

## Democrats Push for Pell Grant Increase



College hopefuls may have the opportunity to receive more funding if the Democratic plan to increase the maximum Pell Grant award is approved by both the House and the Senate in the upcoming weeks.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov), the Federal Pell Grant Program "provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduates and certain post-baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education. Students may use their grants at any one of approximately 5,400 participating postsecondary institutions. Grant amounts are dependent on: the student's expected family contribution (EFC) (see below); the cost of attendance (as determined by the institution); the student's enrollment status (full-time or part-time); and whether the student attends for a full academic year or less." For a student to apply for a Pell Grant, he or she must complete and submit a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), as the amount awarded is based on financial need.

Presently, the maximum amount of a Pell Grant is \$4,050, but the potential increase could pad that award with another \$260. If the bill is passed, it would mark the first direct federal aid increase in half a decade.

There have been rumblings about increasing the Pell Grant for some time. In fact, when President Bush ran for his first term in 2000, one of his campaign points was a proposal to increase the maximum Pell Grant amount to \$5,100. Thus far, this increase has not made it into his budget requests, but the president is due to submit a new request shortly. With this recent push by Democrats to find room in the budget for a smaller increase, it seems both parties could work together to assist prospective college students.

The cost of college goes beyond the expenses of tuition and books. Being a full-time student normally does not allow an individual to hold down a full-time job. Therefore, the smallest cost-of-living expenses can add up quite quickly. In a recent article, Maureen Groppe reports on how the Pell Grant does, in fact, help college attendees who need the financial support. For example, Krystal Hines, a sophomore at Purdue University, speaks of the practicality and effectiveness of her Pell Grant: "Pell Grant does help me be able to afford living and food and things like that."

Currently, about 1.5 million students qualify for the Pell Grant, even though its purchasing power has fallen as a result of escalating tuition costs. Nearly 20 years ago, the Pell Grant was able to cover half the cost of tuition, fees, and room and board, whereas today it only compensates for around 33% of the cost. However, students know that every little bit helps.

Under the new Democratic plan, the pending increase would cost more than \$615 million. If the maximum Pell Grant ever made it above \$5,000, it would necessitate a \$2-billion allocation of funds in the budget.