

Education



PHOTOS BY TAIMY ALVAREZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Nova Southeastern University Dean of Undergraduate Admissions Deanna Voss speaks to biology student Collin Tacy from Cape Coral about the financial aid he receives.

Worried about college costs? There is plenty of aid available

By **SCOTT TRAVIS**
Staff writer

If you want to attend college without breaking the bank, you live in the right state.

Florida's public universities, which charge about \$6,300 a year in tuition and fees for in-state students, are the second lowest in the country, behind Wyoming. Community colleges charge less than half that, at \$3,100.

But if those costs are still too high, or if your dream is to attend a private college, such as the University of Miami or Nova Southeastern University, there are still plenty of ways to greatly lower the costs.

Federal Pell Grants provide free money for students from low-income families. The state's Bright Futures scholarship will pay most or all of public college tuition if you have at least a B grade-point average and high test scores in high school. And most colleges and universities have their own sources of financial aid for students.

Pell Grants will be even more valuable to students this year, as the federal government has approved "summer Pell grants" for the first time in five years. This provides up to \$2,960 for students who meet income requirements. This is in addition to Pell Grants available to students during the fall and spring semesters.

"It's not often that our federal lawmakers allocate summer Pell, so students ... should take advantage of this opportunity," said Eddie Viera, financial aid director for Palm Beach State College.

The Pell Grant may not make a huge dent for those attending private universities. Annual tuition and fees are \$30,000 at Nova Southeastern and \$48,000 at the University of Miami.

But the good news is most people don't pay full price. If you stay in Florida, the state offers grants of about \$3,600 to offset the cost of private college. The full value of Bright Futures can be applied. And the colleges offer internal aid as well.

Any student looking for aid should fill out a Free Application for Student Aid, available at fafsa.ed.gov.

"A student should never shy away from applying to a private college because they look at the sticker price published by the university until they go through the financial aid process," said Deanna Voss, director of undergraduate admissions for NSU.

She also said applicants should not allow horror stories about students getting saddled with debt dissuade them from taking out loans.

"I took out students loans because I was investing in myself and my future," Voss said. "My bachelor's and master's degrees helped me become more and more successful. People are quick to take out a car loan, and the car depreciates immediately. Your college degrees never depreciate."

Still, experts say it's a good idea to check out websites such as College Navigator (nces.ed.gov/collegeNavigator) to ensure they're not attending a school where many students default on their loans. High default rates are usually indicators that students aren't finding good-paying jobs after they graduate.

Federal aid

Federal Pell Grants usually are awarded only to undergraduate students who have not earned a bachelor's or a professional degree. In most cases, students must come from families making



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\$50,000 or less per year, with higher awards going to those with the lowest incomes. The maximum Pell Grant is \$5,920 for the regular school year and \$2,960 for the summer. Visit StudentAid.gov/pell-grant for more information.

Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant provides up to \$4,000 a year for undergraduates with exceptional financial need; Federal Pell Grant recipients take priority. Each participating school receives an allocation, so availability varies. Visit StudentAid.gov/fseog for more information.

Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grant provides up to \$4,000 a year to undergraduate or graduate students preparing to be teachers. They don't have to be repaid unless recipients fail to carry out their obligation to teach at least four years. Visit StudentAid.gov/teach for more information.

Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant is for students who don't meet the income requirements for Pell Grants. A student's parent or guardian must have died as a result of military service in Iraq or Afghanistan after the events of Sept. 11, 2001. The grant provides up to \$5,920 a year. Visit StudentAid.gov/iraq-afghanistan for more information.

G.I. Bills. An updated bill, passed in 2008, provides up to the full cost of tuition and fees, plus many other expenses for those who have served in the military since 9/11. The Montgomery G.I. Bill provides more limited benefits to those who served in the military before then. Visit benefits.va.gov/gibill for more information.

Federal Work-Study is available for undergraduate and graduate students who work certain part-time jobs while in school. There is no annual minimum or maximum amounts. Visit StudentAid.gov/workstudy for more information.

Federal student loans are available to students regardless of family income but must be paid back with interest. Undergraduate students can take out up to \$5,600 in subsidized loans, where the U.S. Department of Education covers interest while the student is in school. Undergraduate or graduate students can take out up to \$20,500 in unsubsidized loans, where the borrower is responsible

for all interest, even while the student is in school. The interest rates are 4.45 percent for undergraduate students and 6 percent for graduate and professional students.

State aid

Unless otherwise stated, this money can be used on top of any federal aid received. For more information about these and other state scholarships and grants, visit floridastudentfinancialaid.org/SSFAD.

Bright Futures scholarships provide up to 100 percent of tuition and fees for students attending a public university or community college. They can also be used to offset tuition at private schools in Florida, but the award cannot be used out of state. The top award, Florida Academic Scholars, fully covers tuition and fees for students who have at least a 3.5 grade point average, a 29 ACT or 1290 SAT score and 100 hours of community service. The Medallion scholarship covers 75 percent of tuition and fees. Students must have a 3.0 grade point average, a 26 ACT or 1170 SAT score and 75 hours of community service.

Florida Resident Access Grants provide \$3,300 a year to offset tuition and fees at private, nonprofit colleges, including NSU, UM, Barry University, Keiser University, Florida Memorial University, St. Thomas University, Lynn University and Palm Beach Atlantic University. There are no income requirements to receive the grant.

Access to Better Learning and Education Grants provide \$2,500 a year to offset the cost of some for-profit and nonprofit colleges not covered by Florida Resident Access Grants. Students can use the grants at 15 schools, including Miami International University of Art & Design, Johnson and Wales University and South University. There are no income requirements to receive the grant.

Florida Student Assistance Grants provide up to \$2,500 for students from low- or moderate-income families to offset costs at a Florida public or private university or community college. Students must fill out the FAFSA to be considered.

First Generation Matching Grant Program provides up to the cost of a

student's need not covered by other forms of financial aid. It's for low-income students whose parents did not attend college.

College-based aid

In most cases, these grants or scholarships can be used on top of any federal or state aid students receive.

Florida Atlantic University offers a variety of forms of financial aid including:

- Freshman recruitment scholarships of up to \$6,000 a year; fau.edu/admissions/freshmen/scholarships.php
- University grants for low-income students; fau.edu/finaid/types-of-aid/grants.php
- Wilkes Honors College Scholarships valued at up to \$72,000 for top students; fau.edu/honors/future-students/academic-scholarships.php
- A variety of scholarships with various criteria; fau.edu/finaid/types-of-aid/scholarships.php
- **Florida International University** offers private scholarships ranging from \$500 or a laptop to \$15,000 or the full cost of tuition and fees; fiu.academicworks.com
- **Nova Southeastern University** offers aid based on financial need as well as numerous scholarships; nova.edu/financialaid/scholarships

■ **The University of Miami** offers aid based on financial need as well as some scholarships; admissions.miami.edu/undergraduate/financial-aid

■ **Palm Beach State College** offers a variety of scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$6,000 per year and financial aid for low-income students of up to \$2,000 per year. palmbeachstate.edu/financialaid/scholarships.aspx

■ **Broward College** offers a variety of scholarships and financial aid; broward.edu/financialaid/Pages/Scholarships.aspx

■ **Miami Dade College** has an American Dream scholarship, which covers any tuition and fee not met through other grants and scholarships. Students must be Miami-Dade residents; mdc.edu/financialaid/scholarships/american-dream.aspx. It has other scholarships ranging in value from \$500 to \$5,000; mdc.edu/financialaid/scholarships

■ **Keiser University** offers a variety of merit-based and need-based scholarships; keiseruniversity.edu/financial-services

■ **Lynn University** offers a variety of scholarships for up to full tuition and fees as well as need based aid; lynn.edu/admission/tuition-aid/financial-aid

■ **Palm Beach Atlantic University** offers a variety of scholarships and grants up to full tuition; pba.edu/pba-scholarships

■ **Barry University** offers scholarships and need-based grants of varying amounts; barry.edu/scholarships

■ **Florida Memorial College** offers scholarships and need-based aid of varying amounts; fmuniv.edu/admissions/scholarships

■ **St. Thomas University** provides scholarships and need-based aid of varying amounts; stu.edu/admissions/financial-aid/scholarships

Private scholarships

Numerous scholarships for people of different backgrounds, areas of residence, interests, fields of study, income levels and academic qualifications are available. Several popular listing scholarships include fastweb.com, finaid.org, collegescholarships.com and U.S. News & World Report (usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/scholarships)