

May 6, 2004

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. Dalton B. Floyd, Jr., Chair, and Members
Commission on Higher Education

From: Ms. Susan Cole, Chair, and Members,
Committee on Student Services

**Informational Report
LIFE Scholarship Program
Fall 1999 Cohort Analysis**

Background

The Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence (LIFE) Scholarship, a merit-based program, was established by the General Assembly during the 1998 legislative session and was signed into law on June 19, 1998. The goals of the program are: to increase access to higher education; improve the employability of South Carolina's students; provide incentives for students to be better prepared for college; improve SAT scores; and encourage students to graduate from college on time.

This report examines students attending four-year institutions, although the LIFE Scholarship is also awarded at the two-year level. In 1999, students who graduated from high school with a cumulative 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and a 1000 SAT (or 21 ACT) would receive up to \$2,000 to attend a four-year institution under the LIFE Scholarship Program. In order to renew the scholarship, students must have earned a cumulative 3.0 GPA and an average of thirty credit hours each academic year. Students received the LIFE Scholarship for a maximum of eight terms.

Among those who graduated high school in 1999 and immediately enrolled in college, their eight terms (four years) of eligibility began with the Fall 1999 term and ended with the Spring 2003 term. However, the data includes the Fall 2003 term in order to reflect their status at the end of their scholarship eligibility, including students in the cohort who graduated, continued enrollment, or did not enroll by the Fall 2003 term.

Methodology

The Commission staff reviewed data provided by enrollment reports that were produced by the Commission on Higher Education Management Informational System (CHEMIS). All the information contained in this report is based upon first-time entering freshmen who enrolled full-time in a bachelor’s degree program in Fall 1999.

Fall 1999 LIFE Scholarship Cohort

In Fall 1999, there were 5,372 first-time LIFE Scholarship recipients at the four-year institutions. Of these, 2,080 (38.8%) received the scholarship for four years, while forty-two percent (2,278) lost the scholarship after the first year and never regained eligibility. Nine percent (495) lost the scholarship after the first year, but regained eligibility in either their junior year and/or senior year. However, approximately forty-eight percent (2,599) earned the scholarship at least the first two years.

Table 1 shows the number and percent of students who received the LIFE Scholarship by year.

Table 1		
Fall 1999 LIFE Scholarship Cohort		
	First-Time Freshmen	% to Total
Received All 4 Years	2,080	38.8%
Received Year 1 Only	2,278	42.4%
Received Years 1 & 2	285	5.3%
Received Years 1, 2, & 3	167	3.2%
Received Years 1, 2, & 4	67	1.2%
Received Years 1 & 3	39	0.7%
Received Years 1, 3, & 4	271	5.0%
Received Years 1 & 4	185	3.4%
Total	5,372	100.0%

Fall 1999 LIFE Scholarship Recipients by Institution

There were 4,213 LIFE Scholarship recipients enrolled at the four-year public institutions during the Fall 1999 term. While forty-five percent (1,874) received the scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility, thirty-seven percent (1,576) of the recipients received the LIFE Scholarship for all four years.

At the four-year independent institutions, there were 1,159 LIFE Scholarship recipients enrolled during the Fall 1999 term. While thirty-five percent (404) received the scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility, forty-four percent (504) of the recipients received the LIFE Scholarship for all four years.

Overall, at all senior institutions in South Carolina, thirty-nine percent (2,080) received the LIFE Scholarship for all four years, while forty-two percent (2,278) received the scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility.

The University of South Carolina – Columbia, Clemson University, and Winthrop University were the public institutions that had larger percentages of LIFE Scholarship recipients who received the scholarship for all four years. Among the independent institutions, Presbyterian College, Furman University, and Bob Jones University had larger percentages of LIFE Scholarship recipients who received the scholarship all four years.

Table II shows the number and percentage of recipients who received the scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility and who received the LIFE Scholarship for all four years by institution.

Table II					
Fall 1999 LIFE Scholarship Recipients by Institution					
Senior Institutions	First-Time Freshmen	Received First Year and Never Regained Eligibility		Received 4 Years	
		Recipients	Percentage	Recipients	Percentage
Four-Year Public					
The Citadel	82	41	50.0%	18	22.0%
Clemson University	1,340	621	46.3%	489	36.5%
Coastal Carolina University	118	60	50.8%	36	30.5%
College of Charleston	656	321	48.9%	210	32.0%
Francis Marion University	105	39	37.1%	40	38.1%
Lander University	127	61	48.0%	48	37.8%
South Carolina State University	25	8	32.0%	14	56.0%
USC – Columbia	1,087	422	38.8%	466	42.9%
USC – Aiken	123	50	40.7%	42	34.1%
USC – Spartanburg	142	71	50.0%	46	41.0%
Winthrop University	408	180	44.1%	167	40.9%
Sub-total	4,213	1,874	44.5%	1,576	37.4%
Four-Year Independent					
Bob Jones University	97	26	26.8%	54	55.7%
Charleston Southern University	137	55	40.1%	51	37.2%
Coker College	37	16	43.2%	15	40.5%
Columbia College	101	33	32.7%	50	49.5%
Columbia International	19	8	42.1%	9	47.4%
Converse College	80	27	33.8%	39	48.8%
Erskine College	72	28	38.9%	31	43.1%
Furman University	161	53	32.9%	63	39.1%
Johnson and Wales University	2	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Limestone College	7	4	57.1%	2	28.6%
Newberry College	33	11	33.3%	16	48.5%
North Greenville College	99	28	28.3%	44	44.4%
Presbyterian College	135	47	34.8%	61	45.2%
Southern Wesleyan University	22	9	40.9%	13	59.1%
Wofford College	157	59	37.6%	56	35.7%
Sub-total	1,159	404	34.8%	504	43.5%
Total	5,372	2,278	42.4%*	2,080	38.7%*

* The total percentage does not equal 100 because all of the categories from Table I are not included in Table II.

LIFE Scholarship Recipients – Received First Year and Never Regained Eligibility

At the end of the first year, 2,278 recipients lost the LIFE Scholarship and never regained eligibility. Thirty-four percent (773) did not meet the minimum cumulative 3.0 GPA, one percent (21) did not meet the 30 credit hours, twenty-five percent (559) did not meet the GPA and credit hours, thirteen percent (297) transferred to another SC institution (data not reported to CHEMIS), and twenty-seven percent (628) were not enrolled in SC.

Table III shows the number of recipients and percentage who received the LIFE Scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility by category.

Table III		
Received First Year & Never Regained Eligibility		
	First-Time Freshmen	% to Total
< 3.0 GPA	773	34.0%
< 30 credit hours	21	1.0%
< 3.0 GPA & 30 credit hours	559	25.0%
Transferred to another SC institution*	297	13.0%
Not Enrolled	628	27.0%
Total	2,278	100.0%
* GPA and credit hours not reported to CHEMIS		

By Fall 2003, the data indicates that twenty-two percent (498) of the 2,278 recipients still graduated within four years after losing the scholarship the first year. Thirty-one percent (710) continued to be enrolled at the same institution and had not yet graduated; eight percent (191) continued to be enrolled at a different four-year SC institution and had not yet graduated; eight percent (180) continued to be enrolled at a two-year SC institution; and thirty-one percent (699) were not enrolled in SC.

Conclusion

The Commission staff examined data that tracked the status of 5,372 first-time freshmen who received the LIFE Scholarship during Fall 1999 through Fall 2003. To qualify for a LIFE Scholarship at a four-year institution in 1999, students had to graduate from high school with a cumulative 3.0 grade point average (GPA) and a 1000 SAT (or 21 ACT). Even though students were required to meet two academic requirements, forty-two percent (2,278) received the scholarship the first year and never regained eligibility.

The Appeals Committee, through the approved Scholarship Appeals Process, has found that students experience difficulty with college adjustment due to several issues, especially during the

freshmen year. They typically have problems with balancing academics with extracurricular activities, home-sickness, roommate issues, and problems with faculty or difficult course-load. In addition, students may experience extenuating circumstances beyond their control, such as a serious health condition, death of a family member, or a traumatic event. These extenuating circumstances can prevent the student from maintaining the continued eligibility requirements for the LIFE Scholarship. The Appeals Process allows the student an opportunity to present documentation to determine if an exception to the renewal criteria can be approved.

All of the above may point to issues surrounding the lack of academic preparation and grade inflation. Existing legislation for the LIFE Scholarship Program requires that the Commission on Higher Education monitor the distribution of grades at the higher education level to ensure accountability of scholarship funding (Section 59-149-130). However, a study to further examine a specific LIFE Scholarship Cohort comparing high school performance against college performance is needed to determine if there is a lack of academic preparation in high school or if grade inflation exists.