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## Graduate School Loans Testimonials

Lisa G., NC

"Graduate School Loans made it so easy for me to take care of my educational debt. I did it all online and now I'm saving thousands of dollars on my loans!"

## THE FOCUS IS NOW ON COLLEGE PERFORMANCE

- SHAILEJA MAMMEN

Congress and the U.S. Department of Education are considering moves that would force colleges to publish information about their performance.

At the same time, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges are advocating a "voluntary system of accountability." The two public-college groups have been working on their voluntary accountability system for more than a year.

A draft template for the voluntary reporting system requests information on graduation and retention rates, financial aid, tuition and other costs, and student performance based on measures of learning outcomes. The leaders of these groups expect the draft to be approved by the end of November.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges together have close to 600 members. The presidents of both associations are optimistic about the acceptance of the voluntary system of accountability, as officials from a large number of universities participated on the committees that worked to draft the template.

The information that the draft accountability system requires to be made public is already available in various forms. However, the voluntary

reporting system would require colleges to adopt one of three standard measures of student learning—the Collegiate Learning Assessment, the Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress, or the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency. The colleges would have to report their students' scores on these tests.

The two associations believe it will be more productive and effective to allow colleges to report voluntarily than it would be to impose measures that seek to enforce compliance.

Some argue that attempts to measure student learning through standardized methods will reduce experimentation and hinder the use of learning portfolios. There are also fears that trying to measure all students with the same yardstick may not prove useful.

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities is also working on this issue and has developed a sample accountability template in response to findings from a focus group of students, parents, and lawmakers. The information disclosed in this template would include tuition costs, financial aid, and details about student life.

In light of both private and public colleges' general acceptance of a need for public accountability, the task of standardizing measurements of student learning and college performance seems as if it will be easier than expected.

## OREGON STUDENTS TO BENEFIT FROM INCREASED STUDENT AID

- NIHIT AURORA

Students in Oregon will now be eligible for increased financial aid following the passage of new legislation by the Oregon State Legislature. The Oregon State Assistance Commission (OSAC) is responsible for disbursing student aid in the state of Oregon. Created by the Oregon legislature in 1959, the commission administers a range of state-funded and privately funded aid programs

for the benefit of Oregon students interested in postsecondary education.

The commission emphasizes improving the standard of education in Oregon to enhance the value, integrity, and diversity of college programs throughout the state. The commission's main role is to develop and administer a variety of federal and

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state-based scholarships as well as a state-funded need-based program. OSAC also runs the ASPIRE program, which consists of volunteers who advise high school students on postsecondary education. It also provides assistance to unaccredited colleges and educational institutions in other states.

Recently, the Oregon legislature approved a \$109 million college financial aid plan for OSAC. This move may increase the amount of available student aid to more than twice the current amount. The bill has gone on to the state senate, where it is expected to be passed soon.

The increase, which is slated to be implemented in the fall of 2008, will increase the number of students who benefit from state-funded financial aid in Oregon. The funding will also cover provisions such as daycare costs for low-income parents who need to attend college.

Currently, more than 25,000 Oregon students are eligible for financial aid each year. The passage of this new legislation will mean that more than 32,000 students will be eligible for financial assistance from OSAC next year.

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## NEWS IN BRIEF

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### **UNC IMPLEMENTS STRICTER FINANCIAL AID RULES**

The University of North Carolina has implemented tighter guidelines for its financial aid officers at its 16 campuses. The new rules are expected to prevent potential conflicts of interest. Earlier, New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo found that schools were accepting gifts and favors in exchange for recommending lenders on their preferred-lender lists. According to the new guidelines for the UNC system, financial aid officers will not be able to receive any gifts from student loan providers. The rules also call for more transparency in the school's financial aid system. Financial aid officers will have to provide students' families with the names of three or more lenders who provide the best deals on educational loans based on interest rates, customer service, and fees, among other factors.

### **FFEL PARTICIPANTS SAY AUCTION NOT A GOOD IDEA**

Proposals requiring student loan providers to participate in an auction if they want to underwrite student loans met with criticism from Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program participants. At a roundtable discussion, FFEL lenders said the proposal, if implemented, would drive small lenders out of the student loan business. Although the move may decrease the number of lenders, the proposals may not have a significant impact as far as students are concerned. Department of Education data show that 32 lenders control 90% of the market, and Sallie Mae currently controls about 40% of outstanding FFEL Program debt.

### **HILLARY CLINTON'S STUDENT LENDER PROPOSALS APPROVED BY HELP COMMITTEE**

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton announced that key components of the measures she introduced to tackle the student loan controversy were included in legislation passed

by the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee. The measures were part of the Higher Education Access Reconciliation Act and the Higher Education Amendments of 2007, which are slated to generate \$17.3 billion in further benefits for students. Provisions that were included in the bill from Clinton's Student Borrower Bill of Rights include "assistance for borrowers with disabilities," "an income-sensitive repayment program," and a requirement that "lenders...provide timely information about their loans to borrowers." Clinton's Non-Traditional Student Success Act contributed features such as "ending the work penalty," "support for parents," and "support for foster youth" to the legislation.

### **UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO-BOULDER ANNOUNCES LARGEST FINANCIAL AID ALLOCATION, INCREASES TUITION**

University of Colorado-Boulder has announced the largest financial aid allocation in its 130-year history. Yet to be approved by the University of Colorado Board of Regents, the \$6.6 million budget for fiscal year 2007-2008 was introduced following a tuition hike. For the next academic year, the campus is planning to offer a one-time \$200 scholarship to every resident undergraduate student. Full-time resident undergraduates at the school's College of Arts and Sciences will see an average tuition increase of about \$332 per semester. The tuition hike also increases the number of credit hours students must take to qualify for full-time status.

### **FLORIDA GOVERNOR CHANGES STANCE, GOES AHEAD WITH TUITION INCREASE**

Governor Charlie Crist of Florida has made a surprising reversal of his stance on tuition hikes; he has passed a bill that allows University of Florida and two other top research universities in the state to increase tuition by almost 40%

over the next few years. The differential tuition bill was not expected to become law in light of the fact that in May the governor vetoed a 5% tuition increase for state universities. The legislation permits the University of South Florida to raise tuition for Florida undergraduates by as much as 30% above

the base tuition rate, provided tuition does not increase more than 15% in a year. The University of Florida and Florida State University will be allowed to charge in-state undergraduates as much as 40% more than the base rate.