

Student lobby says aid information misleading

By Nancy Clark

Ask what the maximum Basic Education Opportunity Grant (NEOG) is and the U.S. Office of Education (OE) will say \$1,400. Read the 1976-77 BEOG application and you will learn that officials estimate awards will range between \$50 and \$1,000.

Challenging the language of the application, the National Student Lobby (NSL) has charged OE of providing misleading information about the federally-financed BEOG program, said Steve Pressman, NSL co-director.

According to the 1972 Higher Education Act, eligible BEOG applicants are legally entitled to receive the \$1,400 award. But in its three years of operation no \$1,400 awards have been made, Pressman said in a telephone interview. A BEOG official has denied the charge.

UNL never has been authorized to award more than \$1,050 to one student said Debi Knight, a UNL financial aid adviser.

Never awarded maximum grant

The amount of the award is based on the student's expenses and any outside income the student is receiving, she said. The award cannot exceed half the student's anticipated expenses for the academic year, she said.

Although Pressman said BEOG officials have never awarded the maximum grant, the situation differs this year in "one important respect."

"In past years, Congress and OE recognized that congressional appropriations would not allow for \$1,400 awards," he said. "But when OE presented its 1975-76 budget request, it was understood by Congress and OE officials that the budget would allow for grant awards of \$1,400 to eligible students," he said.

He added that the program is short of funds because BEOG officials miscalculated the number of students who would be eligible for BEOG in the coming academic year.

To finance the awards, Congress would have to appropriate an additional \$600 million to the original

\$715 million appropriation, Pressman said.

Difficulties understood

He said he understood the difficulties involved in calculating the eligibility level.

"My gripe is that the application provides misleading information about the total picture," he said. "The application doesn't say why maximum awards will probably be \$1,000, and it doesn't mention pending action by Congress to provide additional money to fund \$1,400 awards."

NSL is asking students to come to Washington, D.C. April 2 through 6.

"This will be a great time for students to show their strength. They can have a great impact on the future of financial aid."

NSL is suggesting that OE release revised information on the status of the BEOG program, following the congressional action, he said. But, the NSL information is inaccurate in two respects, according to Diane Sedicum, assistant to the BEOG head. She said BEOG awarded \$1,400 grants in 1975-76. Also, the 1976-77 fund shortage resulted from a cut in the department's original request and not because of miscalculation by OE officials, Sedicum said in a telephone interview.

"Totally unfair"

OE requested \$1 billion for 1976-77, but Congress reduced the request by \$285 million, she said.

Sedicum said she believes that NSL's accusation that the BEOG application is misleading is "totally unfair." "We still don't know what the awards are going to be."

We had to deal with the (budget) cut when estimating what next year's awards would be," she said.

OE officials have told Congress that the program's 1976-77 budget should be increased to 1.3 billion to meet obligations, she said.

Congress appears to favor additional appropriations, Pressman said. But, he added, the appropriation might not reach the \$600 million figure.

Students encouraged

NSL is lobbying for the additional funds, he said, and also is encouraging students to write their congressmen to support the program.

NSL is asking students to come to Washington, D.C. April 4 through 6 for the fifth NSL Lobbying Conference.

The lobbying will focus on financial aid appropriations, Pressman said.

"This will be a great time for students to show their strength," he said. "They can have a great impact on the future of financial aid."

The lobbying will occur a week before Congress recesses, which Pressman said should be the time a decision is made about additional appropriations.

If the past is an indicator, Pressman said he thinks student response will be good.

In September 1975, Congress overrode President Gerald Ford's veto of the 1975-76 Education Appropriation Bill, which included budgets for all financial programs.

The override partially resulted from "a terrific response from students in support of the financial aid program," Pressman said.

NSL is financed by university student governments and private donations, he said. ASUN Senate pays dues to NSL, according to a Senate spokesman.

For more information about the lobbying effort write: National Student Lobby, 2000 P St., NW, Suite 515, Washington, D.C., 20036, or call: 202-833-3116.

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