

Student Proposal Regarding Changes to the Arizona Instrument to Measure Success (AIMS) Scholarship

Since its establishment in 2004, the Regents High Honor Endorsement, also known as the AIMS scholarship or the High Honors Tuition Scholarship, has provided an incentive to Arizona's high school students; that if they work hard and pass the AIMS test, they would be rewarded with an academic award in the amount of in-state tuition at any of Arizona's universities. Many students in Arizona have planned on receiving this scholarship since this program began, and many are working hard to utilize this as the key to higher education as can be seen by the steady increase in recipients. Currently, this is the only form of financial aid that is keeping pace with the dramatic tuition increases over the past few years. In the past three years alone, tuition has increased 63%, causing many scholarships to become inadequate. The concerns of the universities stem from the fact that tuition has dramatically increased, causing the AIMS Scholarship to no longer be viable within its current funding mechanism. Cutting financial aid should never be used as a cost saving measure since it directly impacts both accessibility and affordability.

It is therefore the Arizona Board of Regents and the universities' responsibility to provide due diligence in examining this program prior to making any substantive changes to minimize the harm to any future recipient of the award.

The following are recommendations for changes to the AIMS Scholarship:

- 1) **All changes to the amount of the award should only affect students just now entering their high school sophomore year that have NOT taken the AIMS test.** The Board of Regents should reject all financial changes for Fall 2011 and 2012 and should use that time to do the following:
 - a) **Require that all students that are eligible for the AIMS Scholarship fill out a FAFSA form.** Students that are eligible for the AIMS Scholarship should do so after other forms of grants and scholarships have been utilized. Since the universities have not required students prior to Fall 2010 to fill out FAFSA to become eligible for this program, the impact of need-based aid is largely unknown. Once this data is obtained, an assessment can be made on the impact this scholarship has on students that might qualify for need-based aid. Of the students that filled out FAFSA, it was found that nearly 78% of them qualified for need-based aid.

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- b) All high school counselors and advisors should be notified of the changes occurring to the AIMS Scholarship no later than August 30, 2010.** This will allow for ample time to communicate to both students and parents so that they no longer plan on this scholarship to afford tuition.
- c) The legislature should be asked to commit dedicated funding for the AIMS scholarship.** Although Arizona is facing a \$2 billion dollar deficit in fiscal year 2012, Arizona voters have shown that they prioritize education and are willing to invest in it with the passage of Proposition 100. Legislators should have to publicly support or oppose funding for the AIMS Scholarship.
- d) All options should be explored for full funding of the AIMS scholarship.**
- e) An ABOR task force should be created.** This task force should be comprised of: a high school advisor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, a high school student set to receive the AIMS Scholarship, a university student currently receiving the AIMS Scholarship, a parent of an AIMS Scholarship recipient, representation from each of the universities' administration, and members or staff of the Arizona Board of Regents. This task force will ensure that all important stakeholders are part of the discussions and decisions regarding changes to the AIMS Scholarship.

The Arizona Students' Association rejects any changes to the financial aid that current high school juniors or seniors, entering the Arizona University System. Many of these students entering an Arizona University in the fall of 2011 and fall of 2012 have been planning for up to three years to receive this scholarship in order to afford an education. These students have already taken the AIMS test and should not be penalized by the universities.