



LOSFA LOOP

June 2010 Edition

Volume 3-6

From the Desk of the Executive Director

A letter to graduates: I want to begin by congratulating Louisiana's graduating class of 2010, high school graduates as well as college graduates. To the high school graduates and their parents, remember that the deadline to receive TOPS funding for the 2010-2011 Academic Year is quickly approaching (Page 3). High school graduations are often accompanied by proms, class trips, graduation parties and graduation gifts. One of the best "gifts" a Louisiana high school graduate can receive is the assurance of receiving TOPS funding for the 2010-2011 Academic Year. So if you haven't already submitted your application for TOPS, make sure it is received by LOSFA by the July 1st deadline.

Some students have reported to us that they've received e-mail correspondence which mentions TOPS and advises students to go to www.FAFSA.com in order to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Unfortunately, this site charges students as much as \$99.99 to complete the FAFSA. The first "F" in the acronym FAFSA stands for "Free", not "Fee". So this site called FAFSA.com is actually a misnomer due to the fact that they're charging a fee for a "Free" application. The Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) does not endorse FAFSA.com in any way. In order to complete the on-line FAFSA, we recommend that you go to the United States Department of Education's official FAFSA site, <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. You can also find a link to this site on LOSFA's website at <http://www.osfa.state.la.us/FAFSA.htm>. If assistance is needed with the completion of the application, call our office at 1-800-259-5626 x1012 between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

To the college graduates, I certainly hope that regardless of the career you choose to pursue, you will at least consider pursuing that career right here in Louisiana. According to recent census statistics, Louisiana lost more than 2,500 college graduates between 2007 and 2008, one of only eight states that recorded a net loss of college-educated residents age 25 and older. You have worked hard to obtain your degree and it certainly is your right to pursue your dreams anywhere in the world, but as Louisiana's First Choice for College Access, we hope many of you will remain in the state and apply your talents right here to create a better Louisiana.

To those of you still pursuing your high school or college studies, take note of recent changes to the TOPS Core Curriculum (Page 2) and changes to the Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship (page 4). Of course, if you have found us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA> or you're following us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/LOSFA>, then you're probably already aware of these changes as we've made great efforts to frequently update these sites with the latest news. It's just another way to keep the citizens of Louisiana informed so that we're worthy of

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LOSFA Outreach



LOSFA Public Information Representative Kendra Woods gave a College Knowledge presentation to a crowd of 1,500 middle school and high school students at Southern University's Middle School Day in early May.

The students came from schools across the state, as far north as Bossier Parish, to tour the campus, listen to speakers and learn how to get ready for college.



Kendra Woods provides a professional school counselor with materials during Middle School Day at Southern University.



Additions to the TOPS Core Curriculum equivalents approved

The Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission approved changes to the TOPS Core Curriculum at its May meeting.

Those changes approved the following courses to be the equivalent of courses in the TOPS core.

For the TOPS Opportunity, Performance, Honors and Tech Awards:

- ⇒ Applied Algebra I as equivalent to Algebra I
- ⇒ Applied Geometry as equivalent to Geometry

For the TOPS Tech Award only:

- ⇒ Senior Applications in English as equivalent to (replaces) Business English
- ⇒ Math Essentials as equivalent to the Advanced Math category.

March of Dimes Total

LOSFA's March of Dimes fundraiser raised a total of \$4,601.15 this year, surpassing LOSFA's goal of \$4,000.

LOSFA's second floor raised the most money, a total of \$1,388, while the fifth floor came in second with a total of \$1,064.

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the title, Louisiana's First Choice for College Access.

--Melanie

Deadline approaching for new TOPS applicants to receive funding for 2010-2011 Academic Year

As Louisiana's 2010 high school graduates look toward beginning their postsecondary education in the Fall, they are reminded that in order to receive Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) funding for the 2010-2011 Academic Year, their application must be received by July 1, 2010.

"With the whirlwind of activity graduating seniors experience this time of year, it's easy to become distracted," said LOSFA Executive Director Melanie Amrhein. "But if they plan to begin their postsecondary education this coming Fall and use TOPS funds to do so, the deadline they must keep on their radar is July 1", she added.

Applications received after July 1, 2010, (but before July 2, 2011) will not be eligible for TOPS funding until the subsequent Academic Year, 2011-2012.

There are two methods of applying for TOPS. Louisiana law requires that all applicants who are eligible to receive federal grant aid (Pell Grants) MUST apply by filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The FAFSA may be completed online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. By completing the FAFSA, students are considered for a long list of state and federal assistance programs including TOPS, the Louisiana Go Grant, federal Pell Grants, federal Work Study programs and low-interest federal loans. Many institutional scholarship and grant programs also require completion of the FAFSA.

Students who can demonstrate that they are not eligible for federal grant aid (determined by student and parental income), have the option of completing the TOPS Online Application instead. This application is located on the LOSFA web site, www.osfa.la.gov and considers the student for TOPS eligibility only. However, in the event of a budget shortfall, students completing the TOPS Online Application instead of the FAFSA will be the first to lose funding for their TOPS award.

2010 high school graduates who miss the July 1, 2010, application deadline may still enroll in and attend a postsecondary institution during the 2010-2011 Academic Year at their own expense. If they subsequently apply for TOPS prior to July 2, 2011, and have met the TOPS continuation requirements during their first year of attendance, they will become eligible for a full eight semesters (or twelve quarters) of TOPS funding beginning in the 2011-2012 Academic Year.

Processing of new TOPS awards does not begin until final grades and high school graduation have been confirmed through the Louisiana Department of Education, and the application and student's ACT scores are received by LOSFA. This process is expected to begin on June 10 with awards being made weekly thereafter.

Students who have questions concerning their TOPS eligibility can check their eligibility status by creating an account on the TOPS Portal at www.osfa.la.gov, or they may contact LOSFA customer service representatives for assistance at 1-800-259-5626, ext. 1012, or (225) 922-1012, or via Email at custserv@osfa.la.gov.

Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship Program undergoes changes

On May 4, 2010, the Louisiana Student Financial Assistance Commission approved emergency rules which change the Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship Program from a loan forgiveness program to a scholarship program, increase award amounts, and change the eligibility requirements for initial awardees.

Beginning with awards made during the 2010-11 academic year, the award will become a pure scholarship for students majoring in forestry, wildlife, or marine science as it pertains to wildlife. Other changes include the following:

- Limit awards to undergraduates who have earned at least 60 hours of college credit;
- Allow students who received Rockefeller awards during the 2009-2010 academic year with less than 60 credit hours, and who meet the requirements to maintain the award to receive the Rockefeller award as a scholarship for the 2010-2011 academic year;
- Increase the award amount for undergraduates to \$1,000 per semester (\$2,000 per year);
- Increase the award amount for graduate students to \$1,500 per semester (\$3,000 per year);
- Increase the cumulative maximum award to \$12,000 for three years of undergraduate study and two years of graduate study;
- Allow disbursement of unexpended academic year funds to recipients who enroll full-time during the summer semester, and
- Maintain repayment requirement for funds received by students prior to the 2010-2011 academic year in cases where those students do not graduate in one of the specified majors

Questions regarding the Rockefeller State Wildlife Scholarship should be directed to Bonnie Lavergne, 800-259-5626 ext. 0412, blavergne@osfa.la.gov or Erica Hughes, 800-259-5626 ext. 0164, ehughes@osfa.la.gov.

Volunteer Firemen's Tuition Reimbursement

The Safer Tuition Reimbursement Grant is sponsored by the Louisiana State Firemen's Association (LSFA). The program provides tuition reimbursement of up to \$8,000 for a two year degree and up to \$16,000 for a four year degree for eligible applicants who sign up to serve as volunteer firemen in Louisiana after graduation.

Financial aid programs administered by the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA) may provide assistance with the initial payment of tuition and other education related expenses, but those deemed eligible for the Safer Tuition Reimbursement Grant will receive that reimbursement from the Louisiana State Firemen's Association (LSFA) and not from the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA).

Further information may be found at <http://www.vfdla.org/>

FLY Team outreach expanding

It's been almost a year since LOSFA began its Financial Literacy for You (FLY) team and the team is beginning to expand its reach.

The team is now focusing on three different areas: middle school, high school and college. While still in the beginning stages, things seem to be going well.

Byron Henderson, FLY Team member and LOSFA's Default Recoveries Supervisor, said "The first program (to middle schoolers) went so well, the middle schools asked us to come back."

He said it's often easier to present to middle schoolers, because they're a bit of a captive audience. The FLY Team generally makes middle school presentations in the classroom, with no more than 30 or so students.

It's easier to get them involved and excited that way, he said.

Sigmund Morel, FLY Team member and LOSFA's School and Lender Services Supervisor, notes that each program is customized to the attention span of the audience. Hence, for middle schoolers, the program includes many games to help them understand how money and college financing works.

The programs geared to college students focus on "what you need to know to survive in the real world," Morel said.

College students can be a challenge, because attendance is generally voluntary. Still, numerous colleges have requested presentations and he sees that trend continuing.

Presentations to high schools have just started and the team is still working the bugs out. "We haven't been able to get out into the high schools as much as we would like," Morel said. However, he is confident that will change in the near future.

New federal regulations on the Louisiana Student Assistance Program (LASAP), the state organization of the US Department of Education TRiO Programs, require financial literacy education.

A recent FLY Team presentation to LASAP was well-received.

Now that LASAP is aware of the services the FLY Team offers, "I foresee we're going to do a lot more programs in the coming year," Morel said.

Additionally, the team does presentations to professionals "to demonstrate what we can do," Henderson said. The idea is not to teach, but to show what the team has to offer. There are also modules developed for avoiding default, credit cards, banking, etc.

"One thing we tell people about this program, if they want us to develop specific financial literacy programs for them, let us know and we'll develop them," Morel said.

LOSFA'S FLY Team:
(back row, left to right) Byron Henderson, Sigmund Morel, Scott Burke and Jessica Warner,
(front row, left to right) Lisa Baumer and Kendra Woods.
Not pictured: Justin Marshall.



Become a part of Louisiana's Jumpstart Coalition listserv and receive periodic emails with "News You Can Use" with helpful financial literacy information. Go to LOSFA's FLY (Financial Literacy for You) Page and click the listserv link: <http://www.osfa.state.la.us/FLY/FLYhome.htm>

Helping out a good CAAWS



She's not exactly a cat whisperer, but thanks to LOSFA's Mathilde Rivera, dozens of furry felines are happily in their forever homes.

Rivera, IT Deputy Director, is a cat adoption counselor for Capital Area Animal Welfare Society (CAAWS).

When she was looking to volunteer somewhere five years ago, she chose CAAWS

because "it was a no-kill shelter and once a CAAWS animal, always a CAAWS animal. Even if it's been ten years, you can always bring the animal back to CAAWS and it will be taken in."

CAAWS (<http://www.caaws.org>) is a non-profit organization committed to the well-being of animals in the Baton Rouge community. It promotes adopting homeless animals, teaching the community responsible pet ownership and the humane treatment of animals, and promoting the practice of spay/neuter at all times.

Rivera was a foster mother to a cat at one time -- but she won't be doing that anymore. The cat she was fostering turned into a permanent addition to the family, bringing the total number of animals Rivera lives with to five -- three cats and two dogs.

Still, what began as a few hours on occasional weekends turned into a regular activity. Then came Counselor 101 training and now you can usually find Rivera at the Pet Smart on Airline on Saturdays, matching up cats and adopters.

"I get the satisfaction of giving back," she said. "I've been blessed with a job, family and friends and so many people have no job or have disabilities that keep them from working. I can help these poor animals find homes, not to be victims of a car accident or cruelty."

CAAWS isn't just about adoption, she said. It's also not only about cats. There is a program dedicated to dogs as well. CAAWS sponsors Spay/Neuter Pro-



If you prefer dogs, don't worry. CAAWS has you covered. Dogs are also available for adoption and each year the organization hosts a fund raiser with the Krewe of Mutts parade. Information on both can be located on the CAAWS Web site.



grams to help pet owners defray some of the cost of having their animals altered. The organization provides a \$25 off coupon for anyone who needs one, as well as works with the LSU Vet School on LSU Spay Day.

On Spay Day, pet owners can have their animals spayed or neutered for little or no cost. The event occurs once a month and is available only for cats by appointment. Further information on Spay Day may be found on the CAAWS Web site.

CAAWS also sponsors a Feral Cat Program, which assists people in trapping, spaying and re-releasing feral cats; an Animal Therapy Program, which brings well-mannered dogs into hospitals, nursing homes and other places to interact with patients; and Humane Education programs, which teach responsible pet ownership and safety programs.

CAAWS is always looking for volunteers, Rivera said.

If you're a "person who wants to be committed to a cause" and you've got a few hours to spare on the weekends, CAAWS might be the place for you. More information is available on the Web site and a volunteer form is available online.



CAAWS has cats of all ages for adoption year round. If you'd like to meet some of them, attend an adoption event at Pet Smart on Airline Highway any Saturday. Events start at 11 a.m. and run until 3 p.m.

Second place finish for LOSFA's auditor's daughter

Faith Early, daughter of Compliance Auditor Andrea Nelson-Early, placed 2nd in state finals in the 800 meter run for Division 3-A on Saturday, May 8, 2010.

A sophomore at West Feliciana High School (WFHS) in St. Francisville, Faith has been competing in track and field since the 5th grade, and cross country since middle school. She is also a member of the Future Track Club, a private track team that participates in track and field during the summer. The events that Faith participates in with her high school are the 1,600 meter relay, 800 meter relay, and the 800 meter run. In cross country, she runs the 3 mile event. The WFHS girl's track team placed 2nd overall in their division.

"Faith is a fierce competitor and hates to lose," her mother said. "Our family is very proud of Faith's accomplishments and victories on and off the track."



Wanda Shaffer retires



After nine years, Loan Administration's Wanda Shaffer is saying goodbye to LOSFA.

"Hopefully this is my last retirement," she said, noting that she'd previously worked -- and retired -- from the Louisiana Department of Revenue and the Louisiana Department of Corrections.

She plans on spending more time with her five grandchildren, she said.

Nell Rivet, who shares an office with Shaffer, said she would miss her laughter and the stories about her grandchildren.

Shaffer's last day at the office was May 20th.



LOSFA's Social Media



<http://www.facebook.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.twitter.com/LOSFA>



<http://www.youtube.com/LOSFA1000>



www.Flickr.com/LOSFA



<http://www.louisianatopsprogram.com/>



For more information, contact the
Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance:

By Phone: 800-259-5626, Ext. 1012

By E-mail: custserv@osfa.la.gov

By Mail: P.O. Box 91202, Baton Rouge, LA 70821-9202

Web Address: www.osfa.la.gov

For submissions, opinions or comments for LOSFA LOOP, please
contact David Roberts at droberts@osfa.la.gov.