initiated last year. The Commission has recently completed the staff training component of our BIP program. Commission staff is now in the process of electronically documenting the Commission's internal policies and procedures for its Cal Grant programs. This documentation of our process will ensure uniformity and consistency in the application of our policies, establish a cumulative record of the knowledge of our staff, provide a resource for the training of our staff, and provide a mechanism for continual improvement in the delivery of our grant delivery system. Commission staff, Wendi Dodgin, has been assigned to lead the BIP, to ensure that the process is successfully implemented for the Cal Grant programs in the 2006-07 fiscal year. It is the management team's goal to export this business improvement process throughout the Commission and its programs.

Our public awareness and outreach efforts were also launched in early in January, in all the major metropolitan areas of California. We have participated in numerous live and taped television and radio programs as well as provided information to print media about the availability of student financial aid, the financial aid process, and the Cal Grant program. The Commission has joined with its numerous partners in the business, civic, financial aid and higher education community as well as our own Cal-SOAP programs to conduct our public awareness and Cash for College workshop events.

Our public awareness program has produced television and radio public service announcements highlighting the Cal Grant program and its utility at both public and private institutions, for use in all sectors of postsecondary education, including community colleges and eligible private career and vocational schools and colleges. We have received excellent feedback on our initial efforts. Commission staff will be involved in a number of public awareness events and Cash for College workshops up until the March 2 deadline. Recognition of the hard and dedicated work of our Outreach staff should be noted. They have been exceptional in their work and representation of the Commission.

At your upcoming Commission meeting, the Commission's outreach committee will be discussing our outreach plan for the 2007 year. We are very excited that we are able to present an early comprehensive plan for your consideration. We have learned much over the last four years about the challenge of effectively communicating the availability and sources of financial aid, dispelling the financial aid myths, simplifying the aid application process, and the importance of articulating the need to complete two forms, the FAFSA and the GPA verification form. We still have many challenges in reaching out to those students who come from families where English is not their first language, first-generation college-going students and re-entry students who may be unfamiliar with the college admissions and financial aid processes. We will be providing an update for you at the Commission's February meeting.

In January, the Commission launched a new communications tool, FAST BLAST, to improve the timeliness of our communications to the high schools, postsecondary education institutions and financial aid community. This communications will supplement the operations memorandum and special alerts that are issued routinely by the Commission. Internally, the Commission staff receives monthly information through an electronic newsletter, Keeping You Informed, about activities and upcoming events within the Commission itself. We would appreciate your comments or suggestions on either of these communications tools.

This month, Commission staff has also continued its work on the development of a new Institutional Participation Agreement (known as the IPA). The Commission will be receiving an update of these discussions and a calendar of advisory and consultation meetings planned prior to the Commission hearing and taking action on the final IPA.

And finally, proposed changes to federal legislation governing the state's participation in the federal loan program as well as proposals to increase the Pell grant funding and proposed cuts to other federal financial aid programs has focused our attention on the Commission's role in representing California's institutions and schools on policy matters. Commission staff will be bringing these items as well as informing the Commission about the new composition of the policy and budget committees of the Legislature and new state legislation introduced. In recent weeks, I have had number of opportunities to meet with the new chairs of the Assembly higher education policy and budget subcommittees and their staff. Most recently, I attended the State of Education address by Superintendent Jack O'Connell, on the expected release of a new report and recommendations on how California should address the long-standing achievement gap among African-American and Latino youth in California.

In closing, I want you to know that Acting Chair McClain has directed that staff workgroup to begin deliberations with EDFUND's management on a new operating agreement. The existing agreement must be replaced with a new agreement by June 30, 2007. The external consultant's report on the roles and responsibilities of the Commission and EDFUND is expected to inform the Commission's direction on the development of a new operating agreement.

I look forward to working with you on these issues and seeing you on February 22nd.

Sincerely,



Diana Fuentes-Michel
Executive Director