

# Helping High School Students Find Money for College

By Jean Oxendine

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**F**inding funding for education may seem like a daunting process, but knowing where to look, and what to look for, makes the process manageable and well worth the effort.

Kristine Reyes, a Filipino American, currently a student at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, attended Stuyvesant High School in New York City. For Reyes, the process was made somewhat easier by her high school. “I started looking into scholarship money for college during my senior year of high school, and began my search after my high school informed me about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other government funded programs,” she said.

At times, the applications “can be a bit overwhelming,” said Reyes, but the long applications did not prevent her from applying for funding assistance. “Scholarship applications that require letters of recommendation and personal essays seem the most burdensome—especially since they are usually the most competitive—but ultimately they can be worthwhile,” she added.

Not all high schools are as helpful to their students, so students must undertake much of the legwork themselves. There are a couple of things that all prospective students should know before they begin:

1. Understand the funding lingo. According to the web site collegeboard.com, there are three primary types of financial aid available to students:
  - Grants and Scholarships - Also called gift aid, grants do not have to be repaid and you do not have to work to earn them. Grant aid comes from federal and state governments and from individual colleges. Some grants and scholarships are awarded based on merit rather than need.
  - Loans - More than 60 percent of financial aid comes in the form of loans, which is aid that must be repaid. Most loans that are awarded based on financial need are low-interest loans sponsored by the Federal government. These loans are subsidized by the government so no interest accrues until you begin repayment after you graduate.
  - Work Study - Student employment or work-study aid allows you to earn money to help meet education costs such as books and supplies and personal expenses.
2. Sources of funding vary. For example, funding can come from Federal, state and local governments, foundations, businesses, and associations. Sometimes, combining these sources is the best way to cover educational expenses for the college-bound.

Most funding for college comes from the Federal government, and as a result, many colleges and universities require students to complete the FAFSA in conjunction with the school’s request for aid forms. The U.S. Department of Education’s web site provides information in English and Spanish on FAFSA, as well general information on educational funding. The web site also makes available tools to help students navigate through the financial aid maze.

Although it is usually recommended that a student complete a FAFSA each year, some scholarships carry over from year to year, making it easier for students to continue financing their education with out the hassle of additional paperwork. “After my freshman year, I didn’t bother filling out the FAFSA because my college scholarship carries over every year as long as I maintain a good GPA,” said Reyes.

Funding also comes from the colleges themselves. For Reyes, Goucher College offered scholarship money based on her high school grades and SAT scores. She was interested in Goucher for the programs that it offered, but she did not find out how much scholarship money was available from Goucher until after she was already accepted and trying to decide which school to choose.

Colleges offer a variety of funding from their own financial resources, including grants, merit scholarships, student job programs and low-interest loans. Students should be sure to check with the college financial aid administrator about programs for which they may qualify. Although some aid is need-based, college awards often recognize academic achievement or a special talent. Many schools also have dollars to support specific fields of study.

“My school’s merit scholarship has worked out fine. I need to maintain at least a 3.0 to retain my scholarship from year to year,” said Reyes. The scholarship amount affected her choice of colleges in that Goucher was the only school that offered her this type of funding support.

Furthermore, at some colleges, students are able to participate in cooperative education. Through this system, young people divide their time between school and career-related jobs. Typically, co-op students work at a job related to their field of study and earn course credit as well as a salary.

Individual states offer financial aid as well. The FAFSA is used to apply for most state loan, grant and scholarship programs. When the FAFSA is submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, it forwards the information on the form to the state student assistance agency. Each state has a different FAFSA submission deadline. Procedures for applying for state prepaid tuition programs differ from state to state, and prospective students may visit the web sites for both their state of residence and for the states of the colleges to which they are applying.



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Financial aid is also available for those who are interested in pursuing careers in the military, and for veterans and their dependents. The U.S. Armed Forces offers several programs to provide students with money for school. These programs include the Montgomery G.I. Bill, Army/Navy/Marine Corps College Funds, ROTC Scholarships, and U.S. Service Academies. Financial aid is also available for veterans and their dependents through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

As indicated, funding for education can also come from other sources, such as corporations, professional associations, unions, religious groups and other “private” organizations. They award scholarships to students based on a wide range of qualifications, including need, heritage and talent—whether it be artistic, athletic, scientific or something else. Although these types of awards make up one of the smallest sources of financial aid, they can still make a difference in affording college.

According to Reyes, “Prior to college, I did not look for scholarships given by foundations or sponsors.” But during her sophomore year, she was nominated by her school to apply for the Bill Gates Millennium Scholarship, which is aimed at minority students studying specific fields. Unfortunately, Reyes was not chosen for the Gates scholarship because, “there were about 14 students from my school who were nominated, so I knew there was going to be tough competition. Regrettably, I was not one of the two students who received it.”

Reyes has some advice for high school students applying for scholarships: “Do your research, there are a lot of scholarships available—there is something for everyone.” ♦

