



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Staff Updates:

As announced at the March Commission Meeting, the Tuition Grants Commission was fortunate to have Lily Oyebade, a student from Columbia International University, serve as the Commission's Communications and Outreach Intern for the Spring 2026 semester. During her time with the Commission, Lily supported the agency's social media efforts and developed a plan Commission Staff can use to continue to strengthen reach to more students. Lily scheduled and met with staff at similar agencies in other states to learn more about how those agencies successfully reach adult learners and other non-traditional students within their respective states. During Higher Education Day at the State House, Lily sought out students at participating colleges and universities and captured quick video snippets, which were featured on the Commission's Instagram story. This summer, Lily is participating in a six-week summer program managed by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission called Black to San Francisco (B2SF). This program accepts 30 students annually and B2SF interns contribute to San Francisco's economic revitalization and help to cultivate future leaders in tech, government, education, and beyond. We are grateful for Lily's dedication and work during her time with our agency and hope to welcome her back to the Commission next academic year, should her schedule allow.

On May 26th, the Commission hired Delaney Gilliam, a senior Business Major at Newberry College, to serve as the Commission's Operations Assistant for the summer. In this position, Delaney provides essential administrative and front-line support to ensure smooth daily operations. She assists with preparing and mailing agency communications, managing filing, and supporting front-desk coverage for visitors and incoming calls. Delaney is also assisting with the general "info" email inbox, ensuring emails are routed to the appropriate staff. Her work strengthens the agency's capacity during peak operational periods and supports staff across multiple functional areas. We are grateful to have Delaney with us.

Ross Waddell, Program Operations Coordinator, recently celebrated his one-year anniversary with the Commission. During this past year, Ross has strengthened the agency's relationships with our financial aid partners, has attended several outreach events, providing critical program and general financial aid information to a variety of audiences, and represented the Commission on the College and Career Decision Day planning committee. Ross recently attended the annual New and Intermediate Aid Officers Workshop held by the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) and is eligible to sit for the Student Eligibility professional credential exam offered by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), which he hopes to take and pass in the coming weeks.

Kira Demery, Fiscal Operations Manager, is currently working through the annual year-end reporting process, ensuring the agency remains compliant with all General Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). Thanks to her efforts to streamline and enhance internal financial records keeping, this process, while cumbersome and time-consuming, is already off to a smooth start. Outside of the agency's fiscal responsibilities, Kira is wrapping up the year as Treasurer-Elect for SCASFAA and will be moving into the Treasurer role starting July 1. As a voting member of the

SCASFAA Executive Board, Kira continues to represent the Commission as a leader amongst our peers statewide. Recently, Kira presented at SCASFAA’s New and Intermediate Aid Officers Workshop, co-teaching the Student Eligibility credential preparation session alongside a financial aid administrator from the University of South Carolina.

Zachary Christian, Deputy Director, was recently invited to serve on a panel at the upcoming NASFAA conference, to be held June 29-July 2 in National Harbor, Maryland. The session, titled *Hot Topics in State Financial Aid Policy: What’s Happening Across the States*, will highlight emerging trends and pressing issues shaping state policy, innovative state aid programs, and the role of state and regional associations in advocacy at the state level. Zach will be presenting alongside the Vice President of Federal Relations from SHEEO, the Assistant Director of Government Relations from NASFAA, and a current Director of Financial Aid. This is the second year Zach has been invited to present on this type of panel, and he will represent the Agency and our State well. Additionally, on June 30, Zach will “roll off” the SCASFAA Executive Board after a decade of service to the Association. Elected to the Board as Member at Large while still at Winthrop shortly before joining the Commission, Zach began service on the SCASFAA Board July 1, 2016, and has served in several roles, both elected and appointed, including that of President, during his decade of service to the Association.

Katie Stevens, Executive Director, has been working closely with staff from the Program Management Office and Division of Information Security at the Department of Administration, to address critical business continuity, disaster recovery, and incident response plan requirements to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Agency in the event of information security threats or natural disasters. With some assistance from Zach, Katie has successfully addressed several items and recently distributed the updated Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Plan to all staff. These plans, which are confidential due to the nature of the information contained within them, are to ensure little to no interruptions in service, in the unlikely event an incident takes place. Additionally, Katie has continued building relationships with legislators and staff through a variety of connections and recently participated in the SCICU Legislative Conference, providing attendees with an overview of the Tuition Grants Program’s history and impact.

FAFSA Completion Updates:

The agency’s FAFSA Completion Status Portal continues to be a popular tool for K-12 school counselors throughout the state to access student-level completion data for their enrolled senior classes. The Commission currently has 100 schools who are either using the portal actively or have initiated the process to obtain access. This is up from 40 schools last year and includes 85 traditional public schools, 10 public charter schools, and 5 private schools. This also includes an in-process agreement with the GEAR UP program at the University of South Carolina, which provides services to 26 public schools throughout the state.

The following chart compares the percentage of FAFSA submissions and completions statewide to those schools with access to the FAFSA Completion Status Portal. The schools using the portal tool are outperforming their counterparts statewide by 4.15% in overall submissions and by 4.13% in complete FAFSAs (those with no rejects or errors).

<i>As of June 9, 2026</i>	High Schools using FAFSA Completion Portal	Overall High School Cohort
Total Students Enrolled	13,293	55,638
# Submitted FAFSA	6,344	24,642
% Submitted FAFSA	48.44%	44.29%
# Complete FAFSA (no rejects)	6,281	24,358
% Complete FAFSA (no rejects)	47.91%	43.78%

Agency Training Initiatives:

On April 29, the agency hosted a statewide Tuition Grants training, where Financial Aid Administrators from all 21 of our partnering institutions attended. The training focused on program compliance, best practices for fiscal management, and the importance of communicating across campus when determining student eligibility for funds.

The rest of the training session focused primarily on implementation of the updated state residency regulations, which require all institutions to collect a minimum of four specific documents to verify a student's residency status. Commission Staff, in particular Zachary Christian, have been instrumental in helping our independent colleges understand the new regulations and requirements to ensure their compliance with State Law.