

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
TUITION GRANTS COMMISSION

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AGENDA



SOUTH CAROLINA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY &
LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

Education and Cultural Affairs
Subcommittee

Chairman Tim McGinnis

The Honorable Phillip Bowers

The Honorable Michael F. Rivers, Sr.

The Honorable Paul B. Wickensimer

The Honorable Robert Q. Williams

AGENDA

Tuesday, April 29, 2025

9:00 A.M.

Room 108 – Blatt Building

- I. Approval of Minutes of April 22, 2025 Meeting
- II. Discussion of the study of the Tuition Grants Commission
- III. Adjournment

MINUTES



**SOUTH CAROLINA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY &
LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE**

Chair Jeffrey E. “Jeff” Johnson

Vice-Chair Chris Wooten

Lucas Atkinson
William H. Bailey
Phillip Bowers
Gary S. Brewer Jr.
Kambrell H. Garvin
Leon Douglas “Doug” Gilliam

Wendell K. Jones
Kathy Landing
John R. McCravy III
Annie E. McDaniel
Timothy A. “Tim” McGinnis
Travis A. Moore

Scott Montgomery
Michael Rivers
Richard B. “Blake” Sanders
Marvin “Mark” Smith
Robert Williams
Paul B. Wickensimer

Lewis Carter
Research Director

Cathy Greer
Administrative Coordinator

Roland Franklin
Legal Counsel

Charlie LaRosa
Research Analyst

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MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

9:00am

Room 110 – Blatt Building

Archived Video Available

- I. Pursuant to House Legislative Oversight Committee Rule 6.7, South Carolina ETV was allowed access for streaming the meeting. You may access an archived video of this meeting by visiting the South Carolina General Assembly’s website (<http://www.scstatehouse.gov>) and clicking on Committee Postings and Reports, then under House Standing Committees click on Legislative Oversight. Then, click on Video Archives for a listing of archived videos for the Committee.

Attendance

- I. The Education and Cultural Subcommittee meeting was called to order by Chair Timothy A. “Tim” McGinnis on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, in Room 110 of the Blatt Building. All subcommittee members (Chair McGinnis; Representative Phillip Bowers; Representative Paul Wickensimer; Representative Robert Williams) were present for all or a portion of the meeting. Representative Michael Rivers; was not present.

Minutes

- I. House Rule 4.5 requires standing committees to prepare and make available to the public the minutes of committee meetings, but the minutes do not have to be verbatim accounts of meetings.

Approval of Minutes

- I. Representative Wickensimer made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from prior meeting. A roll call vote was held, and the motion passed.

Rep. Wickensimer's motion to approve meeting minutes.	Yea	Nay	Not Voting
Rep. Bowers	✓		
Rep. McGinnis	✓		
Rep. Rivers			✓.
Rep. Wickensimer	✓		
Rep. Williams			✓

Discussion of Commission on Higher Education, Findings and Recommendations

- I. Chair McGinnis acknowledges that, Zachary Christian, Deputy Director of Tuition Grants Commission was sworn in at the February 27, 2025, and that he remains under oath.
- II. Deputy Director Christian then continues presenting the overview of the agency with Executive Director Harrison presenting on specific information.
- III. Topics of Discussion include:
- a. Five-year enrollment statistics
 - b. Program marketing initiatives
 - c. Agency financial Overview
 - d. Staff salaries
 - e. Tuition grants & lottery allocations

Throughout the testimony, members ask Deputy Director Christian and Executive Director Harrison questions, and they respond accordingly.

Adjournment

- I. There being no further business, the meeting is adjourned.

AGENCY OVERVIEW

SOUTH CAROLINA TUITION GRANTS COMMISSION OVERVIEW



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

EMPLOYEES

5

Authorized FTEs

ADMINISTRATIVE FUNDING

\$950,064

GRANT PROGRAM FUNDING

\$62,661,036

MISSION

The mission of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is to provide access and opportunity for more South Carolinians to pursue a post-secondary education by providing need-based tuition grants to students who choose an independent higher education.

The primary goals associated with the agency's mission are:

- ❖ To provide eligible South Carolinians with the choice to attend the college that best meets their individual academic needs
- ❖ To help offset the cost of attending an independent college or university, just as the state offsets the tuition costs of residents attending its public colleges
- ❖ To preserve the dual system of public and private higher education in our state, which provides healthy competition and innovation among all sectors
- ❖ To support optimal use of college facilities available at independent colleges and universities throughout the state
- ❖ To save the state tax dollars that would otherwise be appropriated at a higher cost, via state subsidies to public colleges, if students choosing to receive an independent higher education migrated into the public college system

GRANT AWARD

For students who qualified by demonstrating financial need and by meeting the academic standards, the maximum South Carolina Tuition Grant (SCTG) for 2023-2024 is \$4,700.

The actual amount of each student's grant is determined by the following factors:

- ❖ Family income
- ❖ Family assets
- ❖ Cost of the college selected
- ❖ Number of family members in the household
- ❖ Number of household members attending college

STATISTICS

- ❖ Over seventeen percent (17.30%) of the total award dollars went to South Carolina residents attending the six (6) historically black colleges that participate in the program.
- ❖ Just under forty-three percent (42.70%) of South Carolina Tuition Grants recipients, whose racial status could be determined, were minority students. African American students represented just over thirty-two percent (32.04%) of all recipients.
- ❖ Nearly eighty-seven percent (86.63%) of SCTG recipients were dependent upon their parents/guardians for financial support. Over thirteen percent (13.37%) were totally independent and relied only on their own income or that of a spouse.

SUCSESSES

- ❖ The agency provides exemplary customer service to all customers.
- ❖ Agency staff work to ensure all internal processes are efficient, reviewing and suggesting enhancements where needed.
- ❖ The agency spends only 1-3% of its overall appropriations on administrative costs, including staff salaries and fringe benefits.
- ❖ All agency staff are encouraged to seek out and participate in professional development opportunities.

CHALLENGES

- ❖ Agency staffing limitations
- ❖ Staff demographics: The combination of little turnover and a small staff makes it difficult to align with the overall state population.
- ❖ Since the agency does not have dedicated departments for certain essential functions we must often rely on other state agencies for assistance with things like troubleshooting SCEIS accounting transactions, HR-related processes, and often lengthy state procurement processes related to larger purchases.

AGENCY PRESENTATION



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

South Carolina Tuition Grants Program

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.



Agency Overview: Mission

The mission of the South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission is to provide access and opportunity for more South Carolinians to pursue a postsecondary education by providing need-based tuition grants to students who choose to attend an independent college or university.

The primary goals associated with the agency's mission are:

- To provide eligible South Carolinians with the choice to attend the college that best meets their individual academic needs
- To help offset the cost of attending an independent college or university, just as the state offsets the tuition costs of residents attending its public colleges
- To preserve the dual system of public and private higher education in our state, which provides healthy competition and innovation among all sectors
- To support optimal use of college facilities available at independent colleges and universities throughout the state
- To save the state tax dollars that would otherwise be appropriated at a higher cost, via state subsidies to public colleges, if students choosing to receive an independent higher education migrated into the public college system



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
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Agency Overview: Vision

Providing opportunity and promoting choice while supporting
South Carolina's postsecondary attainment goals



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
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Agency Overview: Commission Composition

By Statute, the Commission consists "of eight representatives of the independent institutions of higher learning in the State who choose to come under the provisions of this chapter. In addition, the membership of the Commission includes one ex officio member who must be the chief executive officer of the State Commission on Higher Education or his designee." For purposes of the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission, the "representatives" of the independent institutions of higher learning are deemed to be the College Presidents or their designees.

Commission members serve on a three-year basis with a rotation scheduled approved by the Commission; this allows for new members to roll on each year while still maintaining consistent governance with returning members.

Upon appointment to the Commission, all Commission Members are provided with training and orientation to include the following: Review of Commission's statutory duties; general overview of agency mission/vision, services, and clients; requirement to file the annual SEI report with the State Ethics Commission; and other information related to the Program's history and purpose.

Agency Overview: Commission Duties

The Commission (governing body):

- Assists the agency in its duty to administer all provisions of SC Title 59, Chapter 113 by regularly reviewing all relevant program policies and procedures to ensure compliance with statute.
- Votes to enact new policies, or to remove or revise existing policies as needed, to appropriately administer the Tuition Grants Program.
- Presides over all regularly scheduled and special called meetings of the Commission, ensuring all FOIA and public meeting requirements are met.
- Votes on the maximum grant value of the Tuition Grant yearly, in addition to approving the agency's annual budget request, and reviewing and approving any sole source procurements or other procurements as required by law.
- Reviews all requests for new institutions to become participating colleges eligible for students to receive the Tuition Grant.



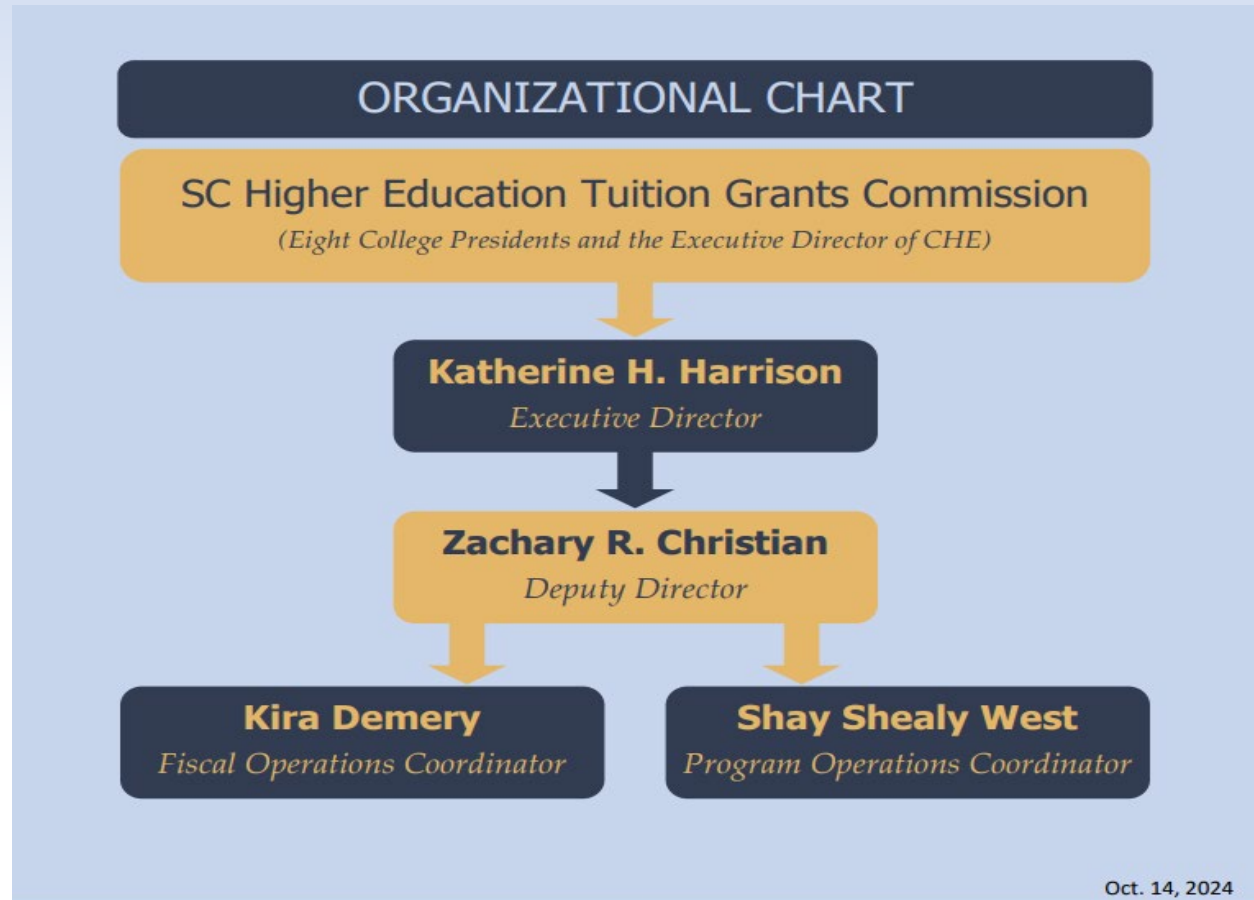
Agency Overview: Commission Members

Current Commission Members FY2025

- Dr. Boone Hopkins, Chair (Commission term 2023 - 2026), President, Converse University
- Dr. Gene Fant, Vice Chair (Commission term 2022 - 2025), President, North Greenville University
- Dr. Natalie Harder, Secretary (Commission term 2021 - 2024), President, Coker University
- Ms. Archinya Ingram, Voting Member (Commission term 2023 - 2026), Interim President, Clinton College
- Dr. Anita Gustafson, Voting Member (Commission term 2022 - 2025), President, Presbyterian College
- Dr. William Barker, Voting Member (Commission term 2022 - 2025), President, Southern Wesleyan University
- Dr. Ernest McNealey, Voting Member (Commission term 2024 - 2027), President, Allen University
- Dr. John Dozier, Voting Member (Commission term 2021 - 2024), President, Columbia College
- Dr. Jeff Perez, Ex-Officio (Commission term indefinite), President and Executive Director, SC Commission on Higher Education



Agency Overview: Organization Chart



Due to the small size of the agency, all staff members are categorized in the “Administrative” organizational unit in SCEIS, with the Deputy Director and Executive Director being designated with managerial duties.



Agency Overview: Organization Chart

Executive Management

Executive Director is primarily responsible for the following: Legislative relations, Commission Meetings and Commission member communications, state budget requests, Accountability Report and other reporting requirements, statistical analysis and strategic planning, advocacy and research, agency privacy liaison, compliance, authorization of MOUs and other requirements for partnerships and sharing of data

Deputy Director serves as the agency's functional manager or director in the areas of Information Technology, Human Resources, Procurement, and Public Information/publications, and is also responsible for training and compliance, data and program research, policies and procedures, and project management



Agency Overview: Organization Chart

Agency Operations

Fiscal Operations Coordinator is responsible for disbursement of student grants, accounts payable and receivable, review and reconciliation of agency budget and expenditures, Closing Packages (CAFR), journal entries, and general accounting; this position also serves as the Benefits Administrator for the agency

Program Operations Coordinator serves as the primary contact and liaison for students, institutions, and the general public, and is responsible for all student eligibility inquiries and resolutions; this position also assists the Deputy Director with public information, including social media and communications, and serves as the Acting Secretary to the Commission, preparing and distributing minutes of all Commission meetings



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Managerial Position Description Information

Minimum Required Qualifications:

- Masters Degree in Higher Education Administration or related field and three (3) years of management experience in Higher Education Administration, Student Financial Aid, or College Admissions/Enrollment Management or a Bachelor's degree and six (6) years of management experience in Higher Education Administration, Student Financial Aid, or College Admissions/Enrollment Management
- General knowledge of all the Federal and State Student Assistance Programs; Knowledge of the Federal and State legislative processes
- Exceptional Written Communicative Skills; Organizational and time management skills
- Financial Management and Personnel Management skills
- Understanding of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches of Federal and State governments
- A thorough understanding of Student financial aid policy and theory
- A thorough understanding of Information Security Requirements and computer and database operations
- General knowledge and ability to work with State SCEIS system
- General knowledge of State Procurement Code and Human Resources Regulations



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Managerial Position Description Information

Duties:

- Administer provisions of the chapter (Chapter 113) and make program guidelines and rules as necessary to carry out the intent of the chapter.
- Effectively and efficiently work towards the overall mission of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program of providing funds for payment of tuition to eligible South Carolina residents
- Strategically work in coordination and cooperation with all interested organizations to promote the advancement and funding of the state's need-based grants programs through all means available
- Work through budgetary limitations to be involved at the various professional conferences, legislative committee and subcommittee meetings, and other entity functions that have an impact on the Tuition Grants Program
- Using historic program data and current trends in student financial aid and college enrollment, the Agency Director forecasts program needs and evaluates how the agency can work toward accomplishing the agency mission, and uses information available to be responsive to the current needs of the Program
- Continue supporting the Information Security, SCEIS, and other Professional Development and training opportunities for the staff of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission, ensuring all staff members work as a team to accomplish the agency mission and provide outstanding customer service



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Managerial Position Description Information

Duties, continued:

- As appropriate, due to administrative budgetary limitations, seek out both traditional and non-traditional opportunities for the staff to obtain training
- Provide opportunities for cross-training of staff
- As opportunities arise, seek to diversify the agency staff
- As needed, evaluate and further improve the use of the Federal Financial Need Methodology (FAFSA) as the need analysis and grant application for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program
- Support needed hardware and software improvements to improve office efficiency
- Evaluate computer systems designed to administer the Program and as needed, recommend improvements or changes to existing electronic infrastructure to ensure efficient and effective delivery of Program funds
- Continue to develop the agency's website and social media platform
- Ensure effective use of the electronic award notification process



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Managerial Position Description Information

Duties, continued:

- Working with available information through other state entities, including the South Carolina Department of Technology Operations and Division of Information Security, and with the Commission's Deputy Director, and within the confines of the agency budget, ensure that the agency's data and online presence are as secure as possible to mitigate risks of data security breaches
- Review, on at least a monthly basis, all agency fund levels and expenditures, ensuring that funds are allocated to the necessary areas to fulfill the agency mission
- Work together with the Deputy Director and Fiscal Operations Coordinator, including a monthly reconciliation of all accounts, to make sure that agency accounting and procurement processes are in accordance with correct state procedures to eliminate potential audit issues
- Strive to be prudent in the fiscal management of the agency's administrative budget, ensuring that funds are spent solely in support of necessary agency operations and administration



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Katherine Harrison, Executive Director

Education and Credentials :

- Master of Education – Higher Education Administration
 - University of South Carolina
- Bachelor of Arts – Communications
 - Oglethorpe University
- Certified Information Privacy Professional (CIPP/US)
 - International Association of Privacy Professionals



Agency Overview: Agency Head

Katherine Harrison, Executive Director

Background/Prior Experience:

26 years of experience in higher education and student financial aid, including:

- SC Tuition Grants Commission; Deputy Director (2009-2017), prior to promotion to Executive Director
- SC Student Loan Corporation; Student Loan Counselor (2007-2009)
- University of South Carolina Student Financial Aid & Scholarships; Assistant Director of Loan Services (2003-2007)
- Lander University; Assistant Director of Financial Aid (2002-2003)
- Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College; Financial Aid Counselor (1998-2002)

Professional and Volunteer Association Highlights:

- President of National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs (NASSGAP) (2021-2022)
- President of SC Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA) (2013-2014)
- SC Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Awards Conferred:
 - Fearless Nine Service Award (2019); Achiever Award (2016); Emerging Leader Award (2010)



SC Code of Laws Section 59-113

SECTION 59-113-10. Higher Education Tuition Grant Commission

There is created a Higher Education Tuition Grant Commission consisting of eight representatives of the independent institutions of higher learning in the State who choose to come under the provisions of this chapter. In addition, the membership of the commission includes one ex officio member who must be the chief executive officer of the State Commission on Higher Education or his designee. The terms of the representatives of the institutions are for three years and until their successors are selected and qualify. The membership of the commission must be rotated among the participating institutions. The commission shall administer the provisions of this chapter and shall make those regulations as may be necessary in order to carry out the intent of this chapter. The commission is responsible solely to the General Assembly and shall report to that body at least annually.

For Commission purposes, the representatives of the independent institutions who serve as members of the Commission (governing board) are defined as the college presidents or a designee in the event the president is unable to participate.



SC Tuition
Grants:
Statute



SC Code of Laws Section 59-113

SECTION 59-113-20. Qualifications of applicants for grants

The State of South Carolina shall grant an amount, as provided in this chapter, to any applicant who meets the following qualifications:

- (a) has been a resident of South Carolina for at least one year;
- (b) is of good moral character;
- (c) has demonstrated qualities of academic merit and financial need;
- (d) has been accepted by or is registered in a South Carolina independent institution of higher learning as a full-time student whose academic programs are not comprised solely of sectarian instruction;
- (e) is not enrolled in a course of study leading to a degree in theology, divinity, or religious education; and
- (f) has not been adjudicated delinquent or been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any felonies or any second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related offenses under the laws of this or any other state or under the laws of the United States in order to be eligible for a South Carolina tuition grant, except that a high school or college student otherwise qualified who has been adjudicated delinquent or has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to a second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offense nevertheless shall be eligible or continue to be eligible for such grants after the expiration of one academic year from the date of the adjudication, conviction, or plea.



SC Tuition Grants: Statute



SC Tuition Grants: Statute



SC Higher Education
Tuition Grants Commission
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SC Code of Laws Section 59-113

SECTION 59-113-30. Students covered by chapter; amount of grants; adjustment for scholarships

- (A) The provisions of this chapter apply to students entering college as freshmen during the 1970-71 academic year.
- (B) The amount of the grant to be paid for each semester, or appropriate academic term, must be determined by the Higher Education Tuition Grant Commission and the Commission shall award the maximum amount permissible under its regulations or the determined need of the student, whichever is less.
- (C) The maximum amount may not exceed the average state appropriation for each full-time student enrolled in the state-supported institutions of higher learning with four-year undergraduate degree programs in the previous year. The tuition grants must be calculated annually by the Commission.
- (D) The need of each applicant must be determined by acceptable need analysis such as the parents' confidential statement and such other analyses as the Commission may determine.
- (E) An adjustment must be made in the tuition grant of any student awarded a scholarship from any other source if the combination of grants and awards exceeds the calculated need of the student. If the scholarship is for only a portion of tuition and fees, the student may qualify for a proportionate tuition grant in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.



SC Tuition Grants: Statute



SC Higher Education
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SC Code of Laws Section 59-113

SECTION 59-113-40. Misapplication of grants

It shall be unlawful for any person to obtain, attempt to obtain, expend or attempt to expend, any tuition grant provided by this chapter for any purpose other than in payment of, or reimbursement for, the tuition cost of the student to whom such scholarship has been awarded at the institution the student is authorized to attend under the tuition grant.

SECTION 59-113-45. Disbursement of funds; awards of accrued interest on undisbursed funds

South Carolina Tuition Grant funds shall be disbursed to eligible students on a semester-by-semester basis. Interest accruing on the balance of undisbursed tuition grant funds on deposit with the State Treasurer's office from September fifteenth through December thirty-first shall be calculated by the State Treasurer's office and transferred within thirty days to the South Carolina Tuition Grant Commission to be awarded as tuition grants to eligible students.



SC Tuition Grants: Statute



SC Higher Education
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SC Code of Laws Section 59-113

SECTION 59-113-47. Exemption from mid-year budget reductions.

The grant funds appropriated pursuant to this chapter are exempt from mid-year budget reductions.

SECTION 59-113-50. "Independent institution of higher learning" defined.

For the purposes of this chapter, an independent institution of higher learning means an:

- (1) independent eleemosynary junior or senior college in South Carolina whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina and which is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; or
- (2) independent bachelor's level institution chartered before 1962 whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina.



Agency Overview: History - Law

- **FY1970:** The General Assembly of the State of South Carolina, during the 1970 session, passed Act 1191 creating the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, which subsequently became law on May 1, 1970, upon the signature of Governor Robert E. McNair. Provisions of the legislation are contained in Section 59, Chapter 113 of the South Carolina Code of Laws. The South Carolina Tuition Grants Program was created to help educate our South Carolina citizens by making the cost of attending in-state independent colleges more affordable, thereby gaining maximum usage from all available educational facilities located in South Carolina. The Tuition Grants Program also helps preserve the dual system of education in South Carolina and saves the state tax dollars by attracting South Carolina residents into the independent college sector, thereby saving the automatic state tax subsidy that goes to all students attending South Carolina's public colleges regardless of the financial need of the family.



Agency Overview: History - Law

- **FY 1973:** a referendum was passed in General Election to amend State Constitution to remove "indirect support" language, which allowed students at a total of 20 colleges to participate in the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program.
- **FY 1988:** Act 464 amends South Carolina Tuition Grants legislation to require that all participating colleges be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, that the main campuses and headquarters of all eligible colleges be located within the State of South Carolina, that the name of the Higher Education Tuition Grant Committee be changed to the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission, that the Chief Executive Officer of State Commission on Higher Education or his designee be an ex-officio member of the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission, and that the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission reports solely to the General Assembly.



Agency Overview: History - Law

- **FY 1999:** The General Assembly added Section 45 of the Tuition Grants statute (Title 59, Chapter 113) as follows:
“South Carolina Tuition Grant funds shall be disbursed to eligible students on a semester-by-semester basis. Interest accruing on the balance of undisbursed tuition grant funds on deposit with the State Treasurer's office from September fifteenth through December thirty-first shall be calculated by the State Treasurer's office and transferred within thirty days to the South Carolina Tuition Grant Commission to be awarded as tuition grants to eligible students.”
- **FY 2001:** The General Assembly added Subsection f to Section 20 of the Tuition Grants statute (Title 59, Chapter 113) requiring that grant recipients must not have "been adjudicated delinquent or been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any felonies or any alcohol or drug-related offenses under the laws of this or any other state or under the laws of the United States in order to be eligible for a South Carolina Tuition Grant, except that a high school or college student otherwise qualified who has been adjudicated delinquent or has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to an alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offense nevertheless shall be eligible or continue to be eligible for such grants after the expiration of one academic year from the date of the adjudication, conviction, or plea."



Agency Overview: History - Law

- **FY 2007:** Section 50 of the Program statute (Title 59, Chapter 113) was changed by the General Assembly altering the existing verbiage to become the introduction and Subsection 1 and adding Subsection 2 as follows:

“For the purposes of this chapter, an independent institution of higher learning means an:

- (1) independent eleemosynary junior or senior college in South Carolina whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina and which is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; or
- (2) independent bachelor’s level institution chartered before 1962 whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina.”

The redefinition of “an independent institution” enabled Bob Jones University, located in Greenville, South Carolina, to become an eligible institution effective for 2007-2008.



Agency Overview: History - Law

- **FY 2008:** Subsection f to Section 20 was modified in two places changing “an alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offense” to “a second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offense.”
- **FY 2010:** The General Assembly added Section 47 to the Tuition Grants statute (Title 59, Chapter 113) exempting grant funds from mid-year budget reductions.
- **FY2021:** Based on the FY2007 changes to the definition of an independent college, Clinton College in Rock Hill became the 22nd eligible institution to participate in the Tuition Grants Program after becoming a bachelor’s level institution.



Agency Overview: History – Court Decision

- **FY 1987:** Joseph A. Talley v. South Carolina Higher Education Tuition Grant Committee (1986) - Rutledge College student sues the Higher Education Tuition Grant Committee for being turned down for South Carolina Tuition Grants assistance. Judge rules in favor of student. Decision is appealed to South Carolina Supreme Court where lower court decision is overturned in favor of the Higher Education Tuition Grant Committee.



Agency Overview: History - Directors

- **FY 1976:** Earliest record of the Agency Head position being utilized, effective July 1, 1975. R. Laine Ligon given Director title (previously Program Coordinator)
 - *Served as Agency Head for 5+ years*
- **FY 1981:** Edward M. Shannon, III appointed Executive Director effective September 1, 1980 upon the retirement of R. Laine Ligon
 - *Served as Agency Head for 28 years*
- **FY 2009:** Earl L. Mayo, Jr. promoted from Deputy Director to Executive Director/Agency Head by the Tuition Grants Commission in October 2008, upon the retirement of Edward M. Shannon, III.
 - *Served as Agency Head for 8+ years (25 total years with agency)*
- **FY 2017:** Katherine H. Harrison promoted from Deputy Director to Executive Director/Agency Head by the Tuition Grants Commission on June 30, 2017, upon the retirement of Earl L. Mayo, Jr.
 - *Current service as Agency Head for 7+ years (15+ total years with agency)*



Agency Overview: History – Recent Board Action

- **FY 2024:** Commission voted to extend the annual application deadline from June 30 to August 1, allowing students an additional month to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which serves as the application for the SC Tuition Grant.
- **FY 2024:** Commission voted to extend the annual eligibility deadline from November 15 (Fall term) to January 15 (Spring term), allowing college aid administrators more time to work with individual students who may need additional time or assistance in completing documents and other requirements.
- **FY2024:** Commission voted to allow students who begin their program of study or transfer to an eligible institution in the spring term to be considered for a Tuition Grant; previously, students must have been enrolled in an eligible institution and receiving the grant in the Fall in order to continue receiving it in the Spring.



Agency Overview: History – Recent Board Action

- **FY 2024:** Commission voted to update initial freshman academic requirements, removing four different criterion to allow for students who have obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent and who are admitted as a degree-seeking student based on the college's admissions requirements to be deemed academically meritorious.
- **FY 2023:** Commission voted to update the Non-Traditional Calendar Programs requirements, removing a restriction that approved programs begin and end within 10-business days of the Traditional fall and spring semesters, enabling programs that follow non-standard terms to be approved. This change allowed Columbia International University to offer Tuition Grants to students enrolled in their online non-traditional program, and ensured existing programs did not lose eligibility based on varying start and end dates.



Agency Overview: History – Recent Board Action

- **FY 2022:** Commission voted to align the Program's Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy with the SAP requirements already in place at each institution to determine a student's continuing eligibility for financial aid; this change eliminated an additional Tuition Grant-specific formula that previously created additional barriers to student persistence and success. More students now meet the Satisfactory Academic Requirement to receive the Tuition Grant.
- **FY 2021:** Attorney General opinion concludes that the statutory definition of independent institution of higher learning in Section 50 of the Tuition Grants statute (Title 59, Chapter 113) is ambiguous regarding whether an institution must have offered bachelor's level education prior to 1962. As such, the State courts would defer to the Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission's interpretation of the definition of an institution of higher learning so long as it is consistent with the plain language of the Statute. This led to the Commission approving Clinton College, located in Rock Hill, South Carolina, to become an eligible institution effective for 2022-2023 at the June 2021 Commission Meeting.



Agency Overview: Key Partnerships

Federal:

- US Department of Education, Federal Student Aid Office - Controls the process of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which also serves as the application for the SC Tuition Grant. The agency utilizes the results of the FAFSA to determine financial need for SC residents who choose to attend an independent college or university; agency obtains these results directly via secure file transfer from the US Department of Education's Federal Student Aid Office system

State/Local:

- SC Commission on Higher Education – Agencies share certain data elements to assist with administration of student financial aid programs; Tuition Grants Commission participates in outreach and advocacy events hosted by CHE (i.e., College Goal SC, Higher Education Day at the State House, and College and Career Decision Day)
- SC Department of Education and Statewide High Schools – Tuition Grants Commission partners with SCDE to receive a list of all K-12 public high school seniors and uses that data to host a statewide FAFSA Completion Portal for authorized users at high schools to obtain non-sensitive student level FAFSA Completion data for students attending their school



Participating Colleges and Universities



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Allen University	Erskine College
Anderson University	Furman University
Benedict College	Limestone University
Bob Jones University	Morris College
Charleston Southern University	Newberry College
Claflin University	North Greenville University
Clinton College	Presbyterian College
Coker University	Southern Wesleyan University
Columbia International University	Spartanburg Methodist College
Columbia College	Voorhees University
Converse University	Wofford College



Participating Colleges and Universities

In order to participate in the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program, a college must be an independent eleemosynary (non-profit) institution of higher learning (junior or senior college) in South Carolina whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina and which is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools or is an independent bachelor's level institution chartered before 1962 whose major campus and headquarters are located within South Carolina.

At this time, the agency is unaware of any institutions that could qualify but are not participating. All 22 participating institutions enroll eligible students who benefit greatly from the Tuition Grants Program. On average, the SC Tuition Grant covers about 15% of a student's direct tuition at a participating college. In many cases, this assistance allows the students to eliminate the need to take out student loans or to reduce the amount borrowed.



Participating Colleges and Universities

The following procedure must be followed by all higher education institutions seeking approval for participation in the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program:

Documentation that the institution meets all the institutional requirements for participation set forth in the South Carolina Tuition Grants statute must be submitted to the South Carolina Tuition Grants Commission along with a letter from the college president requesting consideration for institutional participation. The information received from the college will be presented to the Commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting. Upon approval by the Commission, the newly eligible college will be officially notified by the Commission. On October 1 following the date of approval by the Commission, students may begin submitting applications for South Carolina Tuition Grants assistance for the fiscal year that will begin July 1 of the following calendar year.

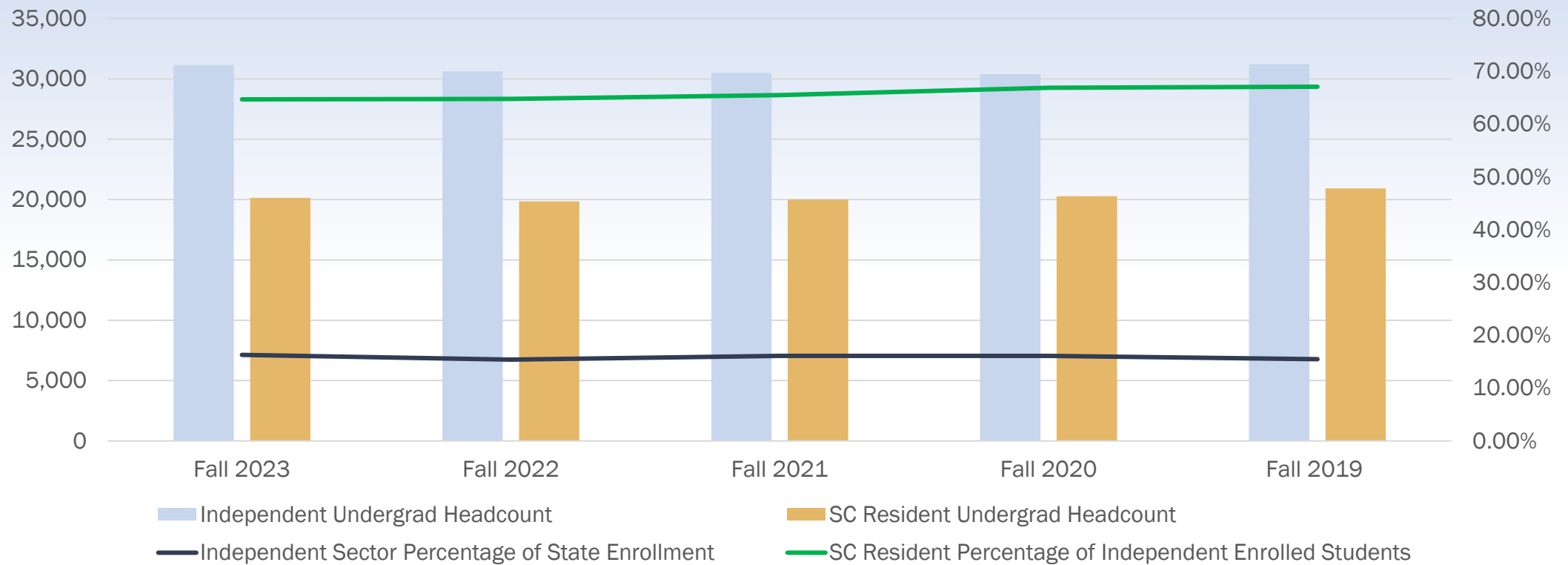


Five-Year Enrollment Statistics

	Independent Sector Percentage of Enrollment	Total Undergraduate Student Headcount	SC Resident Undergraduate Student Headcount	SC Resident Percentage of Enrolled Students
Fall 2023	16.3 %	31,149	20,151	64.7 %
Fall 2022	15.4 %	30,631	19,849	64.8 %
Fall 2021	16.1 %	30,516	19,998	65.5 %
Fall 2020	16.1 %	30,380	20,280	66.9 %
Fall 2019	15.5 %	31,207	20,941	67.1 %



Five-Year Enrollment Statistics





Five-Year Recipient Statistics

	Total Undergraduate Student Headcount	SC Resident Undergraduate Student Headcount	Number of SC Tuition Grant Recipients	Percentage of Student Body Receiving TG	Percentage of SC Residents Receiving TG
Fall 2023	31,149	20,151	12,473	40 %	61.9 %
Fall 2022	30,631	19,849	12,036	39.3 %	60.6 %
Fall 2021	30,516	19,998	11,262	36.9 %	56.3 %
Fall 2020	30,380	20,280	12,202	40.2 %	60.2 %
Fall 2019	31,207	20,941	12,817	41.1 %	61.2 %



Five-Year Recipient Statistics

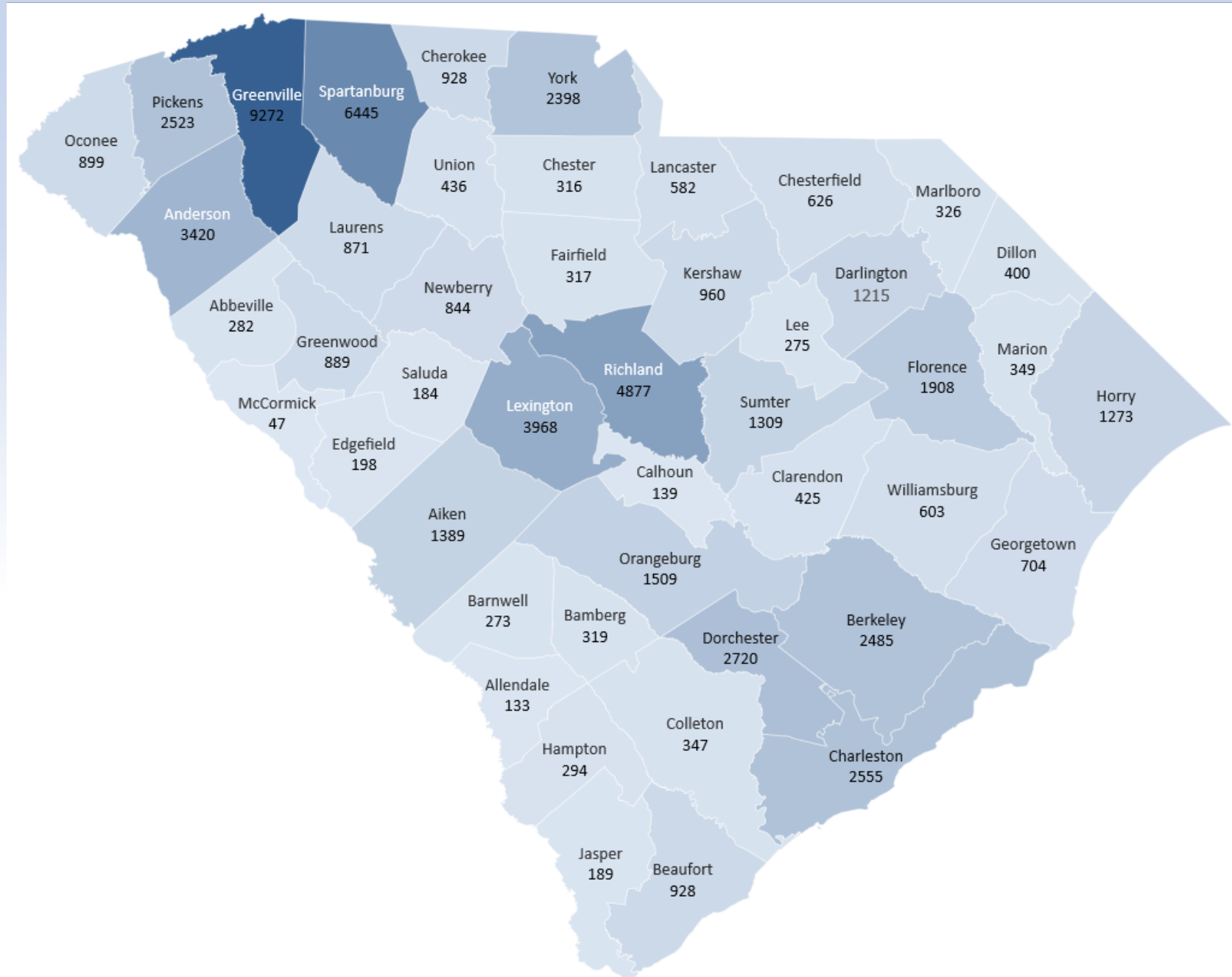




SC Higher Education Tuition Grants Commission

Providing Opportunity. Promoting Choice.

Recipients by County 2018-2023





Agency Overview: Financial Overview

Appropriations:	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Tuition Grants (General State Recurring)	\$27,558,624	\$27,558,624	\$27,558,624
Tuition Grants (Lottery Allocation – Other Funds)	\$19,930,000	\$19,930,000	\$19,930,000
Tuition Grants (Childrens Endowment/CHE Pass-Through – Other Funds)	\$11,477,700	\$13,065,525	\$14,765,740
Tuition Grants (Interest Earned – Other Funds)	\$97,214	\$242,055	\$406,672
Authority to Spend (Other Funds)	\$6,000,000	\$16,000,000	\$30,000,000



Agency Overview: Financial Overview

Appropriations:	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Admin (Operations) (General State Recurring)	\$296,608	\$296,608	\$296,608
Admin (Salaries) General State Recurring	\$225,388	\$240,388	\$249,345
Admin (Benefits) General State Recurring	\$101,642	\$111,724	\$118,434
Lottery Admin (Operations) (Lottery Allocation – Other Funds)	\$70,000	\$70,000	\$70,000
Admin (Operations) (Capital Reserve)	\$200,000 <i>(unspent until FY24)</i>	\$200,000 <i>(unspent until FY24)</i>	\$200,000



Agency Overview: Financial Overview

Actual Expenditures:	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Tuition Grants (General State Recurring)	\$28,506,553 <i>(includes FY21 CF funds)</i>	\$26,282,334 <i>(includes FY22 CF funds)</i>	\$28,193,338 <i>(includes FY23 CF funds)</i>
Tuition Grants (Lottery Allocation – Other Funds)	\$13,667,450	\$15,748,086	\$18,438,102
Tuition Grants (Childrens Endowment/CHE Pass-Through – Other Funds)	\$6,092,040	\$9,115,451	\$11,591,495
Tuition Grants (Interest Earned – Other Funds)	\$97,115	\$0	\$225,600
Authority to Spend (Other Funds)	\$6,000,000	\$16,000,000	\$30,000,000



Agency Overview: Financial Overview

Actual Expenditures:	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Admin (Operations) (General State Recurring)	\$9,462	\$63,931	\$466,150
Admin (Salaries) General State Recurring	\$236,051	\$251,441	\$275,792
Admin (Benefits) General State Recurring	\$99,375	\$111,515	\$126,251
Lottery Admin (Operations) (Lottery Allocation – Other Funds)	\$68,537	\$57,559	\$50,848
Admin (Operations) (Capital Reserve)	\$0	\$0	\$200,000



Average Tuition & Fees vs. Average Grant

Since the 1973-74 award year, when the agency began tracking Average Tuition & Fees of the participating colleges and universities alongside the average tuition grant amount, Tuition & Fees have increased steadily.

The average tuition grant has also increased, but at a much slower rate compared to Tuition costs.

In the early years of the Program, tuition grants covered a higher percentage of Tuition & Fees, often more than 70%.

Over time, as Tuition & Fees increased, the percentage covered by grants declined.

Between 1973 and 2001, the average Tuition Grant covered 81% of Tuition & Fees, steadily declining to 21.20% in 2000-01; Since 2001, Tuition Grants have covered between 11% and 17% of average Tuition & Fees, varying year to year.



Average Tuition & Fees vs. Average Grant

Early Years of the Program (1970s & 1980s):

- Tuition & Fees were relatively low compared to today
- Grants covered a much larger portion of Tuition & Fees, often above 70%
- The number of awardees was significantly lower (3,173 in 1973 vs. 7,152 in 1989)

Mid-Years (1990s & 2000s):

- Tuition & Fees began rising more sharply
- Grants still increased but at a slower rate, causing the percentage of Tuition & Fees covered to drop
- More students began receiving Tuition Grants (6,816 in 1990 vs. 14,200 in 2009)



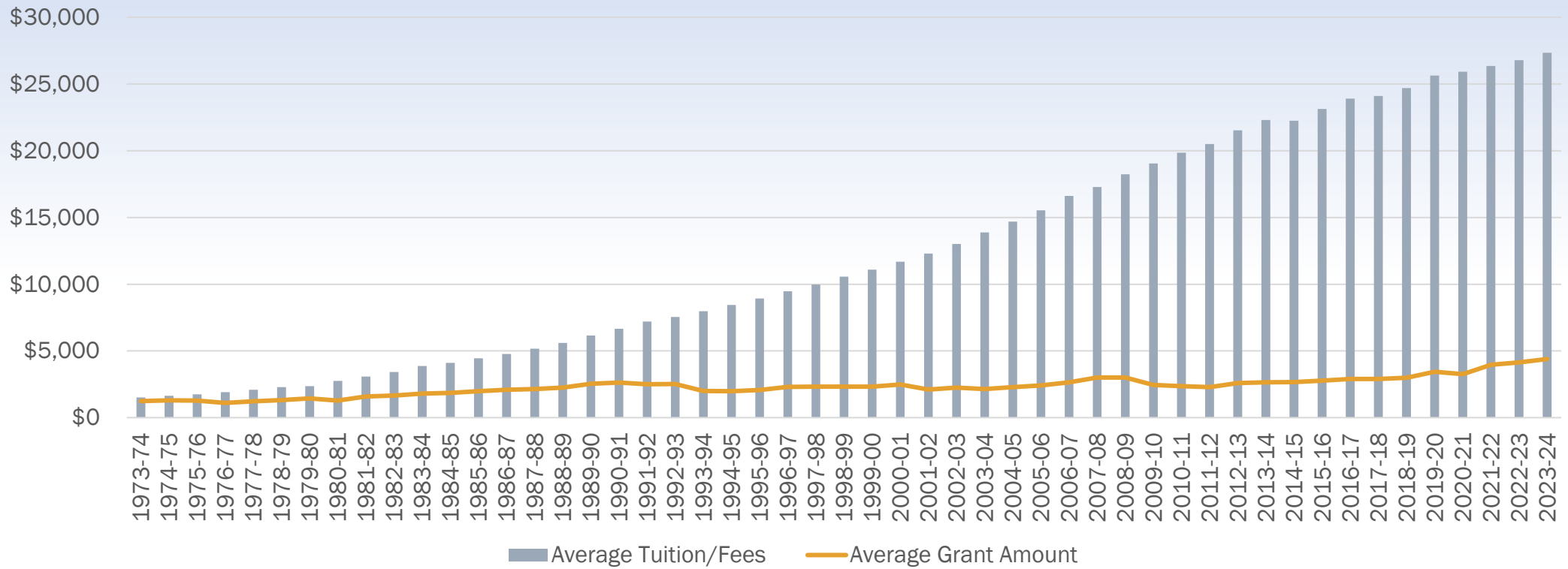
Average Tuition & Fees vs. Average Grant

Recent Years (2010s – Present)

- Tuition & Fees are significantly higher than in earlier decades
- The average grant, though increasing, covers a smaller percentage of Tuition & Fees costs than before
- The number of awardees has reached its highest levels, indicating a greater need for financial assistance (14,451 in 2010 to 12,473 in 2023)

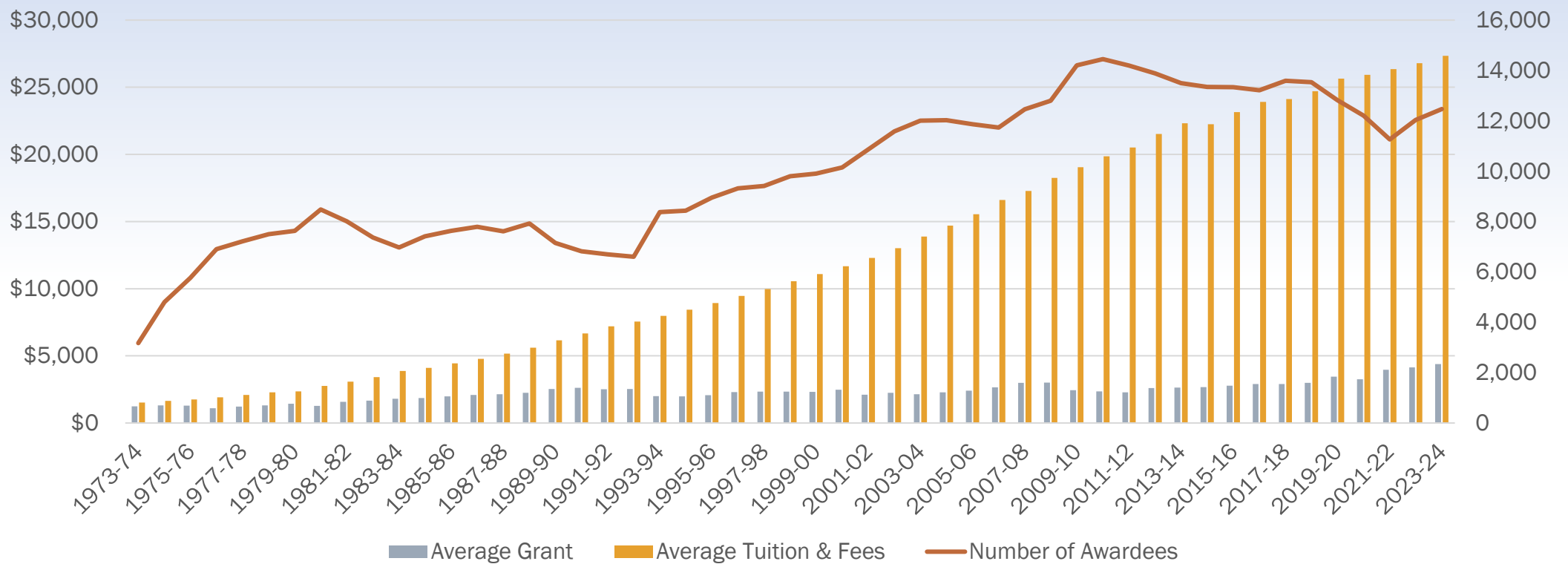


Average Tuition & Fees vs. Average Grant





Average Grant vs. Number of Awardees





Average State Subsidy vs. Average Grant

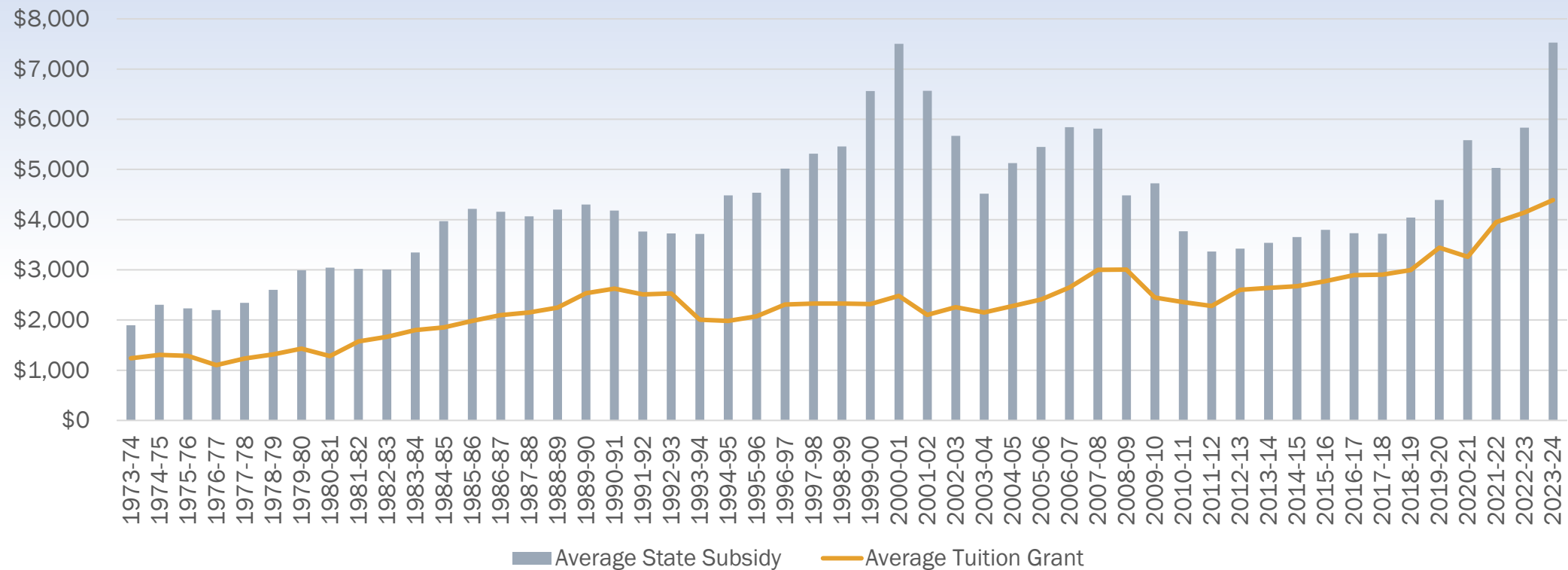
Per §59-113-30(C) of the South Carolina Code of Laws:

- “The maximum amount may not exceed the average state appropriation for each full-time student enrolled in the state-supported institutions of higher learning with four-year undergraduate degree programs in the previous year. The tuition grants must be calculated annually by the [Tuition Grants] Commission”

Since 1973, the first year the Agency began maintaining data related to the maximum Tuition Grants award amount and the average State Subsidy, calculated and provided by the S.C. Commission on Higher Education (CHE), average tuition grants have ranged from a low of \$1,102 up to \$4,391, while the State Subsidy has ranged from a low of \$1,896 up to \$7,529



Average State Subsidy vs. Average Grant



Note: The average per student state subsidy includes only the 12 public senior colleges (excludes MUSC undergrad and USC School of Medicine) comparable to the independent colleges participating in the SC Tuition Grants Program. Only undergraduate subsidies are included. USC's two-year regional campuses and SC Technical colleges are not included. Figures provided annually by the SC Commission on Higher Education.



Agency Overview: Financial Consideration for Future Tuition Grant Funding

Since the Governor and General Assembly increased the State's investment in need-based student aid during FY22, the Commission has increased the maximum Tuition Grant award by \$1,200 per academic year while increasing the number of eligible students by over 700 during the same period.

With carryforward funds from "Other Funds" (i.e., Lottery) available to spend on the Program, and assuming level funding from all existing sources, Commission Staff project to maintain this progress over the next 2-3 award years without asking for any additional Program appropriations.



Agency Overview: Financial Consideration for Future Tuition Grant Funding

The primary sources of funding for the Tuition Grants Program are general/state appropriations and Lottery allocations (in addition to direct Lottery allocations, the Children's Education "pass-through" funding received by CHE is also in the form of Lottery).

If appropriations for the Tuition Grants Program are decreased or diverted from student aid programs for higher education for other purposes, the Commission would be unable to maintain the positive momentum of increasing grant value and expanding access without such funding being replaced with another source. If this occurs and funds are not replaced, the Tuition Grant amount would be cut by over 50% per student.



Agency Overview: Record Retention

- Agency is currently embarking on a thorough review of on-site files and documents to determine compliance with state and agency-specific record retention schedules
- Completed Phase I of Executive-Level E-mail Assessment Form requested by SC Department of Archives and History, through which agency has identified areas of training and support needed
- The agency also plans to seek training and guidance from the SC Department of Archives and History to help digitize records, meet requirements, and transfer necessary documents
- Development of full record management and retention policy to incorporate existing retention schedules (i.e., formalize the policy to reflect procedures already in place, in addition to improvements resulting from Archives project currently in place)



Agency Overview: Reporting

- Accountability Report (Executive Budget Office)
- AFCR Reporting Packages and Year-End Reports (Comptroller General)
- Debt Collection Report (Proviso 117.33 – Inspector General)
- Information Security Plans (Division of Information Security)
- Information Technology Data Collection (Program Management Office)
- Lottery Fund Expenditures Report (Lottery Commission)
- Minority Business Enterprise Utilization Plan (Small and Minority Business Contracting and Certification)
- Minority Spending Quarterly Reports (Small and Minority Business Contracting and Certification)



Agency Overview: Reporting

- National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Program (NASSGAP) Annual Survey
- Other Funds Survey and Federal Project Review Report (Executive Budget Office)
- Procurement Quarterly Reports (Division of Procurement Services)
- Recycling Report (Department of Environmental Services)
- State Travel Report (Proviso 117.26 – Comptroller General)
- Tuition Grants Program Annual Report (Governor, General Assembly, Program Stakeholders)
- Various Required Human Resources Reports (Division of State Human Resources)
 - Retirement Incentives, Furlough, Group Productivity Incentive, Leave Transfer, Organizational Chart Submission)
- *Ad-hoc data and reports to partnering entities (i.e., Commission on Higher Education, SC Independent Colleges & Universities, Governor's Office, etc.) are responded to by request*



Agency Overview: Internal Audits

Due to the size of the agency, the Commission employs no staff for internal audits; however, the following procedures are in place to ensure budget management and compliance:

- Fiscal Operations Coordinator produces monthly reconciliation reports reviewed by Executive Management as an internal measure to review budget and expenses
- Regularly scheduled financial audits by State Auditor's Office (Agreed Upon Procedures)
- Executive Management approves all agency expenditures, and CG's office reviews transactions for accuracy prior to payment
- At least annually, college-specific Tuition Grant disbursement reconciliation is required
- Senate Legislative Oversight process; Subcommittee report accepted in FY2023
- In FY2023, all agencies completed an Information Security Audit and Assessment Program through the Division of Information Security



Agency Overview: Internal Audits

(Continued)

- College administration of Tuition Grants Program and compliance with program policies and procedures is reviewed annually by each college's third-party audit firm as part of an established Program Review requirement. The audit firms send these program reviews directly to the Tuition Grants Commission, and they are reviewed Executive Management. Feedback is provided to each institution based on the results of the Program Review.
- Other areas of review/audit may include:
 - Division of State Human Resources Delegation Authority Audits (every 3 years)
 - Division of Procurement Services is authorized to perform procurement audits if necessary
 - Division of State Human Resources is required to review and approve any personnel-related state budget requests
 - Division of Technology Operations is required to review and approve any IT-related state budget requests



Agency Overview: Risk Mitigation

- Internal Operations – Agency completes an annual review and update using the SCEIS Governance, Risk, and Compliance model to apply role-based small agency risk mitigating controls to various fiscal and procurement functions completed through the SCEIS system
- Internal Operations – Separation of Duties methodology is applied to all financial transactions
 - Staff member who initiates a financial transaction cannot be an approver for the same transaction
 - Executive Management approves all agency expenditures, and CG's office reviews transactions for accuracy prior to payment
 - Reimbursements made to any staff member must be reviewed and approved by Executive Management (Deputy Director and Executive Director review and approve each other's travel reimbursements or other reimbursement transactions)
 - Purchasing Card purchases limited to one agency p-card holder; All p-card transactions are reviewed within the Bank of America Works system and approved or denied in accordance with State Procurement Laws, Regulations and the Agency's Purchasing Card Policies by the Agency's Purchasing Card Program Administrator (Commission Deputy Director). All payments to Bank of America are processed via SCEIS and approved by either the Executive Director or Deputy Director.



Agency Overview: Risk Mitigation

- Data Security – Agency's Student Information System (myTG) is built upon GrantPro, a product of Nelnet Diversified Services. The entire myTG system is NIST-compliant and exceeds the requirements of SCDIS-200 Information Security and Privacy Standards. Confirmation of these security standards were received through the Service Provider Security Assessment Questionnaire, which is required as part of the State's RFP Process through the Division of Procurement Services, prior to the awarding of the contract.
- Procurement – Agency follows procedures outlined in Procurement Policies and Procedures Manual, derived from SC Consolidated Procurement Code and Regulations; Division of Procurement Services assists agency with any procurements requiring an RFP or other bid process
- Information Security – Agency partners with Department of Administration's Division of Information Security to provide InfoSec training and testing to staff, and to develop and review Information Security policies and documents
- Information Technology – Agency is a Shared Services customer of the Department of Administration's Office of Technology and Information Services
 - Workstation support (Office 365 and email services), deployment of security patches and software releases, mobile device management, server and network drive hosting, internet services, data backup, etc.



Agency Overview: Accomplishments

Agency Accomplishments FY 2019-2020 (Highlights)

- Commission staff presented Program information to over 750 stakeholders, including high school counselors, students, parents, and other populations
- Began moving paper-based and manual processes to digital format
- Navigated challenges brought on by COVID-19 pandemic, providing guidance to college administrators and presidents and shifting meetings and trainings to virtual format
- Approval and implementation of agency's strategic plan
- Pilot FAFSA Completion program with 18 high schools and 4,000 high school seniors
- Awarded Tuition Grant to 12,817 students; Maximum Grant \$3,500; Average Grant \$3,443



Agency Overview: Accomplishments

Agency Accomplishments FY 2020-2021 (Highlights)

- Commission staff presented Program information to over 790 stakeholders, including high school counselors, students, parents, and other populations (FY21 workshops held virtually)
- Continued to ensure uninterrupted operations in services to all applicants, colleges, and other customers throughout the pandemic
- For the first time, provided annual Tuition Grant recipient lists to state legislators via secure upload through Commission's website, moving away from previous practice of mailing CD-ROMs
- Positive and favorable review by the Senate Oversight Committee
- Provided oversight for the process of reviewing request for Program participation by Clinton College; the Commission approved Clinton as the 22nd Tuition Grant-eligible independent institution in June 2021
- Awarded Tuition Grant to 12,200 students; Maximum Grant \$3,600; Average Grant \$3,258



Agency Overview: Accomplishments

Agency Accomplishments FY 2021-2022 (Highlights)

- Commission staff presented Program information to over 1,100 stakeholders, including high school counselors, students, parents, and other populations
- Implemented historic Program eligibility changes to expand access to more eligible students. These included updating the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy to mirror existing institutional SAP requirements; allowing students the opportunity to receive a Tuition Grant for up to two additional semesters beyond the existing 8-semester limit in certain circumstances; and increasing the value of the grant for students enrolled in approved non-traditional curriculum models
- Successfully onboarded and provided comprehensive training for administrative staff at Clinton College, in preparation for awarding their newly eligible students for the upcoming year
- Awarded Tuition Grant to 11,262 students; Maximum Grant \$4,390; Average Grant \$3,970



Agency Overview: Accomplishments

Agency Accomplishments FY 2022-2023 (Highlights)

- Commission staff presented Program information to over 540 stakeholders, including high school counselors, students, parents, and other populations
- Updated agency's mission and vision statement
- Continued to review and update policies allowing expansion of eligibility to more students, enabling additional programs that follow non-standard terms to be approved; this change allowed Columbia International University to offer the grant to students enrolled in an online non-traditional program, and ensured existing programs did not lose eligibility based on varying start and end dates
- Successfully completed procurement process for a new Student Information System, entering a contract with Nelnet Diversified Solutions; began process of design, development, testing, and implementation of the new system
- Began House Legislative Oversight process by completing IRFI file and participating in the public input process
- Awarded Tuition Grant to 12,036 students; Maximum Grant \$4,500; Average Grant \$4,142
(Included awarding and disbursing grants to students at Clinton College for the first time)



Agency Overview: Accomplishments

Agency Accomplishments FY 2023-2024 (Highlights)

- Commission staff presented Program information to over 800 stakeholders, including high school counselors, students, parents, and other populations
- Fully implemented the new Student Information System (“myTG”) and offered applicants the ability to view application and award status through a student portal
- Extended annual application (FAFSA) deadline to August 1st
- Extended annual eligibility deadline from November 15th (Fall term) to January 15th (Spring term)
- Updated policy to allow students or institutions the ability to request spring-only grant funding for students who begin their program of study or those who transfer to a participating independent college mid-year
- Awarded Tuition Grant to 12,473 students; Maximum Grant \$4,800; Average Grant \$4,391



Internal Operations: Human Resources

Staff Training/Professional Development

All agency staff receive both internal and external training through various resources:

- All agency staff are members of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA), the Southern Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SASFAA), the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA), and the National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP).
- Currently, the Executive Director, Deputy Director, and Fiscal Operations Coordinator are members of the South Carolina Information Technology Directors Association (SCITDA)
- All staff actively utilize the state-offered LinkedIn Learning to complete trainings on necessary soft skills
 - Agency has been recognized for having 100% staff utilization on LinkedIn Learning during Admin's quarterly LinkedIn Learning Sub-admin Meetings



Internal Operations: Human Resources

Staff Training/Professional Development

Agency Staff complete necessary training through the U.S. Department of Education office of Federal Student Aid's virtual training platform to remain knowledgeable on changes to Title IV Federal Financial Aid Programs to best assist students and ensure Program changes do not contradict financial aid policy or regulations.

Executive Management hold professional certifications:

- Katie Harrison, Executive Director, holds the Certified International Privacy Professional/United States designation through the International Association of Privacy Professionals
- Zachary Christian, Deputy Director, holds the FAAC® designation through NASFAA's Certified Financial Aid Administrator® Program



Internal Operations: Human Resources

Retention and Hiring

With the agency's small staff size, one staff member represents 25% of the active workforce.

Since 2022, the agency has had the following turnover (Resignations or Retirements):

- The Commission's Program Coordinator resigned effective November 30, 2022, after 2 years and 7 months of employment; agency backfilled position with new Program Coordinator beginning employment January 3, 2023
 - Employee resigned for an entrepreneurial opportunity to expand family-run small business
- The Commission's Financial Officer retired August 30, 2024, after 47 years of service to the Commission; the Commission's Program Coordinator was promoted to Fiscal Operations Manager effective September 3rd, and the most recent Program Operations Coordinator was hired in October 2024.
- Resignation of Program Operations Coordinator due to personal reasons was accepted March 2025; Agency had a successful recruitment period, and the newest Program Operations Coordinator will begin employment on May 2, 2025.



Internal Operations: Agency Staffing Overview and Future Needs

Historically, the agency has operated with a small staff of fewer than ten total employees, including a combination of full-time, part-time, and temporary positions.

Since the early 2000s, the agency has maintained four filled Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions. A fifth FTE position exists but has remained vacant due to budgetary constraints.

The fifth Authorized FTE (AM61 – IT Customer Support Specialist II) has been vacant since the retirement of the Agency's long-time Computer Manager in 2001.

To better meet the increasing demands of its customers—including students, institutions, and other stakeholders—agency management intends to request funding for FY2026 to fill the vacant FTE position, reclassifying to an administrative support role.



Internal Operations: Agency Staffing Overview and Future Needs

The addition of a 5th staff member will be critical in addressing the agency's evolving needs, including:

- **Supporting New Reporting Requirements** – Ensuring compliance with expanded data collection and reporting mandates.
- **Strengthening Outreach Efforts** – Enhancing engagement with students, institutions, and other stakeholders; while also increasing the number of financial aid presentations offered by the Agency.
- **Providing Internal Administrative Support** – Improving daily office operations and efficiency.

Given the increasing workload and responsibilities, filling this position will help ensure the agency continues to effectively serve its customers while meeting growing regulatory and operational demands.



Internal Operations: Human Resources

Succession Planning/Institutional Knowledge

Secondary team members are designated and cross-trained to temporarily fill roles in the event of an unexpected departure or long-term absence

Culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing among staff

Staff regularly update area-specific Standard Operating Procedures to ensure there is adequate documentation of all critical functions for each position

Agency maintains central procedures in the event of a long-term absence, and to assist with onboarding of new staff

Leadership development and exposure to prepare for possible future responsibilities; when possible, the agency promotes from within to ensure continued institutional knowledge



Internal Operations: Human Resources

Staff Morale and Employee Engagement

Positive staff morale and employee engagement opportunities are important to the success of any organization or team, especially in a small office environment. Some practices in place at the agency to promote this are:

- Direct access to leadership/management with open-door policies; employees encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions, and to have open dialog with Executive Director and Deputy Director
- Emphasis on autonomy and ownership of work, and importance of meaningful and impactful work
- Team bonding opportunities and celebrations to recognize personal milestones and achievements and to foster strong relationships and a sense of comradery
- Personal and professional development opportunities are encouraged to promote employee growth and engagement (i.e., LeadSC Program, HR Professional Development, SC Executive Institute, certification opportunities related to career development, professional association involvement)



Internal Operations: Staff Productivity

All agency staff spend a portion of their productive time on internal agency operations, as well as external support of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program to students and the general public, the financial aid staff at the participating colleges & universities, and the high school counselor community.

Program Operations Coordinator is the primary point of contact for all external inquiries regarding the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program and student-specific eligibility. Roughly 55-60% of the position's average time in a fiscal year is spent working with external entities, with 40-45% on internal agency operations including student eligibility and coordinating appeals of eligibility.

Fiscal Operations Coordinator serves as the agency's accountant and fiscal technician, processing all external payments and student grant disbursements. Roughly 30% of the position's average time in a fiscal year is spent assisting external entities, with 70% spent on internal agency operations and reporting.



Internal Operations: Staff Productivity

Deputy Director serves as the agency's functional manager for all day-to-day office operations as well as the agency's public information officer, responsible for representing the Program at external workshops and training opportunities. Roughly 30% is spent assisting external entities and 70% spent on internal agency operations, reporting and planning.

Executive Director manages legislative relations, Commission activities, strategic planning, compliance and reporting, and external partnerships. Roughly 45% of the position's average time in a fiscal year is spent assisting external entities with 55% spent on internal agency operations, compliance and reporting, and strategic planning.



Internal Operations: Staff Productivity

Our agency operates with a lean staff of just four dedicated employees who consistently go above and beyond to fulfill our mission. Despite limited personnel, we maintain high productivity levels by streamlining processes, leveraging technology, and optimizing workflows to ensure the efficient administration of services.

To further enhance our agency's capacity, we plan to seek funding to fill the currently vacant 5th FTE position in FY26. This additional team member will help expand outreach efforts, strengthen reporting capabilities, provide essential administrative support, and improve external communications—ultimately increasing overall productivity and ensuring even greater service to our stakeholders.

Through strategic resource management and a commitment to continuous improvement, our agency remains steadfast in delivering impactful results while prioritizing government efficiency.



Internal Operations: Information Technology

The Agency has worked tirelessly to leverage technology to enhance daily operations, create greater efficiencies in the administration of the Tuition Grants Program, and provide enhanced communications to our institutions, students, and other stakeholders.

The availability of Microsoft Teams for internal and external web conferencing has allowed Agency staff to better collaborate internally; offer more virtual trainings to staff at our participating colleges and provide one-on-one assistance to students as needed; and provide better hands-on training with new financial aid staff working with the Program.

- In 2023, Agency equipped the conference room with a 65-inch television, video conferencing hardware, allowing the agency to host virtual training meetings regularly with our institutions.
- Deputy Director and Fiscal Operations Coordinator have “Book Time with Me” links in email signatures, to quickly book virtual meetings as needed with students or institutional staff
- Utilizing SharePoint and Teams, agency staff can better collaborate on internal documentation and processes – this is included in our annual fees paid to Admin’s Division of Technology Operations (DTO)



Internal Operations: Information Technology

The Agency utilizes DTO Shared Services to manage workstations, house data at the State's Data Center, manage Microsoft365 accounts (Email, Office Suite, Teams, and SharePoint/OneDrive) for optimal data privacy and information security.

Agency also utilizes statewide contract with PC Matic to provide enhanced security on all agency-owned workstations, ensuring only applications and software deemed appropriate and secure can run on any machine.

In 2018, Agency Staff worked to digitize many forms and reduce burden for students to submit requests, such as Grant Transfer Requests, by utilizing web-based forms. This reduced the need for students to print and submit hardcopy requests.



Internal Operations: Information Technology

“my Tuition Grant” – myTG Student Information System

As a result of increased administrative funds in FY22, Agency staff were able to begin working through the State Procurement process to procure an integrated student information system, aimed at providing a more stable and efficient solution to process grant applications and awards. The Agency entered a contract with the selected vendor, Nelnet Diversified Solutions, on April 1, 2023, and implemented the new system, “myTG,” on September 6, 2023, effective with 2023-2024 Tuition Grants disbursements, replacing the Agency’s outdated, homegrown Access database system. This system enables authorized staff at the Commission’s 22 participating colleges and universities to directly access their students’ Tuition Grants application information, complete eligibility certifications online, and work with Commission staff to ensure grant eligibility. With the myTG Student Portal, applicants can view their eligibility status, tentative award amount, transfer their grant between eligible institutions, and securely upload documentation for appeals, if applicable. myTG has enhanced the administration of the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program by eliminating manual Excel-based reports and allowing 24/7/365 access to the system for the awarding and administration of the Program.



Application Process: Eligibility Requirements

Application and Deadline: Students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) annually on or before August 1 for consideration.¹

Financial eligibility: Students must have financial need as demonstrated based on information provided by the student, and parent(s) if the student is a dependent student, on the student's FAFSA Form. Financial need is calculated by taking the Cost of Attendance (COA) of the chosen institution and subtracting out the Student Aid Index* (SAI) which is calculated based on the information provided on the FAFSA: $COA - SAI = NEED$

- *SAI can be as low as -\$1,500; negative SAIs are replaced with a \$0 for initial need calculation, following federal guidance.

Academic performance requirements:

- First time Freshmen must have obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent, and be fully admitted as a degree-seeking student based on the college/university's admissions requirements²
- Returning Students must meet federally-required Satisfactory Academic Requirements at the college/university³



Application Process: Eligibility Requirements

Residency requirements: Students, and parent(s) if dependent, must be legal South Carolina residents, domiciled in the State for a period of not less than 12-months prior to the start of the Fall Semester, according to the South Carolina Residency Regulations (62-600 – 62-612)

Required documentation:

- Students must complete the required State Felony, Drug and Alcohol Affidavit annually via their college's State Affidavit collection process
- Students must meet all eligibility requirements for federal Title IV financial aid programs, including completing the Verification process, if selected



Application Process: Eligibility Requirements

Expansion of Eligibility:

Since FY22, when the General Assembly first provided \$20 million in Lottery Allocations, increasing the previous \$10 million allocation, several initiatives have been taken by the Commission to expand access to the Tuition Grant by changing eligibility requirements and other policies:

- 1 – June 30 application deadline, which was put in place effective with the 1993-1994 academic year, was extended to August 1, effective with the 2024-2025 academic year
- 2 – Initial Freshman academic requirements of meeting one of four criterion (Top 75% of High School Graduating Class; or, 2.7 Final High School GPA on the SC UGP; or, 900 SAT; or, 19 ACT Composite Score) replaced with “obtain a high school diploma or its equivalent, and be fully admitted as a degree-seeking student based on the college’s admissions requirements”
- 3 – Previous Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements required of students on top of meeting the college’s federally-required SAP policy replaced with simply meeting the college’s SAP policy



Application Process: Eligibility Requirements

Reasons a student may be ineligible to receive a South Carolina Tuition Grant include the following:

- Not a legal resident of SC for at least 12 months (for dependent students, this extends to parent/guardian)
- Not enrolled full-time or withdrew from classes before incurring charges
- 100% of tuition paid via other source (VA, ROTC, Tuition exchange or reimbursement, etc.)
- Freshman academic requirements not met (no high school diploma or equivalent; student admitted provisionally or not fully admitted as degree-seeking)
- Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements not met at the institution
- Verification incomplete
 - Verification is a process by which institutions are required to confirm financial aspects of a small percentage of FAFSA filers; Most federal and state aid based on need are unable to be disbursed until this process is complete
- State Certification/Affidavit not signed (related to disqualifying felony or misdemeanor charges)
- Did not meet August 1 application deadline (or did not submit an approved appeal for late filing)
- Voluntary withdrawal of application



Application Process: FAFSA

Since the 1994-1995 academic year, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has been used as the official application for the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program. Any South Carolina resident that completes a FAFSA form and lists at least one of the participating colleges and universities is automatically reviewed for eligibility for Tuition Grants.

Completing a FAFSA is the only method to apply for federal financial aid programs (Pell Grant, Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, Work-study, Direct Loans); it is also used by all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, as the application for at least one state-funded need-based program, and many colleges use the FAFSA to determine eligibility for need-based institutional aid programs.

It is general practice in the financial aid profession to encourage all students to complete a FAFSA, as it best explains the student's financial situation.



Application Process: FAFSA

While our Agency receives data for all South Carolina residents who complete a FAFSA, there is no way of knowing where these students matriculate, as FAFSA data would be received even if the student attends an out of state college. Without a comprehensive longitudinal data system, the overall percentage of all South Carolina students completing a FAFSA is unknown.

The U.S. Department of Education provides aggregated FAFSA Completion Data at the high school level, publicly accessible via Federal Student Aid's data center; additionally, effective with the 2025-2026 FAFSA cycle, our Agency now has the ability to provide student-level FAFSA Completion Status Information to counselors at the public high schools, as a result of an agreement with the South Carolina Department of Education, providing our agency with a master file of publicly enrolled high school seniors. School Districts, or individual high schools, can enter into a data sharing agreement with our agency to access this information. Prior to the 2025-26 cycle, this has been available to a limited number of schools, college access programs, and eligibility entities, because of system and personnel limitations.



Application Process: FAFSA

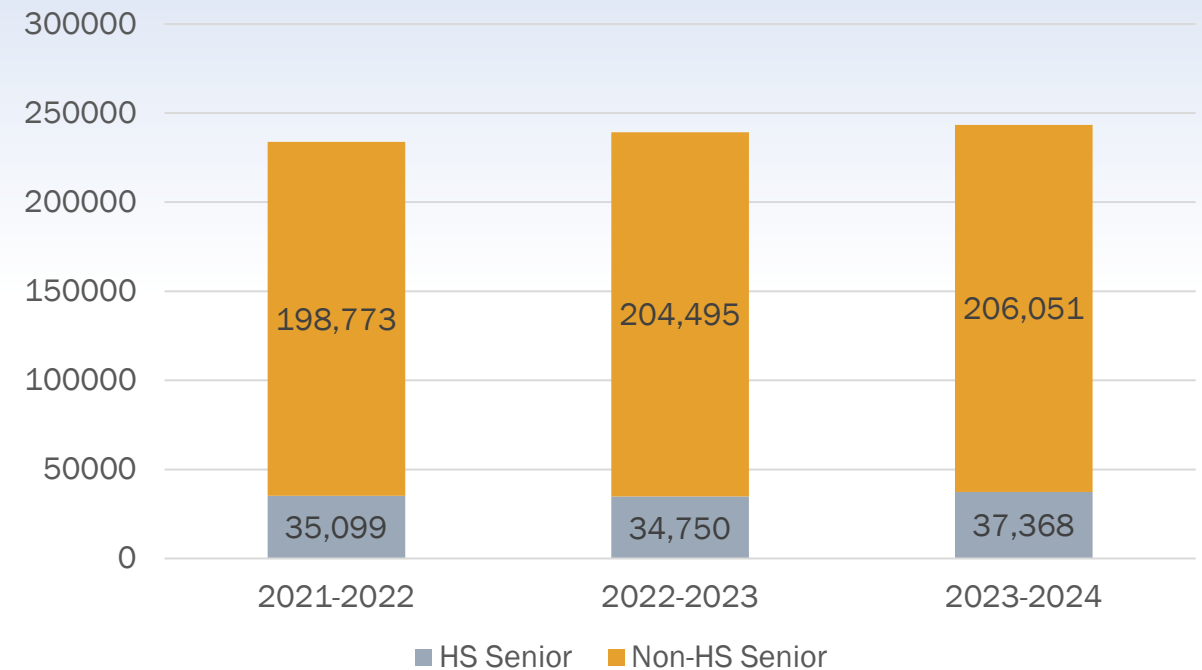
Total Distinct FAFSA forms Completed

2021-2022: **233,872**

2022-2023: **239,245**

2023-2024: **243,419**

Distinct FAFSA Form Completion





Application Process: FAFSA

Currently, there is no legislative mandate for high school seniors to complete a FAFSA prior to high school graduation in South Carolina.

[House Bill 3197](#) has been pre-filed for this legislative session which, if passed, would require high school seniors to complete and submit a FAFSA before high school graduation.

Currently, 12 states require, or are in the process of implementing, mandatory FAFSA filing for high school graduation, with varying levels of success. In 2018, Louisiana became the first state to require the FAFSA (or an approved opt-out waiver) prior to graduation. They have since eliminated their FAFSA mandate.



Application Process: State Affidavit Process

In 2000, the General Assembly passed Act 289, relating to eligibility for state aid programs, including merit scholarships, tuition grants for independent college students, and need-based grants for state-supported college students. The Act was meant to disqualify students who may have been otherwise eligible for these programs if they had any felony conviction, or if they had been found guilty or pled nolo contendere to an alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor.

In 2007, the General Assembly passed Act 103, which amended this law related to alcohol or drug-related misdemeanors so that a first misdemeanor would no longer disqualify a student from receiving funds. Felonies and second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related misdemeanors in the span of an academic year remained in the law as disqualifying events.



Application Process: State Affidavit Process

The current Statutory language states that students receiving funds from these programs must certify that they:

- have not been adjudicated delinquent or been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to any felonies or any second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related offenses under the laws of this or any other state or under the laws of the United States in order to be eligible for a South Carolina tuition grant, except that a high school or college student otherwise qualified who has been adjudicated delinquent or has been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contendere to a second or subsequent alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offense nevertheless shall be eligible or continue to be eligible for such grants after the expiration of one academic year from the date of the adjudication, conviction, or plea

What does it mean in laymen's terms? To qualify for certain state aid programs, students:

- Must not have been judged delinquent nor have been convicted or pled guilty or nolo contender to any felony in any state.
- Must not have been convicted of any alcohol- or drug-related misdemeanor in any state within 12 months prior to the period of the award.



Application Process: State Affidavit Process

At the time the initial Act was passed, the SC Commission on Higher Education, the SC Tuition Grants Commission, and representatives from higher education institutions determined that the most effective way to verify eligibility under the Statutory requirement would be to have students self-certify, on an annual basis, by completing an affidavit or certification statement attesting that they meet these eligibility requirements prior to receiving state aid funds.

Since the 2019-20 Academic Year, 237 students have been disqualified from Tuition Grant eligibility based on not having signed the required annual affidavit. This does not necessarily mean these students had disqualifying convictions; it is simply a reflection of those who did not complete the affidavit with their institution.

FY	Freshman	Non-Freshman	FY Total
2019-20	8	41	49
2020-21	17	37	54
2021-22	5	18	23
2022-23	7	69	76
2023-24	2	12	14
2024-25	2	19	21
Total	41	196	237



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

Aid Program	Administered By	Merit/Need/Other	FAFSA	Annual Award Amount	Other Information
SC Tuition Grant	Tuition Grants Commission	Primarily Need-Based	Yes	Up to \$4,800	Awarded directly by state agency
SC Need-Based Grant	Commission on Higher Education	Primarily Need-Based	Yes	Up to \$3,500	Awarded by institutions (public)
HOPE Scholarship	Commission on Higher Education	Merit-Based	No	\$2,800	Available freshman year only at 4-year colleges
LIFE Scholarship	Commission on Higher Education	Merit-Based	No	Up to \$5,000 (base)	Qualify by combination of GPA, standardized test scores, and class rank
Palmetto Fellows Scholarship	Commission on Higher Education	Merit-Based	No	Up to \$7,500 (base)	Qualify by GPA, standardized test scores, and class rank



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

Aid Program	Administered By	Merit/Need/Other	FAFSA	Annual Award Amount	Other Information
Lottery Tuition Assistance	Commission on Higher Education	Other	Yes (or waiver)	\$75 per credit hr.	Available only at technical colleges and 2-year colleges
Workforce & Industry Needs (WINS) Scholarship	SC Technical College System	Merit-Based	Yes (or waiver)	Up to \$5,000	Available only at technical colleges; good for one credential
National Guard Assistance Program	Commission on Higher Education	Primarily Need-Based	No	Up to \$11,000	Separate application process through CHE
Teaching Fellows Program	CERRA	Service-forgivable loan	No	Up to \$6,000	Loan is forgiven if teaching service requirement is met
SC Teacher Loan	SC Student Loan	Service-forgivable loan	No	Up to \$7,500	Loan is forgiven if teaching service requirement is met



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

The Tuition Grants Commission Staff stand behind and support CHE's current discussion to explore increases to the value of the merit-based scholarship programs in South Carolina, with the base award amounts having remained unchanged for more than twenty years.

Maintaining state-funded financial aid programs and increasing their value, as appropriate, will help keep talent in-state, reduce student loan burdens, and provide businesses with skilled graduates ready to contribute to the economy. This applies to both merit- and need-based programs.



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

South Carolina's economy thrives under a well-educated workforce; in reviewing all State-funded aid programs, there are two key points:

Merit-Based Scholarships Have Stagnated

- The base award amounts for South Carolina's merit-based programs (LIFE, HOPE, and Palmetto Fellows) have remained unchanged for over 20 years.
- Tuition and fees have risen during this period, diminishing the real impact of these awards.
- Increasing the value of these scholarships will better support our students and keep South Carolina competitive with neighboring states.

Need-Based Aid is Critical to College Access

- Many students who qualify for merit-based scholarships still struggle with unmet financial need, forcing them to take on greater debt or forgo higher education altogether.
- Strengthening need-based aid ensures that capable students from all backgrounds—regardless of family income—have a pathway to a college degree.



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

South Carolina Merit-Based Aid vs. Need-Based Aid 2022-2023 Academic Year

Merit-Based Programs:

LIFE Scholarship - \$207.6 Million
41,265 Recipients

Palmetto Fellows - \$70.9 Million
8,922 Recipients

HOPE Scholarship - \$12.5 Million
5,006 Recipients

Total: \$291 Million to 55,193 Recipients

Need-Based/Lottery Programs:

SC Tuition Grant - \$49.9 Million
12,036 Recipients

SC Need-Based Grant - \$76.7 Million
29,088 Recipients

Lottery Tuition Assistance - \$52.2 Million
46,579 Recipients

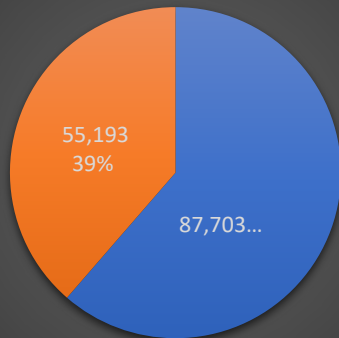
Total: \$178.8 Million to 87,703 Recipients



South Carolina Financial Aid Programs

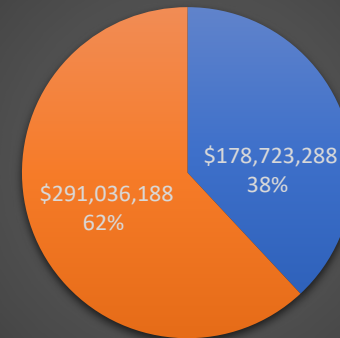
South Carolina Merit-Based Aid vs. Need-Based Aid 2022-2023 Academic Year

Total Recipients



■ Need-Based ■ Merit

Total Disbursed



■ Need-Based ■ Merit



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Secondary School Counselors/ College and University Training

Agency staff provide critical updates and information related to the Tuition Grants Program to high school counselors statewide through participation in annual training workshops held by both the Carolinas Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (CACRAO) and the SC Independent Schools Association (SCISA)

Agency staff volunteer numerous hours throughout the year to present at Financial Aid information workshops, including hands-on assistance with completion of the FAFSA (regardless of whether the student intends to enroll at an independent college); these events may be part of the Commission on Higher Education's College Goal SC campaign or standalone events planned by public or private high schools throughout the state

Agency participates in higher education events held at the State House each year, including Higher Education Day and College and Career Decision Day



Secondary School Counselors/ College and University Training

Agency staff spend roughly 40+ hours assisting with or hosting information sessions and financial aid nights each year:

- Agency staff provide Program information at the annual School Counselor Conferences hosted by the Carolinas Association of Collegiate Registrars & Admissions Officers (CACRAO), held each fall throughout the State (4 separate events – Upstate, Midlands, Pee Dee, and Lowcountry)
- Agency staff provide Program and general financial aid information to counselors at the annual South Carolina Independent School Association (SCISA) Counselor Workshop
- Agency staff work with school counselors to provide financial aid information (“Financial Aid Nights”) and FAFSA Completion events, upon request; in the last two years, Agency staff have provided financial aid nights at Ridgeview High School, Heritage Academy, Hilton Head Christian Academy, Catawba Ridge High School, Cardinal Newman, Spring Hill High School, Battery Creek High School, and Bluffton High School



Secondary School Counselors/ College and University Training

Agency Staff host an annual Financial Aid Administrators Meeting for financial aid staff at each of the twenty-two participating colleges, providing an opportunity to do in-person (when possible) or virtual trainings to all staff who work with the Program.

Agency Staff also provide “New FAO Staff” training, upon request by any college, to provide in-depth information regarding the Tuition Grants Program and to go over the Program Policies and Procedures Manual and all related processes; these can be virtual or in-person, based on the college’s needs and availability.

Agency Deputy Director and Fiscal Operations Coordinator have “Book Time with Me” links in email signatures and regularly offer virtual training and support when needed during peak processing times to better assist key stakeholders.

- While often virtual, Agency staff are always willing to meet in the format (virtual or in-person) requested by the financial aid staff.



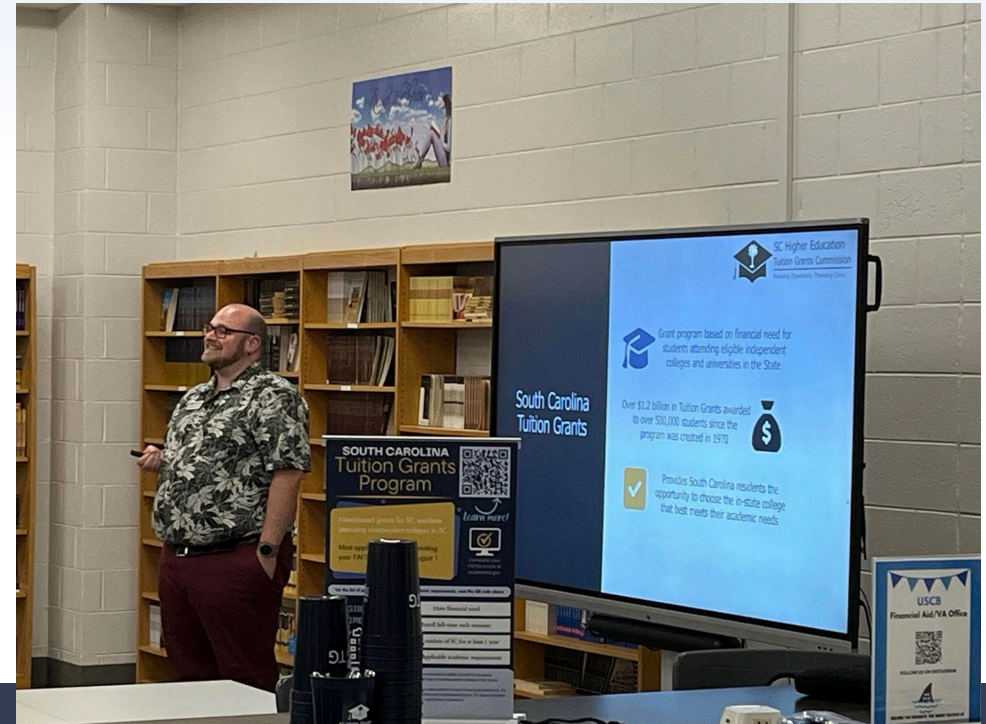
Marketing and Communication

Agency staff promote the South Carolina Tuition Grants Program through our existing outreach efforts, including:

- Presenting at the annual CACRAO School Counselor Conferences
- Presenting at the annual SCISA School Counselor Workshop
- Providing Tuition Grants Program digital flyer QR Codes to high schools, upon request, to have on hand for students to quickly access Program information
- Volunteering to assist with College Goal events, organized by the Commission on Higher Education
- Providing Program information to the financial aid community at the Annual Conference of the South Carolina Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (SCASFAA)
- Attending Higher Education Day at the SC State House, to support and be visible to students in attendance while they express the importance of their Tuition Grants to their representatives
- Obtaining an information booth at CHE's College and Career Decision Day, to provide Program information and assist students with questions



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Workforce Development

Workforce Development has been described by the Federal Reserve Bank as “a relatively wide range of activities, policies and programs employed by geographies to create, sustain and retain a viable workforce that can support current and future business and industry.” This includes education and training, career services, and employer engagement to ensure a skilled and competitive workforce that supports economic growth.

Institutions of higher education play a critical role in workforce development by supporting and training a highly skilled workforce through offering:

- Short-term certificate programs and diplomas in specific programs and skills
- Associate’s Degree programs in technical and other fields
- Bachelor’s Degree programs
- Master’s Degree programs
- Doctoral, Professional, and other Postgraduate programs



Workforce Development

Independent colleges participating in the Tuition Grants Program in the State of South Carolina contribute to our state's workforce needs by developing tangible experience in the areas of communications, critical thinking, problem-solving, research and analytics, and group dynamics, among other skills that are transferrable and adaptable to both current and future employment opportunities.

At the 22 institutions whose students are eligible to receive the SC Tuition Grant, the Top 5 programs of study (as of the 2023-2024 academic year) are:

- Business Administration
- Biology (Pre-med tracks included)
- Psychology
- Nursing/Health Sciences
- Education



Workforce Development

According to the SC Commission on Higher Education, there are about 450,000 state residents who report having some college, but no degree. This represents an opportunity to provide degree completion programs for this population, further contributing to workforce and industry needs. Nearly 70% of the State's independent colleges offer non-traditional programs designed for adult learners. The Tuition Grants Program supports students enrolled in these programs who meet all eligibility requirements.

Five-Year Enrollment Trend for Adult Learners in Non-Traditional Programs of Study:

	Number of TG Recipients in Non-Traditional Programs	Total Number of TG Recipients	Percentage of TG Recipients in Non-Traditional Programs
2022-2023	956	12,036	7.9 %
2021-2022	679	11,262	6.0 %
2020-2021	688	12,202	5.6 %
2019-2020	703	12,817	5.5 %
2018-2019	829	13,534	6.1 %



Agency Strategic Plan Review

The Tuition Grants Commission adopted a strategic plan in 2020, which includes guiding principles for the following areas:

- Maintaining the integrity of the program
- Continuing to increase the impact of the Program
- Continuing to advocate on behalf of Program recipients
- Modernization of agency processes
- Protecting student data at the highest level possible

Metrics associated with the agency's strategic plan continue to be reported annually as part of the agency's Accountability Report process.



Agency SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer service• Efficiency• Cost-effective administration• Historically low staff turnover• Commitment to professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staffing and resource limitations• Reliance on outside agencies (although positive working relationships are maintained)
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training opportunities• Strengthening of Information Security posture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuously evolving external threats• Unintended consequences or delays related to the FAFSA or other decisions made at the federal level



Strategic Cost Reduction Initiatives

Review of Agency's FY26 Budget Plan – Cost Savings and General Fund Reduction Contingency

General Fund Reduction - A theoretical 3% general fund reduction would effectively reduce the Tuition Grant award amount by \$70 per eligible student (over 12,400 recipients in the 2023-2024 academic year), reducing the impact of the grant and potentially increasing student loan borrowing levels.

Agency Cost Savings – The agency regularly reviews monthly and annual expenditures to determine if reductions can be made in operating expenses. Some examples include:

- Creating electronic forms, available online; eliminates printing costs, creates more efficiency
- Electronic notification of eligibility and award status; saves the agency thousands of dollars annually in postage and printing costs
- Offering virtual trainings and meetings with students, college officials, and other agency customers; saves on related travel expenses and reduces staff time away from the office



Strategic Cost Reduction Initiatives

Review of Agency's FY26 Budget Plan – Reducing Cost and Burden to Businesses and Citizens

The agency does not assess fees or fines which could be reduced, as there is no fee to apply for the Tuition Grants Program. By maintaining our relationship with the Federal Department of Education allowing the agency to access electronic FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) applications of South Carolina residents, the Tuition Grants Commission ensures that students will not be assessed any fees to apply for the Tuition Grant.

The agency currently operates on less than 2% of its overall budget and implements cost controls and efficiency in administration as standard practice.



Strategic Cost Reduction Initiatives

Efficiency and Effectiveness Initiatives

Operational Cost Optimization – Agency’s recent implementation of its third-party Student Information System has streamlined and automated processes that were previously completed manually. This successful partnership has resulted in:

- Reduced waiting times for student applicants by providing a real-time self-service option for application status and certain other transactions (i.e., transferring grant from one college to another)
- Reduced data entry errors by eliminating manual data entry
- Increased level of data protection and security standards beyond requirements of SC-DIS-200 framework
- Annual system updates and enhancements are included in contracted price and are professionally managed by the vendor, allowing agency staff to allocate more time to program administration and outreach
- Continuous improvement and project development benefitting grant applicants, college personnel, and K-12 school counselors
 - FAFSA Completion Portal now available to K-12 counselors statewide at NO additional cost to the agency and at NO cost to counselors



Strategic Cost Reduction Initiatives

Efficiency and Effectiveness Initiatives

Workforce Optimization – As previously discussed, the agency hopes to pursue funding for one vacant FTE position. This adjustment to staffing levels will result in:

- Additional cross-training and knowledge-sharing opportunities and initiatives while still maintaining critical Separation of Duties and Risk Mitigation priorities
- Streamlined administrative functions
- Increased level of compliance and oversight
- Increased opportunity to provide targeted education and outreach to a larger audience, including high school students, adult learners without a degree, K-12 school counselors, college aid administrators, and other populations



Strategic Cost Reduction Initiatives

Efficiency and Effectiveness Initiatives

Core Services – Return on Investment of the Tuition Grants Program can be noted in the following points:

- Saves the state tax dollars by attracting SC residents into the independent college sector, thereby saving the automatic state subsidy that goes to students attending the state's public colleges
 - Since Program inception, an estimated cost-avoidance of over \$994 million has been realized through the General Assembly's continued support of the Tuition Grant, since the maximum Tuition Grant award may not exceed the average public college subsidy amount
 - By providing these grants based on financial need to independent college students who may have otherwise enrolled at a public institution, the State saves taxpayer dollars while supporting postsecondary education goals
- According to the SC Independent Colleges and Universities organization, South Carolina's independent college sector enrolls approximately 15% of all undergraduate students in the state while conferring almost 25% of the state's Bachelor's degrees. The SC Tuition Grant supports these students as they matriculate, but there is no additional State funding for college operating expenses, faculty and staff salaries, building expenses, etc.)



Recommended Law Changes

At this time, Commission Staff are following the status of H.3488, a pre-filed bill that would amend the SC Code of Laws Section 59-113-20, relating to the impact of felonies and alcohol or drug-related misdemeanor offenses on South Carolina Tuition Grants qualifications, to remove convictions for misdemeanor alcohol-related or drug-related offenses from those offenses which disqualify persons from receiving state-sponsored scholarships and grants.

Without a seamless way for institutions to review criminal records of applicants and/or enrolled students, a student self-certification or affidavit collection process would still need to be in place to confirm eligibility for certain State-funded scholarship and grant programs related to the felony conviction disqualification.



Agency Contact Information

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