

## Efforts to Inform Students of Financial Aid

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It is a pattern that is developing nationwide: potential college students are discouraged from pursuing their dreams of higher education because of a daunting lack of affordability. As the government and colleges work to make more funds available, the problem of keeping students informed about financial aid also needs to be addressed.

Students might not fold under the pressure of finding ways to afford college if they know where to locate assistance. To have the greatest effect, this task needs to be addressed at government, state, individual institution, and local levels. One event designed to disseminate financial aid information is the annual Massachusetts College Goal Sunday. Presently, the campaign is gearing up for its 2007 event. In a recent press release, organizers discussed the extent of the problem-and the hard work ahead-by relaying their 2006 findings.

Coordinated by the Massachusetts Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (MASFAA) and designed as a charitable event offered at no cost to the public, Massachusetts College Goal Sunday attempts to bring the families of potential college students and financial aid representatives from statewide higher education institutions together. Based on information gathered during past events, including more than 500 responses from program attendees, Massachusetts College Goal Sunday organizers found that there is still a considerable gap “in creating accessibility to financial aid information for those with college aspirations.” This issue is more prevalent among minority and lower-income families. 67% of 2006 attendees came from households with incomes grossing less than \$60,000 per year. Lack of accessibility to financial aid information also tends to be a problem for adult students.

At a recent conference, Secretary Spellings spoke regarding this epidemic. “But more must be done to simplify student access to aid, to notify students of eligibility early, to target resources to the neediest students, and to minimize the risk of tuition inflation. As policymakers and legislators begin to look at this issue, we must make sure that we’re offering long-term solutions that fix the system’s underlying problems [...] without ultimately increasing the cost of higher education. This complete view is necessary for us to achieve our most important goal: getting more money to the neediest students when they need it,” she stated.

According to the results of the 2006 Massachusetts College Goal Sunday Student-Family Survey, the financial aid process intimidates potential students. A major concern is that the students who are most in need of financial aid do not have access to experts’ advice or networks of information. In fact, only 22% of 2006 attendees’ parents had received four-year college degrees, and more than half had no degrees at all.

In a press release, Gail Holt, the tri-chair of Massachusetts College Goal Sunday, remarked, “Nearly 1 million students who do not fill out the FAFSA would, in fact, be eligible for financial grants. Attracting these prospective students to organizations such as Massachusetts College Goal Sunday, and



educating them [about] the process of obtaining financial support for higher education, is a critical mission for the Commonwealth to ensure that the best and brightest from all walks of life make a college education a priority.”

Additional findings by the 2006 survey included the facts that more than 95% of students needed help when attempting to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and more than one third asked for one-on-one assistance when doing so. The campaign hopes to inform even more students and their families during its 2007 event, to be held on January 28, 2007 at 17 statewide locations.