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State has aid for college students

Lots of money available as deadline nears

By Tanya Schevitz

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A huge infusion of cash has turned the state's college financial aid program topsy-turvy: Instead of running out of Cal Grant money as they have in past years, officials are practically begging for students to apply.

"You don't have to be a top student. This money is not a loan, it is a grant," said Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante. "So just apply. The chances are, you are going to get one."

In putting more money into the program earlier this year, the state was hoping to reach every student going to college. But there are still thousands of awards available.

Community college students can still get \$1,551 grants for this year, but face a Sunday deadline to apply — and Bustamante wants to get the word out.

"We are talking about some serious dough here that a lot of students don't know they are eligible for," Bustamante said.

Carol Solov, a spokeswoman for the state Student Aid Commission says the agency did make a big push with radio spots, fliers, grocery store ads and student workshops. The commission saw a 24 percent increase in awards this year.

Nonetheless, she said, "We did come under our amount because we've built in plenty of money. We would like every student in California who qualifies and applies to get the money to realize their dreams of a college education. We have plenty of money. We just need them to apply."

In the past, the state handed out awards to applicants according to a ranking of need and grades. When the money ran out, eligible students were left out.

Last year, there was \$500 million for awards. With \$1.2 billion being pumped into the program through 2006, any eligible low- and middle-income student with average grades can now get a grant.

Students who attend college

A second look at community college cuts

By Elizabeth Bell
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

In response to a campaign mounted by college leaders across California, Gov. Gray Davis is considering restoring some funding to community colleges that he slashed last month from the state budget.

The governor's cabinet secretary, Susan Kennedy, is meeting with the community college chancellor's office to decide how much of the money, if any, should be returned to the budget, said Davis' spokeswoman Hilary McLean.

"I think the community colleges have raised some strong arguments that there are critical needs, so we're taking a look to see what we can do to adjust," McLean said.

Lawmakers said they had presented Davis with a balanced budget bill, but Davis decided to make further cuts in July to shore up budget reserves in light of the energy crisis and the state's faltering economy.

Two bills now pending by Assemblyman Robert Pacheco, R-Walnut, and Senator Jack Scott, D-Pasadena, would restore \$98 million of the funds cut from community colleges for instructional equipment purchases and maintenance projects.

McLean said the governor was interested in restoring funding for projects that addressed safety issues — such as seismic retrofits.

In the Bay Area, community colleges were expecting money for a variety of maintenance needs, from replacing a broken boiler at Merritt College in Oakland to updating fire alarms at San Francisco City College, to replacing leaking roofs at the Diablo Valley College library in Pleasant Hill.

Other projects affected by the budget cuts included money for preliminary planning for a new San Francisco City College campus in the Chinatown-North Beach neighborhood. City College Chancellor Phillip Day had hoped to open the new campus in 2005, but said it would now be delayed a year. Students in that area are now crowded into an old elementary school, store fronts and churches, with no central library facilities or day care, he said. There are no plans at this point to restore that funding.

Community college spokeswoman Kirsten Macintyre said California's Community College Chancellor Thomas Nussbaum would continue to lobby for as much funding as possible. Nussbaum has said the community colleges have yet to catch up on a backlog of maintenance projects left over from budget cuts in the early 1990s.

Any compromise worked out between the governor and the chancellor's office would have to be approved by the Legislature.

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"We are talking about some serious dough here . . ."

LT. GOV. CRUZ BUSTAMANTE

within 18 months of graduating from high school and earn at least a 3.0 grade point average, or B, can get grants that cover tuition at the state's public institutions — up to \$1,428 for California State Universities and \$3,249 for University of California campuses — or \$9,708 toward a private university such as Stanford. The deadline for students attending four-year schools is March 2, 2002.

Community college students earning a 2.0, or a C, average will get a grant of up to \$1,551, which they can use to pay for textbooks and other incidental costs. Part-time students enrolled at least half-time — six credit units a semester — will also qualify for grants. The deadline is Sunday.

The new program also expanded the grants to continuing stu-

dents. At San Francisco State, the program contributed to a 58 percent increase over last year in students receiving Cal Grants, said financial aid director Barbara Hubler.

"It is very good news," she said. "Grant funding is just so limited, so many students are relying on loans. So if we can help the neediest to lower the burden, that is terrific."

The grants are available to students whose families have no more than \$45,400 in assets. The annual income ceiling for eligibility varies, from \$23,500 for students who are independent to \$74,100 for students from families of six or more.

Bustamante said high school students should start thinking about next year already. He will visit high schools in one city a month to let them know that they can get awards if they apply by the March deadline.

Information can be found on the lieutenant governor's Web site, www.ltgc.ca.gov, or on the Web site for the California Student Aid Commission, www.csac.ca.gov.

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