

Student lobbying increases Pell Grant

The need-based grant totaled \$10.7 million this year, helping about a quarter of undergraduates

Aimee Rudin
City/State Politics Reporter

Access to higher education has long been a benefit of the upper class. It takes money to go to college, and when lower-income families struggle just to make ends meet, a college education often falls by the wayside. The relationship between affluence and education can, and often does, leave people behind.

The Pell Grant, part of federal financial aid, can help to ease the cost burden of higher education for needy students. It is the only government grant based entirely on need and is most commonly awarded to lower-income students working toward undergraduate degrees.

"It is the only grant source available to needy students that has no other requirements than need," University Financial Aid Office Director Elizabeth Bickford

said. "All students need to do is apply for it. If they're needy, they will always get the Pell Grant."

At the University this year, Pell Grant awards totaling \$10.7 million were dispersed to 4,049 needy students — about one quarter of the undergraduate student body — according to the University's Office of Student Financial Aid.

"It's the largest grant we have based on need," Bickford said, adding that the Pell Grant is really the "meat and potatoes" of need-based awards.

Individual awards for the 2002-03 academic year may have reached a maximum of \$4,000, with the average award falling around \$2,000.

Pell Grants tend to make up approximately 20 percent of lower-income student funding for college. The other 80 percent typically comes from federal loans and other sources, said Stefan Myers, a legislative associate with the ASUO. Myers said that just 20 years ago, 80 percent of student funding came from grants and only 20 percent came from loans.

"We need to get the grants back to a level where they can cover

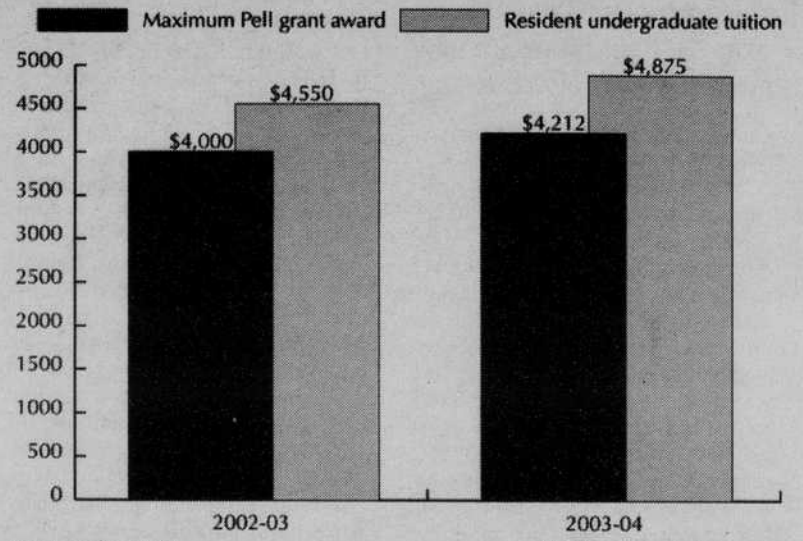
student expenses," he added.

Myers and several members of the University student body recently joined other schools and members of the U.S. Student Association in Washington, D.C., where they lobbied for increases to the Pell Grant award.

As a result of the efforts of the group, the Senate raised the maximum award for the Pell Grant to \$4,550, an increase of \$550. According to U.S.S.A. Legislative Director Mary Cunningham, the group made such an impact that the Senate felt it had no choice but to pass the increase. Cunningham added that the increase will not be final until after the appropriations process is complete, and the increase is approved by the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the meantime, University students should plan on continuing to contact their senators and voicing their support for the Pell Grant, Myers said. The ASUO is putting together a list of students interested in future lobbying for the grant and Myers encourages students to drop

Maximum Pell Grant increase



Meg Krugel Emerald

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education

by the ASUO office and sign up. "The Pell Grant is one of the most important grants out there," Myers said. "It really opens gateways to higher education. We need to make sure our legislators know how important

Pell Grants are to our education." For more information on how to show support for the Pell Grant, contact Stefan Myers at 346-0628. Contact the senior reporter at aimee@dailyemerald.com.

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Lent

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place during the spring, and Estere demanded sacrifices from those who followed her. The Easter symbols of rabbits and eggs are derived from pagan fertility celebrations, which have been traced back to ancient Mesopotamia.

Junior Jin Sook, an international student from Korea, said she thinks Easter is both a secular and religious holiday in the United States.

"In Korea, it is strictly a religious observation," she said. She said she's noticed in America that Easter bunnies and springtime often symbolize the Easter holiday, and its religious connotation does not seem to hold as much weight as it does in Korea.

Still, it's a very symbolic time for many religious denominations in the United States. Lent, a 40-day commitment of sacrifice and fasting, ends on Easter. Holy Week concludes Lent, and according to the Greek Orthodox Church, the week is a day-by-day dedication to observe the teachings of Christ during his final week on earth.

During this week, Catholic Campus Ministry Father Mike Fones said Catholics also observe the Triduum, which began Thursday. He said they chant ancient prayers in Psalms every morning for three days at the University's Newman Center.

"This is a consecration of time to God," Fones said. He said in the Catholic tradition, an Easter Vigil takes place outside on Saturday night, as opposed to Sunday morning, when mass takes place. At the Catholic Campus Ministry, there will be a bonfire, singing of the "exultant," an ancient hymn, and baptisms of students and non-students.

Fones said Lent is a time to realize the dependency humans have on physical needs. He said its intent is to make people discover what changes should be made in an individual's life through God.

"It's important to slow down in life and be more reflective, which is hard for students," Fones said.

For most Christians, Easter is commonly observed on Sunday morning, either by attending church or getting together as a family. "I'm the only one in my family who wants to go to church on Easter morning, so I usually have to convince them to go with me a month and a half to two months in advance," sophomore Melissa Collier said.

Kelsi Johns is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.