

# What Obama means for College Students

Wednesday, 05 November 2008

With the election of Barack Obama, many changes should come in education that directly relate to college students. Obama, throughout his campaign has widely appealed to the younger crowd, which was clear on election day with youth voters favoring Obama over Senator John McCain by a ratio of 68 to 30 percent.

Obama has made many promises and proposals throughout his campaign and has been active on higher education during his term in the senate. Here are some of the things you can expect while he is in office:

## College Tax Credit

Obama hopes to make college more affordable for everyone by establishing a new American Opportunity Tax Credit. This is a yearly credit that will cover the first \$4000 of your college education. With the average in-state tuition at a four-year public college \$6,585, this is a credit that will cover nearly two thirds of the tuition of many college students. It is also enough to cover the full cost of tuition at most community colleges across the nation.

Another good thing is this credit will be available when it's needed: at the time of enrollment. Rather than having to wait until the year's tax returns are filed, the credit will be issued immediately based on the previous year's tax return.

## What's required:

Recipients of the American Opportunity Tax Credit will be required to perform 100 hours of community service a year, either during the school year or over the summer.

## A simpler application for student aid

The FAFSA can be a nuisance to have to complete every year, especially for incoming college freshman who are unfamiliar with the paperwork and the process. The current application students must complete for aid (FAFSA) is five pages long with over 125 questions, making it longer and sometimes just as complicated as many federal tax returns.

In 2004 for example, over 1.5 million eligible high school seniors failed to fill out the FAFSA to receive a Pell Grant. That's free money these students could have had that they let pass by. Obama proposes to simplify the financial aid process by eliminating the FAFSA altogether. The amount of aid a student receives would be figured by a much simpler formula, not the current way that requires you to wait until you receive your Student Aid Report in the mail to determine how much aid you will receive.

Instead of filling out the FAFSA, families will simply have to check a box on their tax form allowing the use of the information in figuring financial aid for their student. Using the new method, students will be able to figure the amount of financial aid they will receive well in advance.

## Early Assessment Programs

Obama will provide more funds for a voluntary program known as the Early Assessment Program. The program helps 11th graders and their parents ensure they are on track to be ready for college by the time they graduate and is there to inform students what they need to do to prepare for college while they still have time to do it. Basically what it does is makes sure that high school seniors will be good and ready to go on to college after graduating from high school.

#### Ensure Pell Grants for Lower Income Students

Obama has always been for increases in Pell Grants and will strive to keep grant increases in pace with the rising costs of college.

#### Changes to Student Loan Programs

Obama wants to end the FFELP and force the entire student loan industry into the Direct Loan program. This would eliminate government subsidies to private lenders and all borrowing would come from the government-controlled direct lending program (not including much costlier private student loans). Obama claims eliminating subsidies would mean a significant boost in support for Pell Grants.

#### Community College Partnership Program

Obama has proposed a new grant program that would provide funds to community colleges to create new associate degree programs that will serve up-and-coming careers.

The program would also reward schools that graduate more students and also increase the number of transfer students that wish to move on to a four-year college.

#### Benefits for certain majors

Throughout his campaign Obama repeatedly claimed that to help boost our economy there needs to be further investments in science and technology. The math and science fields will be an education priority. This includes a National STEM Scholarship Database that will give math and science students easier access to financial aid. Obama sees to attract more students to the technology field and hopes to increase the number of minorities and women studying math and science, who have traditionally been underrepresented in these programs. Obama also makes a big commitment to those who wish to become teachers, saying if you commit your life to teaching you can expect to have all of your college education paid for.