

Applicants for Federal Financial Aid Increase; Obama Calls for Higher Education Reforms

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Nowadays, students and their families are more willing than ever before to borrow money to pay for college, becoming more and more dependent on grants and loans to assist them with their tuition costs.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, an increasing number of students from all income levels are currently dependent on federal financial aid to pay for college; an even higher proportion of students now take out loans. During the 2011-2012 school year, 42 percent of students received federal grants. Four years ago, that number was at 28 percent. Around 41 percent of all undergraduates took out loans, a six percent increase from four years ago.

"Federal financial aid is very important to me.

It is the lifeline of many students who can't afford to immediately pay off the high costs of college. It enables us to take care of our educational needs first, rather than having to face economical obstacles," senior Jeffrey Lee said.

Though the federal government gives out more grants to low-income students, colleges continually use their money on grants for students in wealthier families, according to *The Fiscal Times*. This has become a trend, causing concerns for people who argue that colleges should instead help students of limited means.

"As college tuition skyrockets, [...] the fact that most colleges haven't directed their resources towards lower-income students who need funding has only worsened the situation," senior Bonnie Lam said.

However, on Aug. 22, President Barack Obama called for higher education reforms that aim to make college more affordable.

In the past decades, rising tuition



costs have far exceeded income raises. This has forced students to take out loans to pay for college, which delayed goals such as buying a home, getting married and

saving up for retirement.

By fall 2015, the president wants college ratings to be based on measures such as tuition, debt and earnings of graduates, graduation rates and

graduate employable students on time and also to those who keep tuition affordable.

Obama also encouraged institutions to make courses more accessible through the use of online learning. For instance, accessing higher education would be cheaper and more flexible if classes were streamed online. However, students that take out federal loans would be responsible for completing a certain percentage of classes before they can access more aid.

Nevertheless, there are potential flaws in Obama's plan. Many feel that linking financial aid to graduation rates will cause colleges to either be more selective when admitting students or cause them to push out unprepared graduates. Also, Beth Akers and Matthew Chingos of the Brookings Institution feel that Obama

needs to clarify what he means when he uses the terms "quality" and "value" speech concerning the college affordability plan, according to *U.S. News*.

Overall, students feel that Obama's plan should be tweaked to address certain issues.

"Increasing available federal aid and mitigating the crippling effects that out of control student loans can have makes college more affordable and more appealing. But there are some flaws with Obama's policy. For example, a part of his policy wants to rate schools based on graduation rates, among other aspects. This may have an adverse effect on colleges, causing them to pump out ill-prepared graduates in order to maintain their ratings," senior Tony Situ said.

MOOR graphic by SIMON ZHAO

Scholarship Lauds Diversity of High School Graduates in San Gabriel Valley

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On Aug. 26, the 2013 Sam & Jackie Wong-Alhambra Source Scholarship recognized nine winners in a ceremony at the Mosaic Lizard Theater. Organized by two San Gabriel Valley real estate developers and the Alhambra Source, the scholarship was designed to help San Gabriel Valley students pursue higher education while reflecting on their ethnic heritage.

The scholarships' applicants submitted a potpourri of experiences within their respective cultures from various countries, including Cambodia, China, Cuba, El Salvador, France, Mexico and Vietnam.

"The stories are amazing," scholarship judge Linda Yamachi said, according to Alhambra Source. "Some of the imagery is

beautiful."

Among the winners were AHS alumnae Shannon Ho, Yvonne Lee, Vanessa Solis and Valerie Cabral; all of the recipients were either high school graduates or college students.

"It was very inspiring to be sur-

rounded by people my age who have the same shared experience of being either an immigrant or a child of immigrants," first-place winner Shannon Ho said. "It's nice to be able to celebrate and share something that usually isn't

talked about in day-to-day life, and I was very humbled and honored to be the presence of such strong people."

Though accepting one's cultural background may be difficult, time and experience are paramount to reaching an understanding.

"For so long I didn't even realize that I was pushing away from what I perceived to be my culture," second-place winner Yvonne Lee said. "I definitely think it's something that you grow into and you start to appreciate all the weird things about your background and your family as you get older. As first generation Americans we always struggle with who our parents are and where we grew up and who

we think we are, it's awkward and it inevitably defines us. It's how we choose to go about with that understanding that shapes our path."

PHOTO courtesy of ALHAMBRA SOURCE



SHARING EXPERIENCES First-place winner Shannon Ho reads her essay aloud during the ceremony on Aug. 26.

ACT Results Show Lack of College Preparedness

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This year's ACT results indicated that some of the students who took the ACT lacked competent scores that would prove that they are capable of handling the course load of college.

Similar to the SAT, the ACT helps students get into college and earn scholarships. In addition, the ACT tests students' English, math, science and reading skills.

"[M]y reason [for] taking the ACT in the future is because it definitely stands out when applying to colleges. It gives the colleges more to look at about your academic level, and it is also highly recommended by colleges and universities," junior Carol Chen said.

Aside from giving colleges an idea of who to accept, the ACT also helps in measuring the level of readiness of high school students for college-level courses.

According to Central Oregonian, students who achieve a passing average of the four different parts of the ACT have a 50 percent chance to earn a B or higher and a 75 percent chance to earn a C or higher in college-level courses.

While scantron machines do not discriminate against students and are generally correct, they only measure how many answers a student has gotten right or wrong, not what students have learned permanently.

"It's not a good way to measure overall intelligence of a school because many people do not take it very seriously. Some just quickly complete it to just get it over with," senior Marilynn Bach said.

According to *The Education Week*, The Brookings Institution found that 50 to 80 percent of the improvement during year-to-year tests were "caused by fluctuations that had nothing to do with long-term changes in learning."

While some students may not be prepared for college-level work right now, they can better prepare themselves through classes and reviewing new material. In addition, to further prepare for college-level work, students can study often, read and do extra credit. While the ACT is only one test, there will be more tests in college. The ACT helps with college readiness as it prepares and shows high school students how much is expected of them in college courses.