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Time, and money, running out for MAP college aid program

By **MATT HOPF**

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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College students serious about video games and spring break this month are getting a warning: It's time to get serious about financial aid too.

Officials with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission say interest in state and federal help to go to school is soaring. Students who don't act this month probably will be out of luck.

The number of Illinois college students eligible for Monetary Award Program grants is up 37 percent this year, the ISAC says. As of March 12, 115,758 students were eligible for such grants, up from 84,764 last year.

But that doesn't mean more students will share in the \$400 million expected to be available for MAP grants.

"The amount of money people will get will remain about the same, but many more people will not get money," said ISAC executive director Andrew Davis. "We run the program traditionally with a sort of first-come, first-served basis, and we run out eventually."

The ISAC ran out of grant money in August for fiscal year 2008, in July for fiscal year 2009, and May for the current school year, which is fiscal year 2010.

"Over the last several years, our funding has remained flat, which in this environment is not bad," Davis said.

College students could receive a total of more than \$10,000 in federal and state grants if they submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid early.

"They should be filling out their FAFSA this afternoon if they want to get a grant from the state," Davis said. "If they don't get it filled in for a month, they're still eligible for and will get a federal grant."

The maximum MAP grant for 2009-10 was \$4,968. The federal Pell grant program offered an additional \$5,500.

Schools' interest

At the University of Illinois Springfield, Gerard Joseph, director of financial assistance, said 259 eligible students missed the MAP application deadline last year. A total of 845 out of 4,900 students received MAP grants this year, up from 827 last academic year.

"That's going to become a very critical factor," Joseph said when asked about students losing money by missing the cutoff.

Returning students will generally be better off financially than freshmen, because tuition rates already are locked in for returning students. University of Illinois officials have suggested tuition could go up by 20 percent next year.

At Bradley University in Peoria, about 98 percent of students already have applied for financial aid. David Pardieck, director of financial assistance, said that's because BU pushes a March 1 deadline for students to turn in their FAFSA forms.

"That's very typical for most schools, particularly private schools," he said.

Funding uncertainty?

Funding for MAP grants has remained flat over the last few years, Davis said.

"Right now, the budget has us in for \$400 million, but, as you know, there is billions of dollars of red ink that the state is juggling at this point," Davis said.

Last summer, Gov. Pat Quinn and lawmakers cut MAP funding in half amid deep budget troubles, but an outcry forced them to restore the money in the fall veto session – without, however, specifying a way to pay for it.

Similarly, the \$400 million recommended by Quinn for next year could be adjusted as lawmakers face budget decisions this spring.

"It's been a tough year, but we're coming through it," Davis said. "The scary scenario is the one that's coming the next school year."

In fiscal year 2008, the ISAC awarded \$429 million in state grants. In fiscal year 2009, it gave out \$431 million.

The declines mean many students will not get MAP grants next year.

"Even if we do get that number (\$400 million), there will be over 100,000 students who will not be served by the program," Davis said. "That amount of money, as tough as it is for the state to come up with it, won't nearly be enough."

Matt Hopf can be reached at 782-3095.

MAP grants

*Who's eligible: Illinois residents with financial need who are maintaining satisfactory academic progress in an undergraduate degree

or certificate program at an approved Illinois college. Students must not be in default on any student loan, must comply with Selective Service registration requirements and must not be in prison.

*How much: The maximum MAP grant for 2009-10 was \$4,968. The federal Pell grant program offered an additional \$5,500.

*To apply: A student must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Eligibility for a MAP grant will be automatically determined if the college at which the award would be used is listed on the FAFSA.

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Comments (9)

michaelward

2 days ago

Report Abuse

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Report Abuse

I do not understand why students should expect MAP grants from the state. Maybe they should put the video controller down, buy a map with employers located on it, and get a job to earn money instead of expecting a handout from IL taxpayers.

possum

2 days ago

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Well look's like the student's will march in springfield again, and quinn will promise them anything not to burn down the capitol.

Dawnstewart10

2 days ago

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To michaelward

Some of us that are getting the MAP grants are working and paying our taxes. For your information there are more than just video gamers out there going to school. I am a 27 yr old single mom working and paying my taxes and still trying to get my degree. But thanks for your tax contribution anyway!

George Ecklund Jr

2 days ago

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Gosh.....and to think that I actually took out a student loan (and paid back VERY cent of it) and worked parttime while I went to college.....And I MADE it We didn't have handouts.....of course we worked every summer of High School to save for college. We shoveled snow in the winter for extra money.....When was the last time you could get some kid to shovel your snow or mow your lawn these days???????

Common Sense

2 days ago

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George do you have that same canned response everytime something is mentioned on student assistance? I usually agree with most of what you post but widen your view a touch. Some of these kids are trying to improve themselves better educated means better citizens no? Bet you also walked 10 miles to school in the pouring rain and gas was about 6 cents a gallon yada yada yada times change.

quiet_observation

2 days ago

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I could not have gone to school without the MAP grant. And I am sure there are many more taxpayers out there who didn't have a dad and mom able to pay the tuition bills.

George Ecklund Jr

1 day ago

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Common Sense. Yes I do. Somebody has to say it. All these give-ways of other people's money has to stop. People need to start providing for themselves by getting out, working hard, setting goals and making something of themselves. We are turning into a nanny-welfare state. The bad thing about all this welfare is that pretty soon you are gonna run out of other people's money to give away.

And I venture to say that MORE people agree with MY position, than with yours.

JDR

1 day ago

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Thanks for the money. My kids have gotten a bit of Map funds (I think \$1k over 8 years of collegiate schooling) , but otherwise I and/or they paid or are paying tens off thousands for their college.

michaelwards

1 day ago

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To Dawnstewart10...

My comments were also fueled by Chicago area coverage of students demanding 'their money' when the MAP grant future was lacking funding a few months ago. As

someone who paid for his own college education by working at low paying jobs, I found it quite self-centered of them to be demanding that taxpayers pay their way like that. Like it was 'owed' to them or something.

Good luck on getting your degree.
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