

State Financial Aid for Higher Education

Overview

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) acts as a clearinghouse for financial aid information for students and their families. The HECB is a state agency that among other duties is charged with administering state financial aid and coordinating state and federal aid programs.

The state provides funding for public institutions to offer higher education to state citizens at tuition rates significantly below the cost of providing these services. Approximately 11 percent of the state general fund expenditures go for support for the operation of public colleges and universities. Tuition covers 53 percent of the cost of instruction at the research institutions (University of Washington and Washington State University), while tuition covers 41 percent of the cost at regional universities and 38 percent of the cost at community and technical colleges.

The state also provides financial assistance directly to students. The state earmarks over \$198 million annually for financial aid. The largest assistance program is the State Need Grant, and it is designed to increase access for low-income citizens to higher education. Other aid is available through the Educational Opportunity Grant and State Work Study program.

The state also uses direct financial assistance to reward student achievement with the Washington Scholars program and the Washington Award for Vocational Excellence. Some programs also focus on assisting students to prepare for employment in fields which are important to the state. For example, those seeking credentials necessary to work in select teaching and health care jobs are eligible for assistance.

State Need Grant

The State Need Grant was created in 1969. Its statutory authority is found in RCW 28B.10.800 and rules in Chapter 250-20 WAC. The State Need Grant program has been updated and amended since its inception, but remains true to the intent of the 1969 Legislature by making financial aid assistance available to low-income students that want to go to college.

To be eligible for a State Need Grant, a student's family income cannot exceed 70 percent of the state's median family income -- about \$50,500 for a family of four in 2008. Students can use the grants at public two- and four-year schools, and at many independent colleges and career schools in Washington. Grant amounts vary by type of institution attended, but in 2008 range roughly from \$2,500 to \$5,800. If a family's income does not exceed 50 percent of the state median family income, a student may access the full grant for a particular type of institution. An income between 51 and 65 percent qualifies a student for 75 percent of the grant level. Those at incomes between 66 and 70 percent (\$50,500 for a family of four) are eligible for half of the grant. A student may remain eligible for a need grant for up to five years or 125 percent of the published length of the program in which the student is enrolled.

The State Need Grant Program is administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board. In 2007 the state will spend \$181 million in state funds and \$2 million in federal money to help about 68,000 students go to college.

Opportunity Grant

In 2007, the legislature established the Opportunity Grant administered by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. The grants are for students whose income falls at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level and are enrolled in an approved program of study. The approved programs focus on occupational or vocational training leading to degrees or certification in careers with demonstrable shortages.

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Tuition Waivers

State law grants authority for higher education institutions to waive all or a portion of tuition for certain types of students and for various purposes. State-supported waivers are those where an institution does not directly forego revenue because state general fund money is added to the institution's base budget to make up for the waived tuition. Most state-supported waivers are permissive rather than mandatory, and institutions can choose to waive part or all of tuition and fees.

To keep the waivers at a predictable funding level, state law limits public institutions to a percentage of enrollees whose tuition may be waived.

	Statutory Tuition Waiver Cap
UW	21%
WSU	20%
Central	10%
Eastern	11%
Western	10%
TESC	10%
CTC System	35%

Currently more than 25 kinds of waivers are authorized, and for fiscal year 2004 institutions granted total or partial tuition waivers for 138,000 students. The law authorizes various waivers, but the institutions make the decision about who will be given a waiver.

Examples of state-supported waivers that institutions may award fully or partially:

- Children of firefighters or police who die in action

- Those over 19 in courses to finish high school

- Foreign students

- Graduate students with graduate service appointments

- Eligible veterans/National Guard

- Dislocated forest products workers/spouses

- Needy students

- A small number are "discretionary waivers" which institutions may use for any institution priorities.

Institutions may waive out-of-state tuition rates for:

- Those from surrounding states and British Columbia with which Washington has a reciprocity agreement

- Foreign students

Institutions may waive tuition without state reimbursement for:

- Long-term unemployed

- Certain veterans who did not serve on foreign soil

- Those 60 years and older, but on a space-available basis

- State employees, but on a space-available basis

For complete information on waivers, RCW 28B.15 is the law containing these authorizations.