



Katherine H. Harrison
Executive Director

AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Staff Updates:

The Tuition Grants Commission staff continues to participate in state, regional, and national trainings, and professional development opportunities to ensure our agency has updated and relative knowledge and skills required to successfully administer the Program. Kira Demery, Program Coordinator, has obtained additional certifications through the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) and is scheduled to attend the SC Association of Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) New Aid Administrators Workshop in April. In addition, she has applied to participate in the LeadSC Program, a year-long training program for emerging leaders in state government offered by the SC Department of Administration.

Gena Miles, Financial Officer, researched and implemented more efficient ways of processing and requesting disbursements of grants as part of the implementation of *myTG*. The updated process allows Tuition Grants disbursements to be made with up to all four sources of funds (State, Interest, Lottery, Endowment) on a single disbursement roster. Further efficiencies have allowed the Commission to disburse grants as frequently as on a weekly basis at the request of colleges' business offices. This change has helped ensure eligible students receive their grants funding as quickly as possible after certification is complete.

Deputy Director Zachary Christian began his term as President of the SC Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) in July 2023, and has had a very successful year thus far. He presided over the annual conference in October, boasting one of the highest numbers of attendees in recent history. Zachary continues to be active on the Executive Board of the regional association, SASFAA, as a voting member, and recently presented at the annual conference for the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP).

Executive Director Katie Harrison concluded her term as Past President of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) in October and was immediately appointed to a two-year term as Conference Co-Chair for the Association. In this role, she will plan and executive NASSGAP's 2024 and 2025 conferences, to be held in Portland, Maine, and Washington, DC, respectively. Katie 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.

The Tuition Grants Commission was recently recognized during the quarterly LinkedIn Learning Sub-administrators meeting for 100% of staff successfully completing professional development courses within a 90-day period. Each meeting, agencies are recognized through various metrics on a leaderboard. The next highest percentage of an agency's staff completing training was recorded at 33%. The South Carolina Department of Administration (Admin) has renewed the State's license with LinkedIn Learning and continues to promote the use of this online training platform at no cost to the individual employees or their respective agencies.

FAFSA Updates:

The Tuition Grants Commission, along with every other state higher education agency and every institution of higher education, has been grappling with the unintended consequences and processing slowdowns resulting from FAFSA Simplification, as the Federal Department of Education's rollout of the new 2024-2025 FAFSA has been significantly delayed and wrought with troubles, frustrations, and inconsistencies.

At this time, the Commission is waiting for ED to begin releasing ISIRs (electronic FAFSA application records), which is scheduled to begin this week. Until that time, the agency has no way to compare application numbers to prior years or to determine how many new and returning students have been able to successfully complete their 2024-2025 FAFSAs. This inhibits our ability to make projections on Tuition Grant awards with any level of accuracy. In the meantime, the agency has completed all the steps necessary to receive the ISIRs when they are released, including the submission of the new participation agreement, setup of the new transmission mailbox, and the sharing of vital test file information with the system vendor to ensure our ability to receive and process applications without further unnecessary delays.

Launch of myTG:

Under the leadership of Deputy Director Zachary Christian, agency staff worked diligently and efficiently with the development team at Nelnet Diversified Solutions to help design, build, test, and deploy the new Student Information System, branded as *myTG*, to much success. In order to have the system operational for the Fall 2023 semester, this work was completed in an impressive 6-month period. The new web-based system has enhanced the administration of the Tuition Grants Program in numerous ways, both from the agency and the college financial aid office perspective. Thanks to increased efficiencies, the Commission disbursed 100% of its fall awards, including to non-traditional students in block programs and to students whose eligibility was determined after the November 15th eligibility deadline, prior to December 1st, a 2-3 week improvement over prior years.

Thanks to the financial aid offices for their quick adaptation to the new system and their willingness to learn and embrace a new way to administer the Program alongside our staff!

House Legislative Oversight Committee Process Update:

As previously disclosed to all college presidents and other interested parties, the Tuition Grants Commission was selected last year as one of eight state agencies to undergo an extensive and formal review by the House Legislative Oversight Committee. Public input was gathered regarding the agencies involved in 2023, and the Tuition Grants Commission completed all applicable requests and reports to the HLOC in March 2023. Due to unexpected delays in their review of another state agency, the HLOC has not yet begun their review of the Tuition Grants Commission, but has been in communication with agency leadership and will inform the agency when additional actions, including legislative hearings, are required.