



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



STUDENT ELIGIBILITY OPTIONS FOR NEW ACADEMIC GRANTS

May 2, 2006

"We wanted potential college students to know as soon as possible if they were eligible to receive these grants. We used some common-sense measures to determine the options that would be available to students and states."

-- U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings

To meet the growing need for improved math and science instruction, on Feb. 8, 2006 President Bush signed into law two new student grant programs -- the Academic Competitiveness Grants and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grants. Today, the U.S. Department of Education announced guidelines to make these grants available to college students in the 2006-07 academic year.

\$790 million is set aside this school year for these grants, created by the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005. The grants will encourage students to take more challenging courses in high school – making success in college more likely, according to research – and to pursue college majors in high demand in the global economy, such as science, mathematics, technology, engineering and critical foreign languages.

- General eligibility requirements: to qualify, students must be (1) eligible for Federal Pell Grants; (2) United States citizens; and (3) full-time students.

Academic Competitiveness Grants will be available to students for their first and second years of college.

- Up to \$750 will be awarded to eligible first-year students, and up to \$1,300 for second-year students.
- Students must have completed a rigorous secondary school program of study as established by a state or local educational agency and recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
- Students must be enrolled or accepted in a two- or four-year degree-granting institution of higher education.
- First-year students must not have been previously enrolled in a program of undergraduate education and must have graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2006.
- Second-year students must have graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2005, and have had at least a cumulative 3.0 grade-point average (GPA) during their first year of college.

National SMART Grants will be available to students for their third and fourth years of college.

- Up to \$4,000 will be awarded to eligible students.
- Students must be enrolled in a four-year degree-granting institution of higher education.
- Students will be eligible if they are pursuing a major in mathematics, science (including physical, life, and computer sciences), technology, engineering, or a critical foreign language.
- Students must have at least a cumulative 3.0 GPA in college.

Students in public or private schools, home-schooled, or enrolled overseas in Department of Defense schools have several options by which to demonstrate successful completion of a rigorous secondary school program of study, thereby establishing their eligibility for Academic Competitiveness Grants. For the 2006-07 academic year, the following options will be immediately recognized as demonstrating successful completion of a rigorous program of study:

- Receiving advanced or honors diplomas currently offered by States;
- Completing a State Scholars Initiative program;
- Completing a set of course requirements that is similar to the State Scholars requirements; and
- Achieving a specified score on Advanced Placement / International Baccalaureate tests after course completion.

For more information, visit www.ed.gov or call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

All States have the option of identifying additional secondary school programs of study for the Secretary to recognize as rigorous.

- States wishing to submit a secondary school program of study for recognition by the Secretary of Education must do so by June 1, 2006, to be considered for the 2006-07 academic year.
- States should demonstrate how their program meets the definition of a rigorous program of study.
- States should also submit evidence that input on these proposals was received from the Governor, a State Educational Agency, appropriate higher education officials and the business community.
- If a State does not submit a proposal by June 1, 2006, it indicates a choice to use the options immediately recognized for the 2006-07 year.

For National SMART Grants, federal guidelines will provide students and institutions of higher education with information about which eligible postsecondary majors in math, science, technology, engineering and critical foreign languages will qualify students for grants.

- Guidelines were posted on April 6, 2005, to the Federal Student Aid website:
<http://www.ifap.ed.gov/dpccletters/GEN0604.html>
- A list of eligible majors will be posted today at <http://www.ifap.ed.gov>

The Department has moved quickly to get funds to students by making these options available for the 2006-07 academic year.

- **Feb. 1, 2006** Congress passes the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 as part of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005.
- **Feb. 8, 2006** President Bush signs Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 into law.
- **April 5, 2006** The U.S. Department of Education explains the process for administering grants to institutions of higher education through a letter posted on the Department's website.
- **May 2, 2006** The U.S. Department of Education announces guidelines on how students will qualify as having successfully completed a rigorous secondary school program of study.
- **May 2006** Final regulations for Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants are expected to be published in the Federal Register & posted to the Federal Student Aid website.
- **June 1, 2006** Deadline for States to establish and submit to the Secretary of Education an alternate rigorous secondary school program of study for recognition in the 2006-07 academic year.
- **Late June 2006** States, colleges and students will receive notice of programs that have been recognized as rigorous for grant purposes by the Secretary of Education for the 2006-07 academic year.
- **July 1, 2006** Potentially eligible students will be notified via email and regular mail that they should submit additional information to the Department of Education to determine Academic Competitiveness Grant eligibility.
- **Fall 2006** Institutions of higher education will verify student eligibility using records of high school performance. Student aid will be disbursed.
- **Nov. 1, 2006** Deadline for States to establish and submit to the Secretary of Education additional rigorous secondary school programs of study for recognition in the 2007-08 academic year.
- **January 2007** States receive notice of rigorous secondary school programs of study that have been recognized by the Secretary of Education for the 2007-08 academic year.

More information on Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants can be found at:
www.ed.gov