



ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

# AASFAA Newsletter

[www.aasfaaonline.org](http://www.aasfaaonline.org)

Spring 2005 Edition, January 31, 2005

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Chip Quisenberry

It is now late January, and already things are heating up in the new year. 2005-06 ISIRs are hitting our inboxes, scholarship committees are meeting, and 2004-05 COD reporting is in full swing. As your 2005 begins, make your plans to attend the AASFAA Spring Conference at the Perdido Beach Resort in Orange Beach, Alabama. Dan Miller made a trip down to inspect the facility earlier this month and reported that "the Perdido Beach Resort was found alive and very active" as renovations were well underway in preparation for their reopening in early March 2005.

This year's AASFAA Spring Conference will be held April 12-15, 2005, and President-Elect Buddy Jackson and Spring Program Co-Chair Linda Casey and the rest of the Program Committee are preparing an information-packed conference that you can't afford to miss. You will receive an email soon on registration and room rates for the conference.

I have been impressed with the work that your officers and committees have done this year. I can truthfully state that every time I have asked someone to take on a task or responsibility, the challenge has been met, with excellence. Keeping in mind the superior qualities of our membership, I strongly encourage you to nominate your colleagues for AASFAA office. Past-President Deborah Byrd is soliciting nominations for President-Elect, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer-Elect, as well as for the M. Cecil Padgett and the John H. Buchanan Outstanding Achievement Awards. Deborah is committed to having at least a double slate of candidates for each position, but she cannot nominate everyone herself! Look around you, and nominate folks you believe will do a good job of taking our Association into the future.

SASFAA is right around the corner! Make plans to be present February 13-16 at the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta. I hope to see each of you there.

As always, please let me know if I can be of service to you in any way.

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## VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Ellen Canada

The New Aid Officer's Workshop at the AASFAA Fall Conference was well attended, with about 25 participants. Our presenters, who did an excellent job, were Dorenda Adams, who presented an overview of student aid programs, Suzanne Bush, who talked about the application process, student eligibility, and documentation requirements, and Clark Aldridge, who explained the packaging and award notification processes. We hope the participants not only benefited from the information they received, but also got to know fellow professionals whom they can network with.

Over 70 dedicated financial aid professionals participated in the NASFAA Fall Training Workshop on December 15. The focus of the 5 ½ hour training session was "Student Loan Issues." Participants received a Participant Handbook and listened as Vickie Adams and I delved into such subjects as borrower eligibility, loan periods and frequency of borrowing, and disbursement issues. I want to express my appreciation to the attendees—there was a lot to cover in a limited amount of time, and the subject matter was pretty complex. I hope everyone received some benefit from the training.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Vickie Adams who generously agreed to do the NASFAA training with me, even though it involved traveling through Atlanta as well as many hours of preparation! Many thanks to KHEAA for the use of their facility, and to Lora Kiser, Tonya Till, and Jody Lewis for their assistance in all the logistics as well as coordinating the sponsorships.

Thanks also to the sponsors who provided lunch, snacks and various materials for the workshops. They included: Alabama Student Loan Program, AmSouth Student Lending, Chase Bank, Citibank, CFS, Compass Bank, edamerica, ESF, NSLP, Nelnet, PNC Bank, Regions Student Loan Center, Sallie Mae, The Student Loan People, USAF, Wachovia, and Wells Fargo.

sure we will keep you busy and can promise some fun. The committees are working hard and steady to assure everyone a great conference.

If anyone has any special dietary needs, let me know. You can reach me at 251-690-1290 or [jonna.moses@regions.com](mailto:jonna.moses@regions.com).

Look forward to seeing each of you at the beach!

## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

by Clark Aldridge

There is been little activity on reauthorization since the end of last summer. Now that Congress has passed a continuing resolution that provides for the continuation of the Higher Education Act through September 2005 there has not been any urgency on the part of the Congress to move forward with reauthorization. When activity does begin again look for many of the proposal contain in some of the House bills to resurface.

You can get an idea of the administration thinking from a speech the President recently made in Florida. In the speech he again proposed enhanced Pell Grants that would provide up to an additional \$1000 per year to for the first two years of study to students who participate in the State Scholars Program. He also proposed year-round Pell Grants for students who are accelerating their program of student with the intent of graduating early.

In his speech the President called for flexibility of student aid programs and for loans for short-term training programs. These loans would be aimed at adult students. In addition, he indicated that new reforms of the student aid programs will create savings over ten years to provide \$4.3 billion to eliminate the current Pell Grant shortfall and \$15 billion to increase the Pell Grant maximum award by \$100 per year for the next five years.

In other news of interest H.R. 4818 requires each education institution that receives federal funds to hold an educational program on the United State Constitution on September 17 each year. This of course will include colleges and universities.

## SPRING LOCAL ARRANGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

by Jonna Moses

Looks like the hurricane is not going to keep us away!! The hotel had minor damage but will soon reopen and ready for business. As I am sure you know we are back at the Perdido Pass Resort 27200 Perdido Beach Blvd. Orange Beach, AL 36561. Conference dates April 12-15 2005.

We will have a great agenda, great company, and sunny weather!! Even though some of our favorite places will not be reopened by conference time, I am

## SITE SELECTION COMMITTEE REPORT

by Dan Miller

The news from the Site Selection Committee is good news. The Perdido Beach Resort will be ready for us when we arrive in April for the Spring 2005 conference. Despite the damage sustained by Hurricane Ivan last fall, repairs are underway and things are on-schedule for completion by March 10. The hotel plans to reopen March 10—a full month before we arrive!

Exterior painting, pool and patio repair, and restoration of the lower level are moving along. Glass and roof repairs seem to be almost complete. The conference area walls downstairs have been repaired but flooring and ceiling tiles are yet to be installed. The gift shop, exercise room and the lower lobby area will be completed as soon as the conference space is completed.

Area hotels and businesses have been damaged and many of them are not yet showing signs of repair and probably will not be in operation this spring and possibly not even this summer.

Office spaces in the Perdido Beach Resort are operational but not open to the public. We will soon begin the process of negotiating the Spring 2006 and 2007 proposals and working toward final contracts. Hopefully these will be complete by the time of our spring conference.

## NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS REPORT

by Deborah Byrd

Let's get ready, put your ink pin down, turn off your calculator and think about the free time that you are willing to give to AASFAA. The association needs individuals like you to volunteer and serve as an officer for next year and beyond. The committee is seeking nominations for the following positions:

- President-Elect (three year)
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer-Elect (two year).

The duties for these positions are located in Articles II and III in the By-Laws on AASFAA's website.

Please submit the name along with the position that you are nominating the individual for to me at [dwb@calhoun.edu](mailto:dwb@calhoun.edu) by February 18th.

The committee is also seeking nominations for AASFAA top honors. These honors are given to two individuals who have made outstanding contributions to higher education and student's assistance programs in Alabama.

The *M. Cecil Padgett Outstanding Achievement Award* is presented to an individual who is a member of the association and who has provided exemplary service in the area of student financial aid over a sustained period of time.

The *John H. Buchanan, Jr. Distinguished Service Award* is presented to an individual or group who may or may not be a member of the association. And who is not generally considered a practicing student financial aid administrator in recognition of outstanding and dedicated service in the area of student financial aid over a sustained period of time.

Submit your nominees to Dee Talley at [DGTTALLEY@sass.uab.edu](mailto:DGTTALLEY@sass.uab.edu) on or before February 18.

## LENDER LIASION REPORT

by Paul Wright

### 2004 Consumer Bankers Student Loan Conference

With the Presidential election a week prior, many of us in the lending community were interested to gauge the attitudes of those attending the 2004 CBA Student Loan Conference. As always, Washington DC is an interesting place, particularly around election time. When George Bush was re-elected the general consensus was that loan programs would basically stay intact. However, that is not to say there isn't potential for changes to be made. If there is a shift in the administration (e.g. Rod Paige having already resigned), new influences may induce changes. For example, the concept of an auction has not been eliminated. In this scenario, the government would originate loans and lenders would bid on packages of these loans. Other considerations include, Congress deciding to look into the school-as-lender model, the DOE giving greater priority to post-secondary education and loans, and the pressure on Pell Grants to keep up with the greater number of high school students attending college. With all of this being said, it will be interesting to see what direction financial aid and loans takes over the next couple of years.

Throughout the conference there were five prevailing topics. And of course, the final outcome of these will be determined by their budget impact. The issues are:

- The continued presence of direct lending—will the government want to continue both programs?

- Consolidation—the focus will shift to current and future borrowers. In so doing, consolidation loans will likely go back to a variable rate with the savings shifting to in-school borrowers. With fixed rates in an increasing rate environment, more funds would be going to consolidated borrowers under the current scenario instead of new student borrowers which many feel deserve a greater benefit.
- Inducements—This issue seems to be discussed every year with no real outcome or direction. However, NCHELP recently issued compliance guidelines for FFELP industry participants that are intended to supplement existing DOE guidance. You can view these guidelines NCHELP's website at [www.nchelp.org](http://www.nchelp.org).
- The 9.5% floor issue—this will definitely change in some form or fashion. In a budget sensitive environment, the negative press this has received will prompt congressional action in the coming months.
- Reauthorization—and then there is reauthorization. Will it happen in 2005 or will it slip into 2006? If you listen to the "experts" at the conference, I say pick one or say both. No one really knows. The one consensus was that if it does happen in '05 it will be later in the year. In addition to the issues listed above, you can expect debate on loan limits, accountability provisions, removing or reducing origination fees, sustaining FFEL as the program of choice, price setting for colleges and universities, transfer credits, school-as-lender, and VFA's.

As the year progresses, there will be plenty to talk about. We will do our best to keep you updated as all of these issues develop.

## TWO-YEAR COLLEGE CONCERNS COMMITTEE REPORT

by Suzanne Bush

The Two-Year College Concerns Committee had nineteen (19) representatives present at our meeting held during the fall conference in Birmingham. Items for discussion included:

- Documentation required for students who do not file a tax return
- Satisfactory Progress Appeals
- Process for free GED class
- Occupational diploma for certificate programs and ability to benefit
- Information required from students who report zero income on their Student Aid Report

Minutes from this meeting were emailed to all two-year financial aid personnel, however some were returned as "undeliverable". If you did not receive a copy and would like one, please let me know.

Also, Pebblin Warren asked that all two-year Financial Aid Officers/Directors send her their email address at [pwarren@acs.cc.al.us](mailto:pwarren@acs.cc.al.us). She plans to hold a Directors

meeting and would like to notify everyone at the correct address.

If you have any issues or concerns that you would like to include on the agenda at the spring meeting, please send them to me at [stbush@bscc.edu](mailto:stbush@bscc.edu). I look forward to seeing you there!

## AASFAA NEWS

by Chip Quisenberry



Please join me in wishing Cindy Massey of SouthTrust Bank/Wachovia all the best as she begins a new chapter in her professional life. Many of you are aware that Cindy will be leaving SouthTrust shortly, and I wanted to publicly recognize her many contributions to AASFAA and to thank her for all she has done, both personally and in her professional responsibilities with SouthTrust, to make the financial aid profession in Alabama better.

Cindy, thanks for all you have done. You have worked so hard to make AASFAA what it is today through your service, and I deeply and sincerely appreciate all of your contributions to our profession. We will all miss you dearly, and we hope that you will stop by and visit your AASFAA friends when we make our way to the Gulf. Shannon Cross wrote that "Cindy always has a smile and a kind word for everyone", and that smile and those kind words will definitely be missed.

Thanks, Cindy--for everything....

## NASFAA NEWS

by Mindy Kaplan Eline

### NASFAA Names College Goal Sunday Director

#### *Lumina Foundation Continues Funding, Involvement*

Washington, D.C. (October 12, 2004) – The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) announced the appointment of Marcia E. Weston as director of College Goal Sunday Operations, a successful program that helps low-income families apply for college financial aid. Weston came to NASFAA from the Finance Authority of Maine, where she served as manager of education outreach programs since 1998. She wrote Maine's successful College Goal Sunday grant proposal and served as statewide coordinator for the program. Weston has previously assisted states considering a College Goal Sunday grant application by sharing program strategies, media successes, and budget partnerships.

As director, Weston will be responsible for overall management of the College Goal Sunday program at the national level, with emphasis on program maintenance and expansion, fundraising, public relations, and reporting. Professional and administrative support will be provided by current NASFAA staff and consultants.

Lumina Foundation for Education, which funds College Goal Sunday nationally with additional support from Lilly Endowment, will continue close involvement with the program, including approval and disbursement of new grant funds to states that are planning or implementing College Goal Sunday programs.

"It is an honor and a privilege to be chosen to head up a program that truly opens doors of educational opportunity," said Weston. "I am fortunate to join a program with a longstanding, well organized and efficient infrastructure." Weston follows Lumina Foundation program manager Jeanna Keller, who previously managed the national program. While Weston is now the primary point of contact, Keller will remain involved in the program.

"Filling the position of College Goal Sunday director has been our top priority since NASFAA teamed with Lumina Foundation to begin managing the program earlier this year," said NASFAA President Dallas Martin. "We are delighted to have found an individual with Marcia's skills and experience to head up the operation."

Lumina Foundation announced earlier this year an allocation of \$3.5 million for College Goal Sunday, which will pave the way for expansion to 15 more states, broadening the reach of the popular program to a total of 35 states and the District of Columbia by the end of 2007.

Over the past 15 years, College Goal Sunday has already helped more than 100,000 low-income and first generation students clear the paperwork hurdle when applying for college financial aid. One day each year, traditionally a week or two after Super Bowl Sunday, financial aid administrators and other qualified volunteers fan out to selected community sites across a state to help families fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the universally required financial aid form.

As a prelude to College Goal Sunday, the organizers of each state's program launch an extensive public information campaign to reach low-income students. Campaigns use the news media, direct mail and celebrity appearances at key high schools to inform the public about the importance of an education beyond high school, the availability of financial aid and the existence of College Goal Sunday to help them complete the FAFSA.

NASFAA will provide technical assistance to funded organizations, while Lumina will fund exploratory grants and implementation grants. Interested organizations begin with an exploratory grant of up to \$7,500 to investigate the feasibility of hosting College Goal

Sunday in their states. After a successful planning phase, which includes site visits and training, organizations may apply for an implementation grant. Lumina Foundation contributes up to \$250,000 over a three-year period to eligible groups working to establish the College Goal Sunday program in their states. NASFAA will work directly with states in helping them to develop partnerships within their states to assist in implementing their programs. Support will also be given to attract within-state sponsorships to ensure long term sustainability.

The amount of each grant depends on the size of the population to be served, the scope of the proposed program, and the availability of local funding to supplement the Lumina Foundation grant. NASFAA's role has been critical in the individual states to bring together the financial aid community to help families apply for financial aid.

By the end of 2004, the College Goal Sunday program will have committed \$7 million to fund planning and implementation grants in 35 states and the District of Columbia. The program is currently operating in the following states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming, plus the District of Columbia.

States that are currently running College Goal Sunday programs are encouraged to stay in close contact with Marcia Weston, who may be reached at (202) 785-0453 ext. 111 or [westonm@nasfaa.org](mailto:westonm@nasfaa.org). States that are contemplating submitting applications for College Goal Sunday exploratory grants or just want additional information on College Goal Sunday are also urged to contact Weston.

College Goal Sunday began in Indiana in 1989 as a joint project of the Indiana Student Financial Aid Association (ISFAA) and the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana (SSACI) with funding from the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Over the years, Lumina Foundation and its predecessor organizations have co-funded the Indiana programs and led the expansion in other states.

**About NASFAA.** The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) is a nonprofit membership organization that represents more than 11,000 financial aid professionals at nearly 3,000 colleges, universities, and career schools across the country. Based in Washington, D.C., NASFAA is the only national association with a primary focus on student aid legislation, regulatory analysis, and training for financial aid administrators. Each year, members help more than 8 million students receive funding for postsecondary education. In addition to its Member Web site at [www.NASFAA.org](http://www.NASFAA.org), the Association offers a web site with financial aid information for parents and students at [www.StudentAid.org](http://www.StudentAid.org).

**About Lumina Foundation.** Lumina Foundation for Education, an Indianapolis-based, private, independent foundation, strives to help people

achieve their potential by expanding access and success in education beyond high school. Through research, grants for innovative programs and communication initiatives, Lumina Foundation addresses issues surrounding financial access and educational retention, and degree or certificate attainment — particularly among underserved student groups, including adult learners. The Foundation bases its mission on the belief that postsecondary education remains one of the most beneficial investments that individuals can make in themselves and that society can make in its people. For more details on the Foundation, visit its Web site at [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org).

## LENDING MATTERS

by David Long and Tim Ballard

### USA Funds Accepts Applications for \$3 Million in New Scholarships

USA Funds® announces that applications now are available for a total of \$3 million in new scholarships to assist college students who demonstrate financial need.

USA Funds will award renewable USA Funds Access to Education Scholarships® to qualified students nationwide for the 2005-2006 academic year. In addition to the new scholarships, USA Funds will award renewal scholarships to qualified recipients.

The program offers \$1,500 scholarships to qualified full-time undergraduate, graduate and professional students and \$750 scholarships to qualified half-time undergraduates. Applicants for the scholarships must be enrolled or plan to enroll in coursework at an accredited two- or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school beginning with the fall 2005 term through Feb. 1, 2006.

The program targets students from households with annual incomes of \$35,000 or less.

The application deadline is March 15, 2005. Complete eligibility information and a scholarship application are available on USA Funds' Web site at [www.usafunds.org](http://www.usafunds.org) by selecting "Scholarship Information" from the "Express Links" menu.

For 2004-2005, USA Funds awarded 27 new and renewal scholarships totaling \$39,000 to deserving college-bound students from Alabama.

### Help Your Graduate and Professional Students Determine, Manage Financial Needs

Most students are aware of their tuition costs and related fees. Graduate and professional students may

not be aware of other, less-obvious costs of their educational programs, however.

Within a graduate or professional program of study, students likely will be responsible for additional expenses. The new USA Funds® Life Skills® module, "Embrace New Academic Challenges — Drafting Your Professional Plan," advises graduate and professional students to estimate the complete costs of their education and offers suggestions of sources of financial aid to meet those costs.

Financial-aid administrators can help students understand their financial needs by pointing out these "unexpected" expenses. According to the new USA Funds Life Skills module, these costs include:

- Admission testing and application fees.
- Additional prerequisite coursework.
- Duplicating.
- Research.
- Professional-membership dues.
- Subscriptions.
- Tutoring and proofreading.
- Computer equipment and software.
- Job search.
- Health or professional-liability insurance.

USA Funds Life Skills also notes that lifestyle-adjustment expenses, such as moving, commuting, child care and lost or deferred income should be considered. The program advises students to make some adjustments in their personal expenses, such as housing, utilities, transportation, food, clothing, medical and entertainment.

To cope with these additional expenses, graduate and professional students should be advised that they might qualify for forms of assistance not generally available to undergraduates. These sources of aid funds include assistantships, fellowships, and grant and scholarship programs specific to graduate and professional studies. In addition, loan limits are higher for graduate students.

The new USA Funds Life Skills module offers a list of funding resources for graduate and professional students.

In addition to the new module, USA Funds Life Skills offers another new component that addresses the unique needs of graduate and professional students and adult learners. Minimodule 1 — "Reentering School — How Do I Adjust My Standard Of Living?" — is an interactive CD-ROM that offers graduate and professional students tips for coping with the financial and academic challenges they will encounter.

*Jacqueline Bell is an account executive for USA Funds Services. To learn more about USA Funds Life Skills or any of USA Funds' other products and services, call toll-free (866) 497-USAF, Ext. 9484, or send e-mail to [jabell@usafunds.org](mailto:jabell@usafunds.org).*

## Alabama Student Loan - KHEAA Update

### New Services

#### PLUS Online Pre-approval

KHEAA's new ZipDECISION Process to offer parent borrowers a choice in how they obtain pre-approval is expected to be available on or before April 1, 2005. Parent borrowers will be able to receive an immediate PLUS pre-approval decision online. This service will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for all borrowers who wish to use a KHEAA Origination Services Lender. Borrowers, schools, and lenders may also continue to call KHEAA's PLUS pre-approval line to initiate a credit determination, if preferred, to allow borrowers more flexibility.

ZipDECISION requires parents to select a school and then a lender based on the school's preferred lender list if one is available. The parent will then enter basic demographic, loan, and student information. Once the data is entered, a credit decision is performed immediately.

#### ExitExpress

ExitExpress is a new service designed especially for the convenience of our school partners. Through ExitExpress, KHEAA will retrieve exit data on behalf of schools using Mapping Your Future (MYF) Stafford exit counseling. Federal regulations require schools to forward exit counseling reports to guaranty agencies within 60 days of the exit counseling session. Schools using MYF's Online Student Loan Counseling with loans guaranteed by KHEAA can save time and money since they won't have to send this data to KHEAA.

### Customer Service Hours Extended

Customer service representatives are now available at the following toll-free numbers to personally assist our business partners and borrowers from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.

- School and Lender Hot Line (800) 617-2699
- PLUS Pre-approval Line (877) 353-8070
- Origination Services Status Line (800) 564-6068

Default Aversion Borrower Advocates are available toll-free at (800) 928-5327 to assist borrowers from:

- 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, Monday through Thursday
- 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. ET, Friday
- 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. ET, Saturday

### Staff News

KHEAA Executive Director Dr. Joe McCormick currently serves on the Cradle to College Commission and the boards of the National Council of Higher Education Loan Programs (NCHLP) and the National College Access Network (NCAN).

Dr. William H. Wall, director of the Alabama Student Loan Program, has been appointed to the editorial board of the *Journal* of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA). This is his ninth year serving on the board.

Wall and Lora Kiser at the ASLP are compiling a brochure for AASFAA's Legacy Scholarship Program. The program honors four people who served with distinction in the financial aid profession in Alabama – Shirley Speer, Teresa Duke, Floyd Johnston and Bill Gentry.

### Pell Grant Increase Proposal

President Bush's FY 2006 budget would increase the maximum Pell Grant award to \$4,150 this year and \$4,550 over five years to help more students in need pay for higher education and prepare for a lifetime of achievement. To make student loan programs more cost-effective, President Bush will reform the programs by reducing excessive subsidies and program costs, while providing additional benefits to students in school. The President states his new reforms will create savings over 10 years to provide \$4.3 billion to eliminate the current Pell Grant shortfall; \$15.0 billion to increase the Pell Grant maximum award by \$100 a year for the next five years (from FY 2006 through FY 2010), which will increase the maximum award for low-income students to \$4,550; and make permanent the expanded loan forgiveness for math, science, and special education teachers passed last year.

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/>; "Strengthening Higher Education for a Successful Workforce," January 14, 2005

### U.S. Secretary of Education

The U.S. Senate has confirmed former domestic policy advisor Margaret Spellings as the U.S. Secretary of Education. Ms. Spellings has been a long-time advisor on education to the President, and most of her experience is related to K-12 education. At her confirmation hearing, Ms. Spellings said the changes to the Pell Grant tax tables, which will cause some students to lose some financial aid, is a concern and will be closely reviewed by the Department.

### Reauthorization

Issues that are expected to receive attention during reauthorization include borrower interest rates, loan fees, refinance opportunities, and annual and aggregate loan limits. It is also likely that considerable attention will be devoted to promoting greater comparability between the loan terms and conditions made available to borrowers in the FFEL and Direct Loan programs.

In general, helping students by enhancing their benefits is a goal upon which many can agree, but finding offsetting revenues is often a challenge. Some effort will likely be made to identify savings in the loan programs' mandatory spending that could be used to offset costs associated with enhancements in borrower benefits or that could be used to finance other student aid expenditures.

Source: *CRS Report for Congress: "Student Loan Issues and the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act," November 22, 2004, by Adam Stoll.*

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Allyson Wyne

### You Are the School!

Students will judge the entire school by the kind of experience they have with you! The school has neither personality nor voice – except yours! Many students deal with the Financial Aid Office before they've met their professors. You may very well be the first person they meet and you have the power to make or break that interaction! The Financial Aid Office often holds the key as to whether the student is able to attend your school or not. You (figuratively speaking) possess the key for the students future...You are the school!

When anyone comes to the office or calls the school and talks to you, you are the school to them. They will tell others what "the school" did or didn't do for them. They won't be talking to the university president; they will be talking to you! So, what can you do to set a positive tone for your university? Provide outstanding customer *care*!

How do you provide exceptional service to your customers?...By understanding what your student and/or parent customer wants. The following is a list of items that always receive high marks on customer service surveys:

- ✓ Competence – You have the ability to deliver the service advertised by the sign on your door: "Financial Aid." Students know that "Financial Aid" doesn't mean bags of money. It does mean help with a difficult, and critical hurdle.
- ✓ Attentiveness – They want to be recognized as present and, when it's their turn, they want you to give them your full attention and concern. This is not an automatic. Its eye contact, body language, focus on the conversation, sensitivity to nuances. Most Financial Aid Offices are open and busy places. You have to make an effort not to be distracted.
- ✓ Taking Ownership – They want you to take responsibility for addressing their need. They don't want excuses or buck-passing. Never say "It's not my job." You can refer them to someone else and still keep ownership. "I'm Mr. Jones. If by chance you run into a problem, come back to me and we'll figure it out together."
- ✓ Respect – They want to be treated like human beings. They don't want to feel scolded or talked down to. The risk of patronizing a student is real because in the Financial Aid Office, you have the power position: age, turf, title, control of the resources, and knowledge about the processes.

- ✓ Sensitivity – They appreciate being heard out. They appreciate having their emotions and individuality recognized and taken into account. Dealing with financial aid issues is scary stuff for students. You may have done this 1,000 times, but for them, it’s a first. Using their name helps.
- ✓ Kept Promises – They want you to do what you say you’ll do and when you say you’ll do it. Don’t make promises you can’t keep and don’t forget to follow -up and follow -through.

Here are some additional tools to keep in mind when interfacing with a student customer: Be a good listener and give the customer your full attention. Accept responsibility, do everything you can to be helpful. The customer doesn’t care who is to blame; they want the problem fixed. Try to avoid the “poison phrases” that customers don’t like to hear. For example: *I don’t know. We can’t do that. Who told you that? When you wait until the last minute...*

Keep in mind when communicating that your words account for only 8% of the meaning, tone of voice contributes to 37% to the meaning of your message, and body language accounts for 55% of what you are communicating to a customer. These numbers can be summarized by the age-old saying, “It’s not so much what you say, but how you say it!” Practice saying this

sentence: “Where have you been?” Say it to yourself as though you are angry, then happy, and then surprised. As you will see in doing this exercise, the words are the same, it is your tone of voice and your expression that is really “speaking” here.

The Golden Rule for customer care is to treat each student as you would want someone else to treat your son or daughter. If you really *care* about the student, you will give good customer service!

*Allyson Wynne is a Professional Development Manager with Citibank – The Student Loan Corporation. She regularly presents seminars for financial aid office personnel.*

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

SASFAA Conference .....	Feb. 13-16
Atlanta, GA	
AASFAA Spring Conference .....	April 2005
Perdido Beach, AL	