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More Louisiana Students Qualifying for Federal Academic Competitiveness Grants

Louisiana college students are qualifying for the new federal Academic Competitiveness (AC) tuition grant at a higher rate than the national average.

First- and second-year college students who are receiving federal Pell need-based tuition grants *and* have completed an acceptably rigorous high school curriculum can qualify for the supplemental federal grant and receive an annual award of up to \$750 the first year and \$1,300 the second year.

“The success Louisiana college students are experiencing in qualifying for this excellent new program is clear evidence that we risk excluding many of our best and brightest when we don’t make every effort to provide access to our moderate- and low-income students,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph Savoie, who reported on the program at today’s joint meeting of the Board of Regents and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

In Louisiana, 30% of first-time, full-time Pell recipients received the AC grant, compared to 25.6% nationally. Nearly nine percent of Louisiana’s recent high school graduates received an AC grant, compared to 5.3% nationally.

For Louisiana students, there are three ways to receive credit for the completion of a “rigorous” high school curriculum. Staff from the Board of Regents and Department of Education worked with the U.S. Department of Education to approve the following as Louisiana programs of study approved for the AC grants:

1. The TOPS/Regents High School Core Curriculum
2. The Academic Endorsement to the Standard Diploma
3. The Career and Technical Endorsements, for those students who have completed the TOPS/Regents High School Core Curriculum.

Notably, the success story is not limited to the AC grants alone. In the fall of 2006, 7,400 students enrolled in Louisiana colleges and universities qualified for a total of almost \$8 million in federal tuition assistance over and above the basic Pell grant, including the AC grant program and another new federal program called SMART (Science and Mathematics Access to Retain

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Talent). Under SMART, college students in their third and fourth year of study in an approved science or math degree program who are receiving Pell may qualify for a grant and receive an annual award up to \$4,000.

The Department of Education's Student Transcript System, developed in partnership with LOSFA and Regents, verifies a student's completion of the approved high school program of study providing for consistent and timely certification by colleges and universities' financial aid offices. Louisiana is one of a handful of states with this capability.

"With TOPS, the new Louisiana Go Grant, institutional aid, and the federal grant programs, low-income students who take the right high school curriculum can have their college expenses fully paid," Savoie said.

The US Department of Education has set a goal to double the number of students receiving the Academic Competitiveness and SMART grants by 2010-11. The Department of Education is encouraging states, colleges, and high schools to promote AC and SMART Grants because completing a rigorous high school program has been shown to be the best way to increase college readiness, reduce remediation and increase college completion rates for low-income students.