

Academic Competitiveness Grants (ver. 3a)

Background

On February 8, 2006 President Bush signed into law the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 (HERA). Among many provisions, the law establishes a new grant program effective July 1, 2006 for first and second year college students. All colleges participating in the Federal Pell Grant program must also participate in the Academic Competitiveness Grant (AC Grant) program.

Student Eligibility

An eligible student may receive an Academic Competitiveness Grant (AC Grant) of up to \$750 for the first academic year of study and up to \$1,300 for the second academic year of study. To be eligible for each academic year, a student must:

- Be a U.S. citizen;
- Be a Federal Pell Grant recipient;
- Be enrolled full-time in an associates degree program;
- Be enrolled in the first or second academic year of his or her program of study at a two-year or four-year degree-granting institution;
- Have completed a rigorous secondary school program of study (after January 1, 2006, if a first-year student, and after January 1, 2005, if a second-year student);
- If a first-year student, not have been previously enrolled (matriculated) in an undergraduate program; and
- If a second-year student, have at least a cumulative 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale for the first academic year.

Rigorous secondary school program of study

The Secretary of Education is recognizing the set of options identified below as rigorous secondary school programs of study for at least the next two academic years (2006-07 and 2007-08).

- *The State Scholars Initiative requirements.* A student may complete the courses required under the State Scholars Initiative (4 years English; 3 years Mathematics – algebra 1, geometry and algebra 2; 3 years Science – biology, chemistry, physics; 3.5 years Social Studies – chosen from U.S. history (1), world history (1), world geography (1), economics (0.5) or government (0.5); and 2 years World Language (same language). This program, supported by Congress, establishes a required set of courses that is patterned after the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. High schools currently participating in the program are Wilbur Cross High School and Metropolitan Business High School, both in New Haven, and Danbury High School. For more information, visit <http://www.ctscholars.org/intro.htm>.

- *A set of courses similar to those required under the State Scholars Initiative.* A student may demonstrate that he or she has completed a set of courses which includes four years of English; three years of Mathematics – including algebra 1 and a higher level class such as algebra II, geometry or data analysis and statistics; three years of science – including one year each of at least two of the following courses (biology, chemistry, physics); three years of social studies, and one year of a language other than English.
- *Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and test scores.* A student may demonstrate that he or she has taken two AP or IB courses and received passing scores on the AP (3 or better) or IB (4 or better) tests.
- In addition, a State can establish, or request recognition of, a new or different rigorous secondary school program of study and submit information on that program to the Department for recognition for this academic year. The Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) submitted a proposal to the Secretary of Education and received approval of 2 rigorous program options.
 1. For Connecticut Technical High School Graduates
A specific set of courses “similar to those required under the State Scholars Initiative” AND achievement of standard on the corresponding National Occupational Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) trade certification. (replaces the 1 year foreign language requirement).
 2. Dual-Enrollment Program Participants
There are three major programs providing dual enrollment currently in the state: Early College Experience (UConn program), High School Partnership, and Tech Prep. Students must have completed a minimum of two courses in the "core curriculum" and receive a grade of 3.0 or better in each course.
- Home-schooled students are eligible. Parents/Guardians must provide documentation as to completion of “rigorous program of study.”
- GED recipients are not eligible.

Implications for the Connecticut Community Colleges

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that as many as 40% of current Pell Grant recipients may also be eligible to receive AC Grants. For the 2005-06 Award Year, the Community Colleges had approximately 13,000 Pell Grant recipients; so perhaps as many as 5200 students may be eligible for AC Grants during the upcoming 2006-07 Award Year. Among other items, the Community Colleges must:

- Establish common policies and business practices in the financial aid offices for the administration of AC Grants
- Establish common policies, data definitions, and business practices in admission, records, and/or registrar offices for the confirmation of a student's completion of a rigorous secondary school program of study
- Review, test, and perform necessary software upgrades to the Banner Information System to accommodate the management of the AC Grant program. SunGard HE on July 1 released significant new feature-laden software for the Banner Financial Aid System. We must review the new software and determine how much customization is necessary given our unique 12 college environment.