



# SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

*Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.*

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## **AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES**

### **Staff Updates:**

The Tuition Grants Commission welcomed Kira Demery to the staff as the Program Coordinator on January 3, 2023. Kira brings over 15 years of strong customer service and training experience in Retail and Banking to the Commission. In her role as Program Coordinator, Kira serves as the primary liaison to students and to the agency's Financial Aid partners in areas concerning student eligibility and compliant administration of the Program. She is also assisting with many other administrative duties and has quickly proven herself as a strong employee who is quick to comprehend the many nuances of the financial aid profession and state government. As a graduate of Benedict College, Kira understands the importance of an independent higher education.

In 2020, the SC Department of Administration (Admin) provided employees at all State agencies a license for the LinkedIn Learning platform at no cost to the individual employees or their respective agencies. This additional training and professional development platform has been utilized by all Commission staff since becoming available, but especially by Commission Financial Officer Gena Miles. In an effort to increase her skills and knowledge, and to discover ways to allow for increase efficiencies in internal processes, Gena has actively sought out and successfully completed over 20 Courses, Learning Paths, and modules in the system. Gena's dedication to continued professional development has benefited the Agency, and in turn, the students we serve by strengthening agency processes and by actively taking steps to allow for increased efficiencies in day-to-day operations relating to the Agency's financial tasks.

Deputy Director Zachary Christian, in his role as President-Elect of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, recently had the opportunity to advocate for student financial aid issues and programs on Capitol Hill as part of NASFAA's annual leadership and legislative conference. Zachary met with education staffers from the offices of Representative Jeff Duncan and Senator Lindsey Graham.

Executive Director Katie Harrison concluded her term as President of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs in October after the conclusion a very successful annual conference, the Association's first in-person meeting in three years. She continues to serve as part of the leadership planning team for the combined NASSGAP and SHEEO collaboration project to assist state agencies with their FAFSA Simplification efforts.

### **FAFSA Simplification:**

Tuition Grants Commission Staff have been following developments closely and have actively engaged in conversations with the US Department of Education and national organizations like NASSGAP, SHEEO, NCAN, and NASFAA on FAFSA Simplification efforts and issues. The US Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid has indicated that there is a high probability the redesigned FAFSA for the 2024-2025 year will NOT be ready to go live on October 1, 2023, but that it will be ready to launch sometime "during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter" of the year and before January 1, 2024, which is the legal date by which the FAFSA must be available.

This will impact institutions' ability to package need-based aid early, as they have been able to do in the past.

At this time, national estimates indicate that under the new formula, there could be a 30-40% increase in Pell eligible students with predictions that students who currently have EFCs up to \$11,000 will have a corresponding decrease in the new SAI, which would make many students newly eligible. It is estimated that students whose current EFCs are in the \$3,600 range could possibly get the maximum Pell award under the new formula. As an example, a student with a current Pell award of \$3,245 could potentially see an increase to the maximum Pell award (currently \$7,395) under the new SAI formula.

A much smaller percentage of students will see their Pell eligibility reduced or eliminated under the new formula. This will primarily impact students with multiple family members in college and those whose parents will now be required to report the net worth of family farms or small businesses owned as asset values on the updated FAFSA.

There are possible implications for institutional aid, especially if indexed to Pell grant and/or financial need. Institutions may need to be prepared to adjust financial aid packaging philosophies or formulas to accommodate higher financial need and possibly to ensure returning students are not negatively impacted by these changes.

A NASFAA Survey conducted on February 2<sup>nd</sup> shows that 10% of institutions believe they are "not at all on track" in their preparedness efforts, and 42% of respondents stated their institution's senior leadership has been somewhat or very engaged in the process, meaning 58% answered that senior leadership, including their President, was either "somewhat" or "completely" unengaged in discussions and planning efforts surrounding FAFSA Simplification.

**Student Information System:** Agency staff have been working closely with the State Procurement Office throughout the RFP process for a new Student Information System. After reviewing proposals and demonstrations, a vendor has been chosen to build a new web-based system to administer the Tuition Grants Program and to house the electronic FAFSA information for all State residents. The State Procurement Office is currently in the negotiations phase with the vendor – when this stage is completed, the agency will enter a contract with the vendor and will begin the process of working closely with them to develop system requirements, assisting throughout the system build, and the testing and deployment stages. A more definite timeline for implementation can be shared after the contract is signed and the work begins.

### **House Legislative Oversight Committee Process:**

As previously disclosed to all college presidents and other interested parties, the Tuition Grants Commission has been selected as one of eight state agencies to undergo an extensive and formal review by the House Legislative Oversight Committee. A public input meeting was held at the State House on March 9<sup>th</sup> to allow members of the public to provide testimony concerning the agency. Commission staff would like to thank Scott Cochran, Commission Chair, and Jeff Perez, SCICU President and CEO, for attending and for providing positive remarks in support of the agency and the Tuition Grants Program. The remarks were well received by members of the Oversight Committee.

The agency will continue to cooperate with the House Oversight Committee staff to provide all requested information throughout the review process and will conclude with a formal presentation to the Oversight Committee at a later date.