

Agency Purpose

The purpose of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education is to:

- ◆ help students achieve financial access to post-secondary education;
- ◆ enable students to choose among post-secondary education options;
- ◆ protect and inform educational consumers;
- ◆ produce independent, statewide information on post-secondary education; and
- ◆ facilitate interaction among and collaboration with organizations that share responsibility for education in Minnesota.

The Office of Higher Education became a cabinet-level agency following the 2003 legislative session. The agency administers programs, and gathers and reports data. The director serves as the governor's advisor on higher education.

Core Functions

M.S. Chapter 136A, gives the Minnesota Office of Higher Education core responsibilities to:

- ◆ administer state financial aid programs for students;
- ◆ publish and distribute to students and parents information about academic and financial preparation, including financial aid;
- ◆ approve, register, and license private colleges and career schools;
- ◆ oversee statewide library service programs that improve access to information and support cost-effective library operations;
- ◆ collect, maintain and report data and analysis on higher education including data on student enrollment, financial aid, and higher education accountability;
- ◆ administer federal programs that affect students and institutions on a statewide basis;
- ◆ prescribe policies, procedures, and rules necessary to administer the programs under the agency's supervision; and
- ◆ negotiate and administer statewide interstate tuition reciprocity programs.

Operations

Through delivery of its core programs, the Office of Higher Education serves several constituencies including:

- ◆ current college students;
- ◆ students and families who are preparing for post-secondary education;
- ◆ colleges and universities that participate in financial aid administration and library services for students;
- ◆ students and educators in the K-12 system; and
- ◆ policymakers and researchers who evaluate programs and policies and use statewide post-secondary education data.

The Office of Higher Education provides programs and services through different means, including:

Student Financial Aid Programs. The Minnesota State Grant Program provides more than \$120 million in need-based aid to Minnesota students annually. The agency's other core financial aid programs are the Student Educational Loan Fund (SELF), the Minnesota College Savings Plan, and the Interstate Tuition Reciprocity agreements. The agency also administers other student financial aid programs such as the Post-Secondary Child Care Grant Program, State Work Study Program, and the Public Safety Officers' Survivors Benefit Program.

At A Glance

Two-year State Budget:

\$349 million General Fund
 \$296 million Student Loan Fund
 \$ 11 million Federal and Agency Funds

More than 90% of the agency's General Fund appropriation is for grants to students.

Annual Business Processes:

\$124 million in grants to 73,000 students
 \$123 million in student loans to 32,000 students
 \$ 12 million in work study to 11,000 students

23,000 Minnesota students participate in interstate tuition reciprocity.

150 private institutions registered or licensed.

42,000 accountholders in the Minnesota College Savings Plan, with more than \$453 million in assets in June 2006.

These programs enable thousands of Minnesota students to have financial access to, and choice of, post-secondary educational opportunities.

Research and Analysis. The agency collects and reports information on higher education enrollment, financial aid and trends. In 2006, the Office of Higher Education will produce the first higher education accountability report that will measure the higher education sector's effectiveness in meeting state goals. The agency serves as a clearinghouse for public information on Minnesota higher education including issues like participation rates, degrees granted, and how students pay for college.

Outreach and Publications. The agency's publications, web sites, interactive resources and direct contact with students and families enable it to provide outreach to current and prospective college students including communities of color, low-income families, and families with no previous higher education experience. The Get Ready program, working in tandem with the federally-sponsored GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and the state-funded Intervention for College Attendance Program grants, provide a continuum of contact and service to low income students from 4th grade through high school as they prepare for college admission and attendance. The two programs enable the agency to expand its outreach effectiveness to students.

Library Resources. The MINITEX Library Information Network provides students, scholars, and residents of Minnesota and contiguous states with cost effective access to a wide range of library resources and information, including delivery of interlibrary loan materials, cooperative licensing, and access to electronic resources. The Minnesota Library Information Network (MnLINK) is a statewide virtual library that electronically links major Minnesota libraries. The MnLINK Gateway connects the online catalogs of 20 Minnesota library systems and selected commercial databases so that they appear to a user as a single source of information. The MnLINK Integrated Library System is being implemented as a shared library automation system for the University of Minnesota, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, Minnesota state agencies and interested private college, public, school, and special libraries. The Learning Network of Minnesota provides access to educational programs and library resources through web-based learning interactive videos, and other telecommunications technology. The Learning Network enables students to have access to learning opportunities that otherwise would be unavailable at their college or in their geographic area.

Licensing and Registration. Through state laws that outline the registration and licensure requirements of private colleges, universities, and career schools, the Office of Higher Education protects students as consumers by ensuring that private post-secondary institutions meet state standards and operate legally in Minnesota.

Budget

The Office of Higher Education's budget for the 2006–07 biennium totals approximately \$647 million. Of this amount, \$362 million (56%) is state General Fund monies, \$274 million (42%) is the Student Loan Capital Fund, and the remaining \$11 million (2%) is comprised of special revenue, federal and agency funds.

The Office of Higher Education staff includes 67 full-time equivalent employees, of which 24 are state funded.

Contact

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