



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Information For Students About *Academic Competitiveness* and *National SMART* Grants

July 2006

On Feb. 8, 2006, President Bush signed into law two new student grant programs -- the Academic Competitiveness (AC) Grants and National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grants, which were 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. In addition to the Pell Grant amount, **up to \$750** will be awarded to eligible first-year AC Grant students, and **up to \$1,300** to second-year AC Grant students. **Up to \$4,000** will be awarded to eligible National SMART Grant students for each year in addition to the Pell Grant funds. Students and others can go to www.federalstudentaid.ed.gov to learn more about these new student aid grant programs.

For AC Grants, students --

- Must apply for financial aid by submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and have been determined to be eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. Students who have not yet submitted a FAFSA may do so online at www.fafsa.ed.gov;
- Must be a U.S. Citizen;
- Must be enrolled in a two- or four-year degree program; and
- Must be enrolled fulltime.

In addition –

- Students must be in their first or second academic year of a two- or four-year degree program;
- First-year students must have completed high school on or after January 1, 2006;
- Second-year students must have completed high school on or after January 1, 2005;
- All AC Grant students must have completed a rigorous high school program of study as designated by their state; and
- For a second-year AC Grant, students must have a grade point average (GPA) from their first year of at least 3.0.

Starting on July 1, first- and second-year students who have already completed their FAFSA and who may be eligible for an AC Grant will receive an email or regular mailing from the Department of Education's Federal Student Aid (FSA) office. Applicants will be provided with a link to a secure website where they can learn more about the AC Grant program and provide additional information to determine eligibility.

Applicants without access to the Internet will be able to call **1-800-4FEDAID**, toll-free, to provide the additional information. New FAFSA filers will be provided with the opportunity to submit the additional information at the time they complete their FAFSA online. After students log on to the website using their FSA-PIN (or call the toll-free number) they will be asked a few simple questions about their high school course of study, including some questions specific to their state.

A student is eligible for an AC Grant if –

- The student completed one of his or her state's designated secondary school programs of study, as noted on the website; or
- The student has taken and passed the tests for at least two Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses; or
- The student has completed a high school course of study with at least –
 - Four years of high school English;
 - Three years of high school math, including Algebra I and another higher level math course;
 - Three years of high school science, which must include two years of biology, chemistry or physics;
 - Three years of high school social studies; and
 - One year of high school foreign language.

The information provided by the student on the website (or over the phone) will be sent by FSA to the financial aid office at the student's college or university. While students will receive an on-screen confirmation of their submission, a grant is not confirmed until eligibility is verified by the institution of higher education. Note also that some colleges and universities may determine their student's eligibility without waiting for the information to be sent to them by FSA.

For National SMART Grants, students –

- Must apply for financial aid by submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and have been determined to be eligible for a Federal Pell Grant. Students who have not yet submitted a FAFSA may do so online at www.fafsa.ed.gov;
- Must be a U.S. Citizen;
- Must be enrolled in a four-year degree program; and
- Must be enrolled fulltime.

In addition –

- Students must be in their third or fourth academic year of a four-year degree program;
- Students must be pursuing a major in mathematics, science (including physical, life, and computer sciences), technology, engineering, or a critical foreign language, such as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Russian; and
- Students must have a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.0.

Financial aid officers at four-year degree-granting colleges and universities will be able to determine which of their Pell Grant students are eligible for a National SMART Grant. There is no need for the student to provide any information beyond what was submitted with their FAFSA.