

# Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG)

## Background

- One of two grant programs created by the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005 (HERA)
- Purpose of programs is to encourage students to be academically prepared for college and to encourage states to develop rigorous programs

## Award Amounts

- Up to \$750 for first-year students
- Up to \$1,300 for second-year students

## General ACG Eligibility Criteria

- Completion of a rigorous secondary school program
- Federal Pell Grant recipient for same award year
- First- or second-year student in a
  - Two- or four-year degree program
  - One- or two-year certificate program offered at a two- or four- year degree-granting institution

## Additional Eligibility Criteria for Second-year Students

- Have at least a 3.0 grade point average (GPA) in an eligible program from freshman year of college study; GPA only checked once at the end of freshman year
  - Cannot gain eligibility based on second year GPA. If a student's GPA is not a 3.0 or higher at the end of first year, he or she cannot gain eligibility by pulling grades up in second year.

## Rigorous Secondary School Program Options

- State-designated programs
  - An advanced or honors diploma established by a state and in existence for the 2004-05 school year or later
  - State Scholars Initiative
- Program designated by state as rigorous

- Coursework designated by the Secretary of Education
  - 4 years of English
  - 3 years of mathematics (Algebra I and at least one higher level class)
  - 3 years of science (biology, chemistry, physics)
  - 3 years of social studies
  - 1 year of a foreign language
- Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB)
  - Successful completion of any secondary school program for a student who completes at least two courses with a minimum passing test score on the exams in those courses
    - ◆ Score of at least 3 for AP exams
    - ◆ Score of at least 4 for IB exams
- All states have at least one designated rigorous program
- Students from every state have at least three ways to meet rigorous program requirement

### **Documentation of Completion of Rigorous Programs**

- Colleges required to collect and retain documentation that confirms a student meets at least one of the rigorous program options
- Colleges may document the eligibility option that is the most efficient for them
  - Students may meet more than one definition of rigorous program

### **Student Application Process**

- *FAFSA on the Web*
  - Submit FAFSA at **[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)**
  - Respond to prompts if data indicates possible eligibility
  - Wait for follow-up contact from school
- Paper FAFSA
  - *Student Aid Report (SAR)* will indicate possible eligibility
  - SAR includes toll-free number for the Federal Student Aid Information Center (FSAIC) at 1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243). Students can call FSAIC for answers to questions about eligibility

- Self-identification
  - Student self-identifies to financial aid office at college in person or in writing
  - Student has to submit documentation

### **Role of Counselors**

- Tell students about ACG program
- Encourage students to take courses that meet the definition of “rigorous”
- Provide documentation in a timely manner showing that students have met the rigorous program criterion
  - To students or directly to college
- Inform students enrolled in AP or IB courses of the importance of taking course exams
- Emphasize importance of first-year GPA

### **Resources**

- ACG Recognized State Rigorous Secondary School Programs of Study:  
[www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/about/ac-smart/state-programs.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/about/ac-smart/state-programs.html)
  - Rigorous high school program codes
  - Programs listed by graduation year
  - “Submit a question” feature

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