



NEWSLINE

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Workshops provide interactive forum

A grand total of 573 attendees representing more than 350 high schools recently participated in the annual series of Guidance Counselor Workshops presented by the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA).

Spanning the months of November and December, the half-day workshops were staged at seven different locations across the state, including Lafayette, Shreveport, Lake Charles, Monroe and New Orleans.

A crew of at least five LOSFA public information and communications representatives was dispatched from Baton Rouge to the various sites. The group was well-armed with up-to-date information on various financial aid topics including: the Tuition Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS); other state and federal scholarships and grants; the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); and an overview of the federal loan program and financial aid process. Information packets containing supporting materials were distributed to all participants.

A well-received addition to this year's workshop was a mass distribution of the newly created TOPS High School Handbook. This publication is geared toward the guidance counselor's perspective and explains TOPS requirements and processes in easy-to-read language. The handbook will be continuously updated with a series of supplements to be mailed directly to the schools over time. Counselors who did not attend the workshops will be mailed a bundle containing both the information packet and the



LOSFA Public Information and Communications Representatives, from left to right, Jerri Mack, Kim Butler and Tamara Holmes, register a workshop participant at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

High School Handbook materials. Though detailed and accurate, the printed materials represent only a portion of the information that was discussed at the workshop. LOSFA highly recommends that counselors make every effort to attend subsequent seminars in order to obtain all pertinent financial aid information for that academic year.

As a result of the interactive forum provided by the workshop, three main concerns were raised by counselors across the state. The concerns were as follows: a) how to calculate the Grade Point Average from core courses only, beginning with the class of 2003; b) a request to review and revisit the

policy of requiring students who graduate from high school in three years (as opposed to the standard four years) to wait one year (until their peer class graduates) before becoming TOPS eligible; and c) the desirability of revising requirements for the Tech Award (specifically, the required ACT score and core curriculum). LOSFA has since reported these concerns to both the financial aid commission which oversees the agency and the appropriate legislative committees for further consideration.

With the generous support of lender sponsors, LOSFA was able to offer the workshops free-of-charge to participants.

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Newsline is a publication offering recent technical, procedural and feature information related to the scholarship/grant programs of the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance. This publication also contains material related to Federal Title IV Student Aid Programs. While LOSFA believes that the information herein is accurate and factual, this publication has not been reviewed nor approved by the U.S. Department of Education.

Additions to the distribution list and articles for publication should be submitted to: *Newsline* Editor, P.O. Box 91202, Baton Rouge, La. 70821-9202.

NEWS AND UPDATES

LOSFA's chief collector achieves CST certification: Director of Collections **Byron Henderson** has completed the state's first level of public management training by earning a Certificate in Supervisory Techniques (CST) in the Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP).

The CPTP, established in 1979, is designed to upgrade the professional, technical and managerial skills of state employees and nonelected state officials in Louisiana. Henderson's CST represents completion of the first of two certification tracts in the program, designed for any state supervisor and awarded to participants who complete three tiers of management classes plus tests, work-related projects and other requirements. His research project focussed on the efforts of LOSFA to reduce the turnover of the staff who fill the collectors' positions.



LOSFA Director of Collections Byron Henderson, left, is presented with his Certificate in Supervisory Training (CST) by Allen Reynolds, director of the Department of State Civil Service and Policy Board Chairman for the Comprehensive Public Training Program (CPTP).

The public training program is sponsored by the Governor's Office, the Division of Administration and the Louisiana Department of State Civil Service, in cooperation with the School of Vocational Education at Louisiana State University.

LOSFA loan processing common e-mail address: Routine loan processing requests, such as cancellations, reinstatements, reallocations, and/or questions from schools, lenders, servicers and other external customers may now be sent to a common electronic mailbox located at **loanprocessing@osfa.state.la.us**. The mailbox is monitored by several staff members in Loan Administration who can process the requests quickly and accurately with a minimum turnaround time of a few days. While this electronic medium will be much faster and more economical than traditional mail or faxes, it is intended as an enhancement to routine transactions only. Any problematic situations, or matters requiring immediate attention, should be directed to the School and Lender Section representatives at (800) 259-5626, Ext. 1682, 7692 or 7727.

TOPS DEADLINES

April 7 **ACT National Test Date** – Last chance for graduating seniors to receive a qualifying score on the ACT without incurring a penalty.

April 15 **Priority deadline** for filing the 2001-02 FAFSA.

Symposium brings together LOSFA, campus financial aid decision makers

This past November, the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA), through its School and Lender Services (SLS) section, presented an interactive symposium on emerging technologies aimed at bringing together state financial aid directors and campus decision makers with LOSFA administrators to consider and define the challenges and issues facing the financial aid community. The symposium, titled “Future Financial Aid Systems and Technologies,” was held in Lafayette and was open to all state financial aid directors and their supervisors.

A number of LOSFA leaders were on hand, including all three SLS marketing representatives – Kelly Hutson, Sigmund Morel and Jeff Cropco – as well as Executive Director Jack Guinn, Assistant Executive Director of Operations Melanie Amrhein and Assistant Executive Director of Support Services Mark Riley.

The symposium was moderated by independent consultant Christel Slaughter. Slaughter has a doctorate degree in management with an emphasis in systems and organization theory from LSU. She is widely published in scholarly journals and has served on the transition teams for four Louisiana governors in the areas of economic development, education and governmental reorganization.

Amrhein reviewed the student loan cycle, explaining the difference between the agency’s Federal Fund and Operating Fund. In the process, she showcased the benefits available for all state financial aid programs through the use of the Louisiana guarantee for student loans.

“We hope that LOSFA can become the conduit through which the schools’ goals

are realized, and we want to be of assistance in whatever way we can,” Amrhein said.

During the give-and-take format of the symposium, several financial aid professionals expressed concern that rapidly advancing electronic technology is outstripping the available software. Although some attendees thought that it might be advantageous for all college financial aid offices to share common software programming, they also agreed that it might shut out the admissions offices and others from the ability to interface with them.

Some attendees raised the concern that many colleagues in the educational and product development environment do not fully understand the complexity of financial aid operations and, as a result, a wide variety of products are being manufactured and purchased by several different levels of expertise, resulting in snags in electronic communications and operations.

Guinn stated that LOSFA is largely dependent upon the technological systems currently in use at the schools and stated that the lowest-technology schools have an impact on which system processes the agency can offer to the entire group of schools. However, Guinn added, in the future the agency may migrate to a new system, dependent upon the needs and wishes of the financial aid community.

“LOSFA is interested in determining what our agency needs to do within the next five years to support the financial aid community,” Guinn said. “We are at a point in time where we have the capability



Campus decision makers DeWayne Bowie, director of financial aid at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, left, and Roger Vick, director of financial aid at Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, right, raise concerns and discuss issues in emerging electronic technology and its effect on the financial aid process during the recent SLS symposium.

to provide input to USA Group about follow-on (supplemental support) systems.”

Guinn said that the agency would like to know what the community desires in the way of enhanced or improved technologies at LOSFA, adding, “I hope the financial aid community will assist our agency in evaluating products.”

Symposium participants agreed that an advisory team should be formed to evaluate products and possibly visit other sites in a production environment to better ascertain the necessary steps in creating a more unified and updated system for financial aid processing.

“We were very pleased with the exchanges generated by participating financial aid executives,” Hutson said. “And the symposium moderator did a great job of generating ideas for group discussion.”

For more information on LOSFA programs, please contact a public information representative at our toll-free number at (800) 259-5626, Ext. 1012.

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