TEACH Grant Advocate Proposal

Description

The purpose of this request is to provide a resource for the Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA) to develop a position that will have primary responsibility to recruit and administer greatly amplified participation in the Teacher Education Assistance and Higher Education Grant (TEACH) Program. The 2009 Survey results indicate that students endorse future initiatives directing Student Services fees toward expanded support and increased funding access to programs that benefit students. We believe that addition of a position in OSFA to focus on this program will meet these objectives; it will bring $6,000,000 directly to student bank accounts.

Background

The TEACH Grant was created in 2008. This program provides funds to students who are completing, or intend to complete, coursework to begin a career in teaching and who agree to serve for a minimum of four years as a full-time, highly-qualified, high-need field teacher in a low-income school. This grant provides up to $4,000 a year in grant assistance to undergraduate students ($16,000 total) and graduate students ($8,000 additional). If recipients of these funds do not complete the teaching requirement the grant will revert to an Unsubsidized Stafford loan. The process of identifying grant recipients and processing these grants is complex and requires a large amount of OSFA staff effort to determine and document student eligibility. OSFA has elected to participate in this optional program and as of March 1, 2009 has awarded approximately $220,000 to 55 students. Current budget limitations and recent OSFA staff reductions have limited the amount of effort available to support UA participation in this program. We believe that given additional resources OSFA could reach many more students and increase this funding from the 08-09 level to $1,000,000 in 2009-10, $2,000,000 in 2010-11 and $3,000,000 in 2011-12. This would mean $6,000,000 in additional grant aid for UA students over this 3 year project.

Benefits

Most importantly, this amazing initiative will result in students (who may have not previously considered the possibility) to become qualified teachers in critically needed fields. This outcome provides immense benefit to our state and nation. Maximum student benefit derives from financial aid in the form of grants as they do not need to be repaid. These grants are not need-based and are available to offset the family contribution toward educational costs. The TEACH Grant program provides the only non-need based grant available from Federal funds. If, in the future, the teaching commitment is not completed and the grant becomes a loan, it is a Stafford loan which carries a much lower interest rate than any private educational or Parent PLUS loan. The University currently certifies nearly $12,000,000 in high-interest private loans. We believe this program will substantially lower this figure.
Requirements

This will require an OSFA employee who will be available to:
1. Promote the features and benefits of the program to students
2. Identify and qualify applicants
3. Provide liaison with College of Education and other departments
4. Become the resident expert in Department of Education policies and procedures in this complex program to maintain compliance with Federal regulations.
5. Maintain administrative capability for extensive document tracking and maintenance requirements.

Outcomes

The effectiveness of this program will be determined by:
1. the number of students who receive awards from this program – number and dollars
2. renewal of awards from year-to-year
3. retention of grant recipients to graduation
4. reduction in very high-interest Private Educational loan borrowing
5. reduction in excessive hours of student employment
6. mining the demographic data to determine who receives benefit and modify future efforts accordingly.

Conclusion

In these current days of economic turmoil and instability it has become even more evident that the future of our society depends on education. Well-prepared teachers are the engine that will drive our future economic well being. This Federal program provides a tremendous incentive for students to become teachers. Very few schools currently participate in the program because of the work necessary to administer the program. Despite UA’s small participation to date we are a leader among participants in the program. OSFA needs additional resources to fully utilize this program and maximize the possibility for participation by UA students. By funding this concept through their Student Service fees, UA students would be among the most innovative, aggressive and lead the nation in facilitating and encouraging student participation in this beneficial program and, make a significant contribution to the future of our society.