

Information/Action Item

Student Impact Committee

Update on the Dream Act

The California Dream Act of 2011, authored by Assembly Member Gil Cedillo, became law through the passage of two Assembly Bills (AB), AB 130 and AB 131. These two bills allow students who meet AB 540 criteria to apply for and receive non-state funded scholarships for public colleges and universities under AB 130 and state-funded financial aid such as institutional grants, community college fee waivers, Cal Grants and other programs under AB 131.

Commencing on January 1, 2013, AB 131 went into effect for the 2012-13 academic year. In April 2012, we released the first phase of the online 2012-13 California Dream Act Application (CA Dream Application) which allows students who attend public universities to apply for state funded institutional aid. Approximately, 14,000 students submitted the 2012-13 CA Dream Application applying for the University of California (UC) Grant, the State University Grant and the Community College Board of Governor's Fee Waiver. Public institutions used the student's CA Dream Application information to determine student program eligibility for the various grants and fee waivers offered on their campuses.

As the processor of the California financial aid application (CA Dream Act Application), similar to the federal processor's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), our role and responsibility has increased significantly. Prior to the Dream Act Application, we used the FAFSA data that is managed and maintained by the federal processor (US Department of Education) to process Cal Grant awards. Now, we have responsibility in managing and maintaining the CA Dream Application comparable to the federal processor, and in addition, responsibility for assisting parents and students in completing the application, answering and explaining financial questions related to the income, assets and other financial inquiries that most of these applicants have never had to answer. Many of these students have questions outside of the Cal Grant program which require us to provide more information than that of a student completing a FAFSA.

We continued to make enhancements to the 2012-13 application during the development of the 2013-14 CA Dream Application. The planned January 1, 2013, roll-out of the 2013-14 application included an online application and a paper application in English and Spanish. In addition, application-supporting documents are posted including the pre-application worksheet and complete application instructions. The English PDF application and worksheet were posted on January 1, 2013 and the Spanish application was posted on February 4, 2013.

The complexity of the online 2013-14 year application required additional testing time beyond the January 1 original release date and additional programming after it was initially released. Programming was completed and tested, and the application was brought back online on January 23. We continue to make improvements to the application in an effort to streamline the process for students.

In order to assure that a functioning application was available well before the March 2 Cal Grant deadline, the skip logic programming was not implemented. Similar to the FAFSA, the CA Dream Application has 105 questions and without skip logic, some students find some difficulty in completing the application. To assist those students who have not successfully completed the application, we are contacting these students to assist them through the application process.

To date 5,689 students have completed the 2013-14 CA Dream Application. AB 540 Dream applications will be processed through the WebGrants system to determine their eligibility for a 2013-14 Cal Grant. Eligible AB 540 students, who meet the Cal Grant program requirements, will receive a California Aid Report (CAR) identifying their Cal Grant award offer and their eligibility status will be reported on the institution's Cal Grant roster. AB 540 students who have completed the CA Dream Application and are offered a Cal Grant will be identified with a flag to be verified prior to disbursement. Depending on the Cal Grant award offered to the student, verification of their high school graduation will be required prior to disbursement of the award. We continue to hold discussions with segmental representatives and campus administrators on the verification process for selected applicants.

Throughout the development of the 2012-13 and the 2013-14 CA Dream Applications, we held regular teleconference and webinars with segmental representatives. These meetings were essential to identify issues and solutions to their needs and areas of concern. More meetings with segmental representatives and students will be held to address their questions and needs. In addition, webinar trainings continue to be offered for financial aid administrators, high school counselors, segmental representatives, and outreach staff.

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