



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Professional Association Involvement and Staff Updates:

Tuition Grants Commission staff continue to participate in state, regional, and national trainings, and professional development opportunities to ensure our agency has updated and relevant knowledge and skills required to successfully administer the Program:

In October 2025, Katie and Zachary attended the annual conference of the National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP), held in Alexandria, VA.

In November 2025, Commission Staff attended the annual conference of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA), where a special concurrent session was held for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, enabling Commission Staff to provide timely and specific Program information to conference attendees from our participating colleges. All information and material shared during the session was sent out through our full distribution list for those unable to attend the Annual Conference.

In February, Katie Stevens attended the Management & Leadership pathway at the annual Leadership & Legislative Conference held by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), in Washington, D.C.

Also in February, Zachary, Kira, and Ross attended the annual conference of the Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SASFAA), held in Charlotte, NC.

Kira Demery, Fiscal Operations Manager, has found ways to increase Agency efficiency regarding refund, disbursement, and internal reconciliation procedures. These updates have helped to better align the Agency's internal procedures with the South Carolina Enterprise Information System (SCEIS) best practices. Kira has identified and recommended procedural changes where necessary to mitigate risk and strengthen the Agency's fiscal integrity. Kira continues to attend Statewide meetings on Budget Procedures, Employee Benefits, and Information Technology, while also working to build rapport with Business Office personnel at our participating colleges. She has also worked with several more colleges, enabling them to return funds electronically, should they choose, ensuring a timelier refund process. As Treasurer-Elect of SCASFAA, Kira has used her knowledge and skills, while working closely alongside the current SCASFAA Treasurer to recommend policy changes to the SCASFAA Executive Board. Her continued involvement on the Board has been a tremendous benefit to the Agency.

Ross Waddell, Program Operations Coordinator, has nearly survived his first full year with the Commission. Despite only working with the Program since May 2025, Ross has quickly found his footing and has helped the Agency with critical outreach efforts, attending and presenting at nine "financial aid night" events, providing Program and other financial aid information to various audiences. He is currently serving on the planning committee for College and Career Decision Day, an annual event at the State House that is spearheaded by the Commission on

Higher Education and celebrates the accomplishments of each year's high school graduating class. His warm personality and quick attention to detail have enabled him to build a solid rapport with our financial aid partners, students, and families. Ross, alongside Kira who formerly served in his position, recommended significant process enhancements for student appeals, which have gone into effect with the 2026-27 award year appeal cycle. These changes should help streamline the internal appeal process and guide students through the initial submission of appeal documentation. Ross has also taken charge of the current digitization of Agency records project to prepare for transmittal to State Archives.

Zachary Christian, Deputy Director, presented a session titled "Advocacy by the Numbers: Turning Grant Data into Legislative Action" at both the annual NASSGAP and SASFAA conferences, sharing information on the agency's internal geocoding process used to support both SCICU's letter writing campaign efforts and the direct communication sent from the Agency to all members of the General Assembly. Additionally, at SASFAA, Zachary presented a session titled "Searching for Quality Live Data: SQL for All," where he provided information and resources to support financial aid administrators in understanding the basics of SQL and how to work with their Financial Aid Management Systems to retrieve necessary data and reports. In October, Zachary began the start of his two-year term as Co-Conference Chair on the Executive Committee of NASSGAP. He will support the Association in planning the next two annual conferences, set to be held in Stateline, NV (October 2026), and Nashville, TN (October 2027).

Katie Stevens, Executive Director, wrapped up a decade-long tenure on the Executive Committee for NASSGAP in October. During her time with the organization, she served as Membership Chair, Secretary, Conference Chair, and President. During the October conference, NASSGAP presented her with their Distinguished Service Award. During the recent NASFAA Leadership & Legislative Conference, she met with staff members from the offices of Senator Lindsey Graham, and Representatives Joe Wilson, James Clyburn, and Russell Fry, advocating for support of Pell Grant funding, elimination of student loan origination fees, and other areas of importance for South Carolina students. Ms. Stevens also participated as a resource expert on a recent College Affordability panel hosted by the Hunt Institute as part of their State Policy Fellows program.

FAFSA Completion Status Information Portal Updates:

For the Class of 2026, school counselors at a total of 63 high schools are actively using the Tuition Grants Commission's FAFSA Completion Status Information Portal available through myTG. As of March 3, 2026, these schools are seeing an average FAFSA Submission Rate of 37.22% and an average FAFSA Completion Rate of 36.73%, compared to the statewide Submission Rate of 33.79% and Completion Rate of 33.37%, representing an increase of 3.43% and 3.36%, respectively.

As the Tuition Grants Commission continues onboarding additional schools throughout the cycle, we will continue monitoring and highlighting the success of this portal, as school counselors work to encourage their seniors to complete and submit their FAFSA forms.

Agency Outreach Initiatives:

In December 2025, the Commission launched a new online Data Center, designed to make Tuition Grants Program information more accessible and easier to use. The Data Center brings together FAFSA completion dashboards, recent Annual and Accountability Reports, and

historical Program data in one place, with interactive tools that make trends easy to review. Special thanks to Zachary for his work in planning and developing this new resource, and to Ross for ensuring the FAFSA completion dashboard is updated weekly.

For the Spring 2026 Semester, the Commission is fortunate to have Lily Oyebade, a sophomore business administration major at Columbia International University, join the team as a Communications and Outreach Intern. Lily has quickly added value to agency operations by designing social media content, working on messaging campaigns related to the application deadline, and reviewing institutional websites to ensure all information related to the Program is accurate. She also had the opportunity to join agency staff at the State House for the budget hearing to the House Ways and Means Higher Education Subcommittee and assisted with the annual communication to all State legislators concerning the impact of Tuition Grants in their districts. During the last half of the semester, Lily will be working on a marketing and communications plan geared toward adult learners and non-completers, informing them of funding options and opportunities to reenroll to complete their degrees. This project is a direct recommendation from the House Oversight Committee's study of the agency and aligns with the statewide goal to have 60% of adults in South Carolina to hold a quality postsecondary credential by 2030.