



FSA Conference Coming

By *Mary Waldron*



As the 2006 Federal Student Aid Conferences approach Orlando, FL, and Las Vegas, NV, herds of financial aid professionals are preparing to gather together to network and learn about Title IV programs, as well as the evolving federal policies and practices that affect students and administrators alike. Federal Student Aid distributes more than \$80 billion each year in student grant, work study, and loan programs, making these conferences highly beneficial for those in the field. Members of the Department of Education conduct the conferences, striving to provide education regarding the most current information and taking advantage of opportunities to train and strengthen the abilities of financial aid experts.

The first conference, in Orlando, will take place from October 30 to November 2; the Las Vegas conference will run from November 28 to December 1. Since the conference only takes place twice per year, opportunities to attend can be limited. Admission to attend the four-day conference is free, although registration must be completed through the Federal Student Aid Conference website before the designated deadline. Registration for the Las Vegas conference will conclude on November 11. Travel, lodging, and meals are not provided, although there are complimentary continental breakfasts each morning and snacks in the late afternoon. A convenient cyber café is located at each conference location, allowing participants to check their email throughout the week. During the last two days of the conference, attendees will also have access to on-site registration kiosks where they can print boarding passes before departing for the airport.

Each day's conference schedule runs from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with the exception of the last conference day's schedule, which ends at 3:00 p.m. In addition to general conference sessions, the Federal Student Aid Conference offers an array of specific-interest sessions geared toward beginning financial aid staff, direct loan students, technical staff, and guaranty agencies and lenders.

There are also sessions on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) concerning record-keeping and reporting, system security, and working with regional, state, and nonprofit allies within the student aid sector, as well as discussing improved technology associated with the system and improved strategies and regulations for handling aid applicants and recipients.

A pre-conference day, held the day before each conference from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., will provide a quality assurance workshop, as well as a software developer session.

Each conference has a selected speaker scheduled to deliver a speech on one of its four days. This year's speaker for the Orlando conference is David Dunn, Acting Under Secretary and Chief of Staff to the U.S. Secretary of Education. According to his biography on the conference's website, "Dunn



oversees policies, programs, and activities related to vocational and adult education, postsecondary education, college aid, and the president's financial reforms for the Pell Grant program. He is also the chief of staff to U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings." Dunn's expertise and passion for improving accountability and raising standards in America's schools make him the perfect speaker for the October 30 session of the Orlando conference.