

Wisconsin Students Awaiting Approval of WHEG Funding

By Amit Agarwal

A delay in approving Wisconsin's state budget has put a number of college students in a difficult position. They don't know what kind of financial aid they will receive for the upcoming school year.

Uncertainty regarding funding for financial aid offered through the need-based Wisconsin Higher Education Grant (WHEG) Program has put many students on a waiting list. The state-funded grant program is available to eligible undergraduate, resident students who have demonstrated financial need.

According to Connie Hutchison, executive secretary for the Higher Educational Aids Board, if there isn't any change in the state assembly's budget this year (which allocates slightly more than \$39 million for the WHEG Program), more than 6,000 students will not receive financial aid from the program in spite of being eligible. The board has already utilized the current funding by awarding \$674 to \$2,730 grants to 22,400 eligible students for the coming year. WHEG, whose funding is disbursed on a first-come-first-served basis, has placed students who applied for aid after June 26 on a waiting list.

Democrats who currently control Wisconsin's state senate have proposed spending \$50 million on the program, while the Republican-controlled assembly wants to limit the program's funding to \$39 million.

Since the average family earnings of WHEG recipients are around \$27,000 per year, most students are automatically eligible for state grants. Hutchison has said that the Higher Educational Aids Board must operate under the assumption that funding will not be increased.

If no additional grants are provided to fill the gap, most eligible students will have to delay their college plans or borrow more.