

Pell Grant recipients eligible for Oregon Health Plan

However, the plan does not cover visits to the Student Health Center

By Eric Collins
Community Editor

Beginning in January 1998, full-time college students in Oregon who qualify for federally funded Pell Grants among other requirements will be allowed medical coverage under the Oregon Health Plan.

An addition to the health and human services budget approved during the 1997 Legislative session, the coverage plan allows students, who were taken off the plan because of 1995 budget cuts, to be placed on it once again.

An estimated 5,000 to 7,000 students from Oregon universities, private schools and community colleges will be affected by the legislation, according to Ed Dennis, Oregon Student Association executive director.

tion executive director.

"We saw it as a fairness issue, really," Dennis said. "We want to help people get into college who are poor."

Dennis said he believed paying for health insurance was just one more hurdle for low-income students to jump over.

"For some people, that's all it takes to not go to school," he said.

By allowing free coverage, Dennis said more people would have access to post-secondary education.

ASUO President Bill Miner, a member of OSA and future beneficiary of the coverage, said the association has been working on the issue for the past two years.

"This is a huge victory for students," he said. "The Legislature now sees the OSA and the ASUO as a powerhouse."

The next step in the process, Miner said, is figuring out a feasible method for automatically qualifying Pell Grant students for the health plan; otherwise, students would have to take the initiative in applying for coverage, which is a problem because many qualifying students may not know they are eligible.

What remains unclear, however, is whether the Oregon Health Plan could be used at the University's Student Health Center.

When the plan was formed, the federal government allowed money reserved for Medicaid to flow into the plan instead. The only stipulation was that the health care provider serve the entire community and remain open 24 hours a day.

The health center doesn't meet these requirements and "has not been considered on the Oregon Health Plan up to this point,"

said Bob Petit, administrator of the health center. "There is still a lot of ambiguity of how [the health plan] is going to work."

Petit said he hopes the issue is solved between now and January by the people in charge of the Oregon Health Plan.

"This is an issue we are following and tracking," he said.

Pell Grants are awarded through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. In the 1997-98 school year, undergraduate students pursuing their first degree will be offered Pell Grants if their expected family contribution, totaled in the application, does not exceed \$2,500.

The family contribution includes both parental and student funds, which breaks down to \$277 a month. Ed Vignoul, director of student financial aid, said about 3,000 students currently receive the federal grant.

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ASUO President

rently receive the federal grant.

In addition to qualifying for the federal grant, students must be uninsured and must meet certain minimum resource requirements. This includes having a three-month income average of \$658 or less per month.

For more information on applying for Oregon Health Plan coverage or its qualifications, call 1-800-359-9517.

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