

New student aid programs could ease financial burden for some college students

by Bend Weekly News Sources

University of Oregon students have qualified for more than \$600,000 this fall under two new federal student aid programs. With thoughtful planning, even more students may be able to benefit, according to Jim Gilmour, associate director of the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships.

So far this year, 548 students have received more than \$615,000 in Academic Competitiveness (ACG) and Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) grants. The programs are distinctive because they offer students grants, rather than loans.

Gilmour said the eligibility criteria are stricter and more complicated than any financial aid program in recent memory. To receive either of the grants a student must be Pell grant eligible, enrolled full time, a U.S. citizen, and meet special criteria.

ACG grants are reserved for freshmen or sophomores who have taken what the US Department of Education deems as a rigorous high school curriculum. Freshmen are eligible for up to \$750, but must have graduated high school after Jan. 1, 2006. Sophomores must have graduated after Jan. 1, 2005. Sophomores who have a 3.0 GPA at the end of their freshman year can receive as much as \$1300 distributed over three terms.

Congress created the SMART grant specifically to stimulate interest in math, science, engineering, and what is termed a critical foreign language. Juniors and fourth year seniors who are pursuing a major in one of those areas, maintain a 3.0 GPA, and meet the general eligibility criteria, may receive up to \$4000 per year.

Students who have not yet declared a major could qualify for the grants if they act quickly.

"In order to be eligible for the grants, students would need to decide now if they wish to pursue a major that fits the criteria," Gilmour said.

Students who think they might qualify for either of the grants should review the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships' website for more specific information, including a complete list of SMART grant eligible majors. For more information, contact the office at 541-346-3221.