

## **Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program**

May 2006 has been proclaimed South Carolina Scholarship Month by Governor Mark Sanford. On May 24th at 9:30 am, the Governor and the SC Commission on Higher Education will sponsor the Third Annual Scholarship Day Celebration in the Rotunda of the SC State House. Recipients of the LIFE, Palmetto Fellows and SC HOPE Scholarships will be honored for their academic achievements.

As a part of SC Scholarship Month activities, the Commission on Higher Education would like to provide information that will help in the awareness of the scholarships in South Carolina. As the first part of a three part series of informational articles to the public, this article will discuss the State's premier scholarship program, the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship.

The South Carolina General Assembly established the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program in 1988 to retain the "best and brightest" in the State through awards based on scholarship and achievement. Roslyn Perry, a 2006 graduate of Crestwood High School in Sumter, is a example of what type of student the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship is trying to attend college in South Carolina. Roslyn stated that the scholarship "will give me the opportunity to attend the college of my choice by assisting my parents with the expenses associated with higher education. I am very grateful to the state of South Carolina for supporting its students that wish to pursue higher learning. This scholarship is one of the main reasons that I will be able to attend college in the fall and pursue my dream of becoming a medical professional."

Based on the current academic requirements, high school seniors may apply during December or June if they meet one of the following:

1. Score at least 1200 on the SAT (27 on the ACT) by the June national test administration of the senior year; earn a minimum 3.50 cumulative GPA on the SC Uniform Grading Scale (UGS), and rank in the top six percent of the class; or
2. Score at least 1400 on the SAT (32 on the ACT) by the June national test administration and earn a minimum 4.00 cumulative GPA on the SC UGS.

Palmetto Fellows may receive up to \$6700 per academic year towards the cost-of-attendance for their first bachelor's degree at an eligible institution in the State for a maximum of four years (eight terms).

This year, the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship Program has seen the largest number of applicants since its inception in 1988. The Program has expanded from awarding a little over forty scholarships per year to awarding over 1,600 scholarships in 2006 (and the June awards have not yet been made).

The purpose to retain the "best and brightest" has grown over the last eighteen years because of the efforts of the members of the General Assembly. The Palmetto Fellows greatly appreciate the continued financial support that they receive for their outstanding academic achievements. The Commission on Higher Education and the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship recipients want to take this opportunity to say "thank you" for making higher education a priority in South Carolina.

## **South Carolina Gives LIFE Support to Its Students**

The LIFE Scholarship Program is providing students with the opportunity to attend college in South Carolina. Created by the General Assembly in 1998, the LIFE Scholarship is the largest scholarship program administered by the S.C. Commission on Higher Education on behalf of the State.

Like most merit-based scholarships, the LIFE Scholarship has a set of initial eligibility requirements that must be met in order for students to be awarded the scholarship. In particular, students must meet two of three eligibility requirements: a minimum 3.0 cumulative GPA on the S.C. Uniform Grading Scale; minimum 1100 SAT or 24 ACT score; or rank in the top 30 percent of the graduating senior class. Students can earn eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship at both four-year and two-year eligible public or private institutions in the state.

Currently, more than 27,000 students across the state are receiving financial assistance through the LIFE Scholarship. Without this vital support, many of these students would be unable to attend college or to obtain a college degree.

For many students and their families, the high price of attaining a college education is a constant issue of growing concern. As a result of the escalating cost of tuition, many students and parents alike are starting to question whether education beyond high school is affordable or even possible. As Daniel Crompton, a student at Midlands Technical College, explained, “It can be frustrating when you have the want and ability to succeed in school but have an issue like money acting as a stop sign on the path of life.”

For Daniel, the LIFE Scholarship has been a lifesaver. He stated, “The LIFE Scholarship has taken the extra stress off of my back and has given me the ability to concentrate more on the material that my professors are teaching me. Without the LIFE Scholarship, I would have to work more hours and take more time away from my studies at the risk of lower grades just to get by.” In the future, Daniel plans to enroll in the Medical University of South Carolina to pursue a career as a doctor. According to Daniel, the LIFE Scholarship is helping him start along the right path of earning a degree to put towards his future medical career.

Like Daniel, the LIFE Scholarship is helping many students across the state to earn a college degree as well as make progress towards achieving their career goals. In addition to giving students an opportunity to attend college, the LIFE Scholarship is also providing a great incentive for students to stay in-state.

For some students, the award of the LIFE Scholarship is an important factor in their decision to attend school in-state or out-of-state. That was the case for Jeri Govan, a student at Clemson University. Like many high school students, Jeri wanted to attend college out of state after graduation. She stated, “While in high school, I always said I was going to go to a school out of South Carolina to continue on in higher learning. As I narrowed my choices down, I realized that school is expensive, especially if I had to pay out-of-state tuition and I could not afford to attend a school out of the state.” When Jeri was awarded the LIFE Scholarship, she decided to attend an institution of her choice in the state of South Carolina, since the scholarship would help pay for her education.

By enrolling in a South Carolina college or university, students are able to take advantage of earning a college degree at an in-state tuition price. Tuition at in-state colleges is substantially

*(LIFE Scholarships, page 2 of 2)*

lower for South Carolina high school graduates than tuition at out-of-state institutions. For instance, for the 2005-06 academic year, tuition and fees at two of the state's top universities Clemson and the University of South Carolina were \$8,886 and \$7,314, respectively. In comparison, the cost to attend college out-of-state was approximately \$21,000.

Being a \$5,000 annual award, the LIFE Scholarship provides students with up to \$20,000 in financial assistance towards their college education. According to Robbie Walker, a Mechanical Engineering Technology student, because of her LIFE Scholarship award her family did not need to raise extra money in order for her to attend college and has helped her to meet her financial obligations at S.C. State University. As with Robbie and her family, the LIFE Scholarship is lessening the financial burden on students and their parents as well as keeping more and more of the best and brightest students in the state.

Recent changes to the LIFE Scholarship by the General Assembly are also providing students with additional advantages for maintaining their LIFE Scholarship award.

One important change that has made to the scholarship is the creation of the LIFE GPA.

Once students have been awarded the LIFE Scholarship, they are required to meet two continued eligibility requirements to keep the scholarship. Specifically, students are required to earn a minimum 3.0 LIFE GPA as well as earn at least 30 credit hours by the end of each academic year to maintain their eligibility. The LIFE GPA includes all grades and credit hours earned by students at all eligible institutions both in-state and out-of-state.

Due to the creation of the LIFE GPA, students are now able to use all of the grades and credit hours that they earn to maintain their eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship. In addition, since the academic year for the scholarship consists of fall, spring and summer sessions, students are also able to attend summer school at any eligible institution both in-state and out-of-state to either increase their LIFE GPA or to increase the total number of credit hours earned toward LIFE Scholarship eligibility.

The LIFE GPA and the ability to attend summer school at an institution other than the student's home institution provides students with advantages for maintaining their eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship. During the 2004-05 academic year, there were 22,842 LIFE Scholarship recipients attending public institutions in the state. Of those students, 8,929 (39.1%) were enrolled in courses during the summer 2005 sessions. With the implementation of the LIFE GPA, it is expected that summer enrollment will significantly increase.

When asked about enrollment for this summer, Michele Bowles, the Director of the Office of Student Financial Services at Midlands Technical College, replied that right after final grades are posted she anticipates an increase in the number of inquires about LIFE renewal requirements and summer registration from students enrolled at Midlands Tech as well as from students attending other colleges across the state. She stated, "Many students are concerned that they may have lost their eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship due to problems with their GPA or because they did not complete enough credit hours during the fall and spring terms." According to Ms. Bowles, students are genuinely relieved when informed by staff in her office that by taking courses over the summer, they may be able to retain their eligibility for the LIFE Scholarship for the upcoming academic year.

## **Good Thing There's HOPE!**

Do you ever hear much about the SC HOPE Scholarship Program? No, not the Georgia HOPE, but the SC HOPE Scholarship. It may not be the largest scholarship program in SC, with 2,425 students receiving funds in fall 2005, but it definitely makes a huge impact on our State.

Many students aspire to the Palmetto Fellows Scholarship or the LIFE Scholarship, but what about those students who have a 3.0 GPA except they don't quite have that SAT score or they just miss the rank requirement? Should we not still reward them for their academic achievement? Shouldn't they too be given an extra boost to go to college? Well, there's still HOPE...yes, pun intended.

The SC HOPE Scholarship was created in 2002 for first-time entering freshmen attending eligible SC four-year institutions who do not quite meet the requirements for the Palmetto Fellows or LIFE Scholarships. They are nevertheless successful students having earned a 3.0 GPA, so giving them the SC HOPE Scholarship provides them with that extra little incentive not to give up on their dream of being a Clemson Tiger, USC Gamecock, etc. According to Brent Patrick, a recent graduate from Ridgeview High School who will be receiving the SC HOPE Scholarship, "A teacher once told me that I could do anything positive I set my mind to, and that it was worth it to make a difference in this world. The SC Hope Scholarship makes a difference to many students, and I look forward to making a difference through having it." Sounds like an ambitious young man. Isn't it great for the State to help send students like this to college?

Well, you may ask, is this small scholarship program truly a good investment? Statistics say yes. According to data, SC HOPE Scholarship recipients are sticking with it! They may not have that 1200 SAT or rank in the top 6% of their class, but they are proving that college is for them. In fact, 86.8% of SC HOPE Scholarship recipients in Fall 2004 returned to a SC college or university in Fall 2005. By providing SC HOPE recipients with a monetary incentive to enroll in a four-year institution and closing the gap on their unmet financial need, SC is improving the probability that these students will enroll in college and eventually earn degrees. In addition, sometimes just the idea of earning a scholarship to attend a four-year institution is just what a student needs to have the confidence to actually enroll and succeed, "If they're giving me a scholarship, they must think I can do it."

Financial aid officials from around the State have noted that the SC HOPE Scholarship is providing college access to students who otherwise may not have enrolled in a four-year college. So what does that mean for our State? Well, every student in SC that earns a degree brings us one step closer to bridging the wide social and economic gaps in SC.

So we know these kids are good students, but do they really need the money, or are they students who can afford gone to college regardless? Is the State giving them \$2,650 a year that their parents can afford to pay? Well, let's turn to the statistics once again. According to a survey conducted by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Division of Student Services at the four-year colleges and universities (2005), about one-quarter of SC HOPE Scholarship recipients (25.6%) qualified to receive a SC Need-based Grant, and over half of these students (53.4%) were required to obtain student loans to help pay for college. It appears that these students do need this money- even if it's just \$2,650. If you've ever paid your way or your child's way through college, there is no doubt that every little bit helps, especially with the rising costs of higher education. In 2005-06, average tuition and required fees was \$6,843 for a SC four-year public institution and \$15,277 for a SC four-year independent institution.