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Missouri's A+ Scholarship funding situation improves

Popular program will cover tuition for all but one credit hour

Students who participate in Missouri's A+ Scholarship Program will receive tuition reimbursement for all but one credit hour for the Spring 2015 semester, the Department of Higher Education announced Monday.

Department officials informed the state's community colleges and vocational-technical schools in August that available funds might be insufficient to cover 100 percent of tuition reimbursement costs through the A+ Program. Officials said at the time that tuition reimbursement could potentially be reduced by up to four credit hours per student due to a funding shortfall. Reimbursement is based on tuition and fee costs not covered by federal financial aid – excluding student loans.

"The A+ Program helps thousands of qualified Missouri students cover the cost of higher education every year," said David Russell, Missouri Commissioner of Higher Education. "Several factors – including the growing popularity of the program – have contributed to a potential shortfall in funding this year. Fortunately, the reimbursement gap appears to have narrowed somewhat, and many community colleges across the state are working to help students cover the cost of the one-credit hour reimbursement reduction so they can continue their education uninterrupted.

"A+ students who have questions about their obligations should contact their institutions' financial aid advisers to determine their exact situation," Russell said.

The funding shortfall is attributed to state funding levels, an increasing number of students using the program and increases in tuition costs. In November, Gov. Jay Nixon released \$2 million in A+ funds that had been restricted in June to keep the state budget in balance. The release of the restricted funds by the governor significantly eased the anticipated impact of the projected shortfall.

Because the A+ Scholarship is a reimbursement program, the department had to assess the amount of funding needed to pay tuition and fees for qualifying students completing the Fall 2014 semester in order to determine how much funding would be available for the Spring 2015 semester. The deadline for institutions to submit their preliminary reimbursement requests based on fall semester data was Dec. 15.

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The number of credit hours reimbursed for the Spring 2015 semester will depend on the number of hours each student completes. For example, a student completing 15 credit hours will receive tuition reimbursement for 14 hours. A student completing 18 credit hours will receive reimbursement for 17 hours. The program does not reimburse tuition for courses students do not complete.

The Department of Higher Education will continue to monitor program funding status over the next several months.

“This is not our final word on this matter,” Russell said. “If the situation changes and additional public funds become available later in the spring semester to reimburse students for the cost of the additional credit hour, we will hasten to inform the students affected.”

About 14,000 Missouri students are expected to receive funding through the A+ Program during the 2014-2015 school year, compared to 12,500 students during the 2013-2014 school year.

Tuition reimbursement levels for the 2015-2016 school year will depend on the number of students participating in the program and available funding.

To participate in the A+ Program, students must meet a number of qualifications:

- Attend a designated A+ high school for three consecutive years immediately prior to graduation
- Earn a 2.5 grade point average
- Have at least a 95 percent attendance record for grades 9-12
- Perform at least 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring
- Maintain a record of good citizenship

Beginning with the high school senior class of 2015, students also must score proficient or advanced on the Algebra I end-of-course exam or higher level end-of-course math exam or earn a qualifying score on the Compass test or ACT test.

For more information about the A+ Program, visit dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/aplusscholarship.php. Information about funding for the Spring 2015 semester is located at: dhe.mo.gov/ppc/grants/documents/APlusSpring2015reimbursementupdated.pdf.

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