

## College grant cutoff devastating for some

By **CHRIS DETTRO**

**THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER**

Posted Sep 09, 2009 @ 11:30 PM

Last update Sep 10, 2009 @ 06:41 AM

Charles Olivier last year received about \$1,200 toward his tuition and fees at the University of Illinois Springfield from a state program that helps students based on need.

Olivier, a junior, will get another \$600 during this year's fall semester. But because of state budget cuts, he is scheduled to get the same amount for the spring semester as every other Monetary Award Program grant recipient.

A big zero.

For Olivier, who is a resident assistant at UIS and has his housing paid for, that won't mean the end of his college education. But he fears that it may mean just that for many others.

"Because I'm an RA, I get to interact with a lot of freshmen and sophomore students," said Olivier, a junior from the Chicago suburb of Glenwood. "And I see a lot of other students in far worse positions than me. I see a lot of freshmen and sophomores who, if they don't get this money, school won't be an option."

About 137,000 college students across the state receive assistance from the MAP grant program, which was created in 1997 to help undergraduate students who demonstrate financial need and keep a satisfactory academic record.

Officials estimate it will take \$200 million to fully fund the program this year, but the legislature reduced MAP grant funds by half this year in an attempt to balance the budget.

As a result, students who qualify for MAP aid will receive their full first-semester grants, but nothing is left for spring.

"It is a program aimed at our neediest students," said UIS Chancellor Richard Ringeisen. "We're aware that it's a big problem.

"There also are issues with timing," he said. "Students register for spring classes in October and November, and unless they know early on that money will be available ... it could mean a huge loss of our neediest students."

Even without the MAP grant money, Olivier will return to UIS in the spring. He also has a General Assembly scholarship and has been taking more classes than what constitutes a full load.

"I could come back," he said. "I may have to work some extra hours."

Ringeisen said most UIS students who receive MAP grants also are borrowing, as well as working.

"They're going everywhere they can to get money," he said. "We're trying to guide them to other sources. Many already are at the maximum for borrowing.

"We don't have anyplace else in our budget to get that money for them."

Last week, presidents and chancellors from public and private colleges met with Gov. Pat Quinn, urging him to find a way to restore funding for the MAP program. Ringeisen said he believes the group caught the attention of the governor.

"The governor clearly understood that this cut must be restored, and it must be restored this fall so that returning students can stay in school," said John Peters, president of Northern Illinois University. "If these funds aren't restored, we risk losing an entire generation of hard-working, low-income students."

Students also are taking the initiative to urge restoration of MAP grant funding.

Students involved in leadership roles from colleges and universities around the state are organizing a "Rally Day" in Springfield for Oct. 15.

"I'm hoping we'll all be going to a pub or a coffee shop because the situation will have already been resolved," said Jaimie Casinova, UIS student senator from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

But if it hasn't, "we're going to show up en masse at the Capitol," he said. "At least a dozen colleges have said they're sending more than one bus."

Casinova, a junior from Peoria, said that while he receives a MAP grant, he's advocating for thousands of students.

"But I'm in big, big trouble if we don't get something accomplished here," he said.

Casinova said state officials "better have some great answers for us" when the students rally.

"Where are our priorities?" he asked. "These are students who need the progression in their lives the most and who have the hardest time getting there."

Ringeisen said the MAP grant cutback is "the biggest concern I've had since I've been here."

"This can't be delayed to January, or students will already have given up," he said. "These students can't take off for a year. They might never come back."

Chris Detro can be reached at 788-1510.

### **UIS impact**

Number of students at the University of Illinois Springfield affected by cuts in Illinois's Monetary Award Program: 750

Average grant per student, per semester: \$1,900

Lost funding: \$1.4 million

### **LLCC**

Lincoln Land Community College officials say students at the two-year institution aren't in as dire straits as their counterparts at four-year schools when it comes to the cuts in MAP grant funding.

"Typically, our students can get (federal) Pell grants to cover tuition and fees," which are lower at LLCC than at a four-year school, said Faye Fullerton, vice president for student services. "That should be sufficient to keep them enrolled."

However, if funding isn't made whole and students don't get their spring MAP grants, Fullerton said, it could be a hardship for some to come up with money for living expenses.

"There are really not many other places they can go," she said.

About 1,300 LLCC students received MAP grants last fall, and 1,000 students got them this spring. The average award was \$500.

Fullerton said Lincoln Land supports the efforts of the Illinois Community College Board to get funding restored.

### **Other college aid**

Information on other sources of education funding is available from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission at <http://www.collegezone.com>.

---

Copyright © 2009 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a Creative Commons license, except where noted.