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California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) Launches First Podcast, *Financial Paid: Paying for College in California*

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SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec. 02, 2021 -- As the pandemic forced people to stay indoors, one thing was made very clear, the need to communicate virtually with each other is not only needed, but here to stay beyond COVID-19. One of the most creative ways in which people have been engaging with their audiences is in the form of podcasts. According to Vulture Magazine, "28% of the total U.S. population, or an estimated 80 million Americans, can now be considered habitual weekly podcast listeners, up from 24% the year before."

As of Summer 2021, the National College Attainment Network (NCAC) also reports FAFSA completion declining nearly 5%, losing 270,000 FAFSA's nationally since 2019. NCAN also reports that 2020 high school senior college enrollment declined nearly 7%. Given the impact of the pandemic on enrollment and financial aid applications in addition to podcast listenership increasing, the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) saw an opportunity to reach more people than it ever has before. That is why CSAC decided to launch its first ever podcast, [*Financial Paid: Paying for College in California*](#). Financial Paid is a podcast dedicated to getting students and families the information they need to successfully navigate the financial aid system. The podcast invites members of the community, educators, students, and financial aid experts to the table to discuss financial aid from a variety of different angles.

“We need to expand beyond our traditional forms of outreach and marketing. This podcast allows us to be present in the modern age, while allowing us to reach those in underprivileged communities like my hometown Lynwood. When we invest in our students, we invest in the state’s future”, said Judith Gutierrez, one of the hosts of Financial Paid.

“As a first-generation college graduate myself, I wish I had resources like this podcast to help me stay informed. A podcast like this would have helped me navigate college access and affordability in a fun, yet informative way.” said Michael Lemus, CSAC’s Program Outreach & Marketing Manager and co-host of Financial Paid. “Beyond the resources, I also believe that there is power in everyone’s voice and being able to bring people from all walks of life into conversations about financial aid make me excited for what is to come”

“The pandemic really got us thinking about how we could enhance CSAC’s outreach, marketing, and communication strategy” said Marlene Garcia, Executive Director of the California Student Aid Commission. “We know that students and families are accessing information differently, but that the need for financial aid to make higher education attainable is just as great. Our podcast and other new outreach initiatives we are undertaking will help us reach a wider audience of students, parents, educators, and community partners as we spread the message about the availability of financial aid and how to pay for college.”

Financial Paid: Paying for College in California can now be streamed on [Spotify](#), [Google Podcasts](#), [iHeart](#), and [Stitcher](#). Each episode has also been video recorded and is available to be seen [here](#).

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The California Student Aid Commission administers the state’s \$4 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at <https://www.csac.ca.gov/> or follow us on Social Media by clicking on our Link Tree, <https://linktr.ee/castudentaid>.

The podcasts hosts, Michael Lemus and Judith Gutierrez are both employees of the CSAC, former Cal Grant recipients, and first-generation college graduates.

Michael Lemus serves as the Program Outreach and Marketing Manager, overseeing the CSAC’s Cash for College Program, Cal-SOAP, and its various marketing strategies. Michael has work experience at the California State University system, the University of California system, as well as the California Community College system and holds a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona and a master’s degree in Higher Education from California State University, Fullerton.

Judith Gutierrez serves as the Outreach and Marketing Coordinator at CSAC. In her role, she works with external stakeholders, community organizations, and CSAC partners, developing strategic marketing plans that amplify and promote financial aid programs to underserved populations in the state. Through her work with the Cash for College program, she serves as the agency's primary liaison to the state's Consulates of Mexico and spearheads CSAC's Spanish-Bilingual Cash for College workshops. Judith is a graduate of the University of California, Santa Cruz.