



SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

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AGENCY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Staff Updates:

The Tuition Grants Commission staff continues to participate in state, regional, and national trainings, and professional development opportunities to ensure our agency has updated and relative knowledge and skills required to successfully administer the Program.

Upon the retirement of Commission Financial Officer Gena Miles in August, Kira Demery was promoted to the role of Fiscal Operations Coordinator. In April, Kira will complete her time in the LeadSC Program, a training program offered by the SC Department of Administration (Admin) for emerging leaders in state government. As part of this program, Kira has worked closely with individuals from other state agencies, shadowed Government Relations personnel through their workings at the State House, met with state legislators and the Governor, and has learned the inner workings of State government. Kira was also recently elected as the Treasurer-Elect for the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) and will begin the first of her two-year service on the SCASFAA Board as an elected officer on July 1st.

Shay Shealy West joined the Commission Staff as Program Operations Coordinator in October. Shay brings her experience working with the South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (SCICU) to the Commission, while strengthening relationships with the colleges and universities participating in the Tuition Grants Program. Shay is currently serving as a committee member on the SCASFAA Communications Committee.

Deputy Director Zachary Christian earned the FAAC® designation from the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators' accredited Certified Financial Aid Administrator® Program in September. Including Zachary, there are only 20 aid administrators in the State who currently hold this designation. In February, Zachary traveled to Washington, D.C., to attend the annual NASFAA Leadership & Legislative Conference & Expo, where he organized Capitol Hill visits for a group of aid administrators from South Carolina. The group, which included aid administrators from the University of South Carolina, Clemson University, Coastal Carolina University, and Trident Technical College, met with the Deputy Legislative Assistant to Senator Tim Scott, and the Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Lindsey Graham to advocate for federal student aid programs on behalf of South Carolina students.

Executive Director Katie Harrison planned and executed a successful annual conference of the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) in October and is currently overseeing the planning for the upcoming NASSGAP Annual Conference, which will be held in Washington, D.C., this upcoming October. Katie also continues to serve as part of the leadership planning team for the combined NASSGAP and SHEEO collaboration project to assist state agencies with their FAFSA Simplification efforts. Additionally, Katie is a current participant in the South Carolina Executive Institute, a program offered by Admin allowing participants to work closely with executive leaders from around the state and build trusting relationships, address complex problems, and gain insight into successfully moving their organizations into the future.

The Tuition Grants Commission was recently recognized as the “Champion of Learning” during the January LinkedIn Learning Sub-administrators meeting for creatively promoting LinkedIn Learning. As the agency’s sub-admin, Zachary created a Cyber Security Awareness challenge and requested all staff participate in honor of Cyber Security Awareness Month, continuing to place emphasis on the importance of data privacy and information security best practices. Admin continues to promote the use of LinkedIn Learning for all state employees.

FAFSA Completion Status Information Portal:

The Tuition Grants Commission entered into a data sharing agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE), allowing our office to receive the 45-day headcount master file of all publicly enrolled high school seniors. This data, which was uploaded to the Commission’s student information system, myTG, allows the Commission to provide student-level FAFSA Completion Status Information to approved high school counselors and personnel at other designated education-related entities. Individual high schools, school districts, or approved non-profit education-related entities must enter into a data sharing agreement with the agency in order to participate in the FAFSA matching process. Private high schools are also able to enter into an agreement and provide their list of seniors to review completion status information. Since rollout the week of January 27th, 13 high schools, districts, and education-related entities have signed MOUs, allowing staff at a total of 30 high schools to access FAFSA Completion Status Information for their senior students. Through a partnership with the S.C. Commission on Higher Education (CHE), we are continuing to announce the availability of the FAFSA Completion Status Information portal and continue to enroll new districts/schools regularly.

House Legislative Oversight Committee Process Update:

As previously disclosed to all college presidents and other interested parties, the Tuition Grants Commission was selected in 2023 as one of eight state agencies to undergo an extensive and formal review by the House Legislative Oversight Committee. Public input was gathered regarding the agencies involved in 2023, and the Tuition Grants Commission completed all applicable requests and reports to the HLOC in March 2023. Due to unexpected delays in their review of another state agency, the HLOC review was delayed until this current legislative session. Agency leadership appeared before the Education and Cultural Affairs Subcommittee on February 27, to present information regarding the agency and Program at the first of several meetings. While the Agency has already participated in the Public Input hearing in 2023, the agency is being requested to appear before the full Committee on March 19. Agency leadership will appear before the Subcommittee to continue presentations in late April.