

An hourglass-shaped graphic with a globe inside. The top bulb is dark blue, and the bottom bulb is light blue. The globe is centered in the narrow neck of the hourglass. The top bulb has a dark blue cap, and the bottom bulb has a light blue cap.

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Report RS20646

District of Columbia Tuition Assistance Program

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September 14, 2007

Abstract. The District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 (H.R. 974), enacted on November 12, 1999 (P.L. 106-98), created the District of Columbia (DC) Tuition Assistance Program. The DC Tuition Assistance Program provides scholarships for undergraduate education to DC residents ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Scholarships may be used to attend public higher education institutions throughout the country, as well as some private institutions. Originally, the program was limited to providing scholarships for attending public higher education institutions in Maryland and Virginia, but it was expanded to include public institutions nationwide in May 2000. On March 14, 2002, Congress passed the District of Columbia College Access Improvement Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-157), to allow more DC residents to participate in the program.

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Summary

The District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 (H.R. 974), enacted on November 12, 1999 (P.L. 106-98), created the District of Columbia (DC) Tuition Assistance Program. The DC Tuition Assistance Program provides scholarships for undergraduate education to DC residents ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000. Scholarships may be used to attend public higher education institutions throughout the country, as well as some private institutions. Originally, the program was limited to providing scholarships for attending public higher education institutions in Maryland and Virginia, but it was expanded to include public institutions nationwide in May 2000. On March 14, 2002, Congress passed the District of Columbia College Access Improvement Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-157), to allow more DC residents to participate in the program. This report will be updated as necessary.

Contents

Scholarship Awards	1
Eligibility for Scholarships	1
Program Administration and Funding	2
Legislation in the 110 th Congress	2

Contacts

Author Contact Information	2
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<http://wikileaks.org/wiki/CRS-RS20646>

Scholarship Awards

The District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 (H.R. 974), enacted on November 12, 1999 (P.L. 106-98), created the District of Columbia (DC) Tuition Assistance Program, which provides scholarships to DC residents for their undergraduate education. Scholarships for public institutions of higher education (IHE) in all 50 states are used to pay the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition, up to \$10,000 per student per school year (with a cumulative cap of \$50,000 per student). Prior to May 2000, when the program was expanded to include public IHE nationwide, the scholarships were designated to pay the cost of attendance at public IHE in Maryland and Virginia. Initially, scholarships of \$2,500 per student per year (with a cumulative cap of \$12,500 per student) were available for tuition only at a limited number of private colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in Maryland and Virginia. Under the District of Columbia College Access Improvement Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-157), students attending private HBCUs nationwide may now receive the tuition grants. Other eligible private IHEs are limited to those in the Washington Metropolitan Area.

In the event that the amount of funds needed to cover approved applications exceeds the annual appropriation, scholarships will be reduced based on each applicant's financial need, with returning applicants receiving preference over new applicants.

Eligibility for Scholarships

Students who graduated on or after January 1, 1998, are eligible to participate in the Tuition Assistance Program. Under P.L. 107-157, students who graduated from secondary schools or received the equivalent of a high school diploma *prior* to 1998 and are currently enrolled in an eligible institution may participate.¹ In addition, individuals who enroll in an IHE more than three years after graduating from a secondary school may participate in the Tuition Assistance Program.

Students must meet the residency requirement of having lived in DC for 12 consecutive months prior to the start of their freshman year at college. For individuals who graduated from secondary school prior to 1998 and never attended college, or individuals re-enrolling after more than a three-year break in post-secondary education, the DC residency requirement is five consecutive years.²

P.L. 107-157 closed a loophole that allowed non-U.S. citizens residing in the DC to receive the tuition assistance benefit. Under the revised legislation, students applying for tuition assistance must meet citizenship and immigration status requirements under Section 484(a)(5) of the Higher Education Act of 1965.³

Each applicant must be enrolled in or accepted for enrollment, on at least a half-time basis, in a degree program at an eligible institution. Applicants who are currently enrolled must have

¹ P.L. 107-157 § 2 (A) (ii). (The General Educational Development (GED) test is the most popular form of alternative secondary completion.)

² P.L. 107-157 § 2 (A) (iii). (The three-year period excludes time served in active military duty, Peace Corps, or Americorps service.)

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1091 (a)(5).

maintained satisfactory progress in their chosen course of study. Scholarships may only be used for an individual's first undergraduate baccalaureate course of study.

Program Administration and Funding

The Mayor of the District of Columbia, in consultation with the authorizing committees,⁴ is responsible for administering the DC Tuition Assistance Program, including setting policy and procedures. The program allows expansion to public institutions nationwide based on assessment of need for admissions elsewhere and impact on program costs. In May 2000, the Mayor exercised his administrative authority by expanding the program to include public institutions nationwide. P.L. 107-157 also requires the District to establish a dedicated account for the resident tuition program. This dedicated account will contain all future appropriations, any unobligated balances, and interest earned on the balances.⁵

The President's FY2008 request for DC resident tuition support is \$35.1 million. With the passage of the Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007 (P.L. 110-5), funding remained level at the FY2006 appropriation of \$32.9 million.⁶ Funding had been approximately \$17 million, annually, from FY2000 through FY2004 and increased to \$25.6 million in FY2005.⁷

For the 2005-2006 academic year, 4,700 students received grants from the tuition assistance program. There were 3,730 grants for public schools averaging \$7,585, and 970 grants for private schools averaging \$2,145.⁸ Information about the DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program is available online at its website, <http://www.tuitiongrant.washingtondc.gov>.

Legislation in the 110th Congress

H.R. 1124 authorizes appropriations for the District of Columbia College Access Act of 1999 for the next five years.

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⁴ Oversight and Government Reform Committee of the House of Representatives, and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee of the Senate.

⁵ P.L. 107-157 §4; D.C. Code § 38-2705 (h)

⁶ CRS Report RL32313, *District of Columbia: Appropriations for 2007*, Eugene Boyd and David P. Smole.

⁷ District of Columbia Appropriations Act, 2005. P.L. 108-335.

⁸ Number of grants and average grant awards provided in a June 1, 2007 email from Sylvia Bailey-Charles, Executive Office of the Mayor, DC Tuition Assistance Grant Program.

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