



Free program helps students apply for financial aid

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— In this economy, having a quality education is one of the best hedges against unemployment. But in an era when more students than ever are vying for post-secondary education — more than the number of available openings at colleges and universities — the associated costs are rising faster than most families can afford.

“There’s a very strong realization of the importance of higher education,” said Bill Wozniak, director of marketing for ISM Education Loans in Indianapolis. “There’s a very strong demand, and a limited number of seats across the country. That’s going to push prices up.”

That’s why there’s student financial aid. While every student is eligible for no-interest loans from the federal government, there are scholarships, grants, institutional money, and state money they can try to get first with no strings attached.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) must be completed by students seeking such funding. For first-generation college students and their families, this can feel like a daunting task.

Members of the Indiana Student Financial Association established College Goal Sunday in response. Now in its 20th year, the program features hundreds of financial aid professionals donating their time to help students and their families properly complete the FAFSA. This year’s College Goal Sunday is Feb. 15 at 36 sites across Indiana, including the cafeteria at George Washington Community School, 2215 W. Washington St., Indianapolis.

Wozniak, who also volunteers as a spokesperson for College Goal Sunday, doesn’t think the FAFSA is that complicated. It’s mostly just a fear of the unknown for first-time applicants.

“A lot of people get intimidated just by the thought of the form,” Wozniak said. “But once they get into the questions, they realize (quite a few) don’t even apply to them.”

The FAFSA does start to get complex when it asks the applicant to assess the value of his property. The government designed it as such so as not to award aid simply based on what a person has in the bank or the value of his assets. For example, what if someone makes \$20,000 a year but has \$4 million in an IRA. Or what if someone has great income but little savings because he has expenses like caring for elderly parents. “(The government) needs a broader picture,” Wozniak said. “But when you have (that), certain political parties want this and that, and everyone has their own vested interest in how they want it decided. You need to take a full picture of what a family or student has to make a determination on what aid they need.”

College Goal Sunday has become such a successful program that it’s now a national model. More than 25 states have the same or a similar event. Wozniak says the key to College Goal Sunday’s eminence is the philosophy that there’s no dumb questions when it comes to assisting students obtaining an education.

“We may not always have a rosy picture for them, but we want to help any family, any student, that wants to get a post-secondary education,” he said. “There are hundreds of financial aid folks all across Indiana that are committed to helping these families.”

And now more than ever, a program like College Goal Sunday is needed. Wozniak expects many more students to apply for financial aid this year.

“I think this is really going to be a hot topic, as families really start to feel the brunt of what’s happening in Washington,” he said. “I’m a little nervous for families. I think it’s going to be dramatic no matter what decisions are made.”

For more information on College Goal Sunday, call (800) 992-2076 or visit the website www.collegegoalsunday.org.

College Goal Sunday 2008 Fact Sheet
What is College Goal Sunday?

College Goal Sunday is a statewide charitable program that provides free information and assistance to Indiana families applying for financial aid for postsecondary education. At College Goal Sunday financial aid professionals from Indiana colleges and universities help students who qualify for undergraduate admission to a college or technical school in 2009 complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students seeking federal and state grants, loans and scholarships, as well as other financial awards, must complete the form. FAFSA forms, required by educational institutions nationwide, must be received by the federal processor by March 10 for Indiana residents.

When and where is College Goal Sunday?

College Goal Sunday 2009 will take place at 2 p.m. (local time) Feb. 15 at 36 sites throughout the state, including the cafeteria at George Washington Community School, 2215 W. Washington St., Indianapolis.

Who should attend College Goal Sunday?

College Goal Sunday is geared toward high school seniors and other low- to middle-income Indiana students who qualify for undergraduate admission to a college or technical school in 2009, need financial aid, and would like help filling out the FAFSA.

What should students bring to College Goal Sunday?

Students should attend with their parent(s) or guardian(s) and bring their parents' completed 2008 IRS 1040 tax returns, W-2 Forms, and other 2008 income and benefits information. If students worked last year, they should also bring their income information. Students 24 years of age or older may attend alone and bring their own completed 2008 IRS 1040 tax return, W-2 Form, or other 2008 income and benefits information. Pens and FAFSA forms will be provided, but students are encouraged to bring their own FAFSA forms and their U.S. Department of Education Personal Identification Numbers (PIN) if filing online. Parents will also need to obtain a PIN to file online. To obtain PINs, go to www.pin.ed.gov.

How can Twenty-first Century Scholars benefit from College Goal Sunday?

Twenty-first Century Scholars are income-eligible students who sign a contract in the seventh or eighth grade promising they will graduate from high school with a minimum of 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale, refrain from using drugs and alcohol, and apply for college financial aid. Upon high school graduation, Scholars who have fulfilled the commitment receive state funds to help cover their college tuition and fees for eight semesters at eligible Indiana colleges. To fulfill their pledge, Scholars must submit a completed FAFSA form on time. College Goal Sunday can help.

How does the College Goal Sunday educational prize drawing work?

Students who attend any of the College Goal Sunday sites and submit a completed evaluation form will automatically be entered in a drawing for an educational prize. Three educational prizes will be awarded statewide — one for northern Indiana, one for central Indiana, and one for southern Indiana. Winners will be notified in March; prizes will be sent directly to the higher education institutions selected by winning students.

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